

# ‘Lighting the way with Eureka’ from L'Express (26 April 1985)


**Caption:** On 26 April 1985, the French weekly magazine L'Express analyses France's attempts to coordinate scientific and technological research at Community level.

**Source:** Les Cahiers de l'Express. 1985-1995: 10 ans d'Europe. De l'Acte unique à l'Union des Quinze: la décennie Delors. dir. de publ. SAMPERMANS, Françoise. Février 1995, n° 31. Paris: Groupe Express. "Les lumières d'Eurêka", auteur:Simonnet, Dominique , p. 21-22.

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## Lighting the way with Eureka

**France wishes to move beyond today's free-for-all in science and technology, whether for civil uses or otherwise.**

The experts are referring, in their jargon, to arrangements based on 'variable geometry'. The fact is that 'Science and Technology Europe' is no more than a metaphor, or at best a variegated bundle: a few common programmes with unassailable European credentials rub shoulders with a variety of bilateral cooperative ventures and, above all, with a mass of scattered and competing initiatives.

In proposing the Eureka project, France is attempting to imbue it with a measure of consistency. Hubert Curien, the French Minister for Research and Technology, makes the point very clearly: 'The aim is not to set up shared laboratories but to define a coherent shared policy.' The lessons of the past have not been forgotten. Towards 1950, the Old World hoped to find its technological 'personality' in nuclear energy. However, the dead hand of bureaucracy and the difficulty of moving on to the applications stage eventually caused Euratom to fail. Ispra, the atomic research centre established in Italy, has stagnated, and a number of expensive projects, such as the Super-Sara simulator, have been abandoned. With the exception of the brand new UK-based JET, where 500 scientists are studying fusion, Community nuclear technology offers a rather meagre bottom line: look after number one.

Fundamental research, for its part, has achieved some sort of cohesion. The European Organisation for Nuclear Research in Geneva, with its 13 Member States, has come to symbolise what is most successful in joint European research. It was here, for example, that the famous W and zero-charge Z bosons were identified, a discovery which, last year, earned the award of two Nobel Prizes, and it is also here that an enormous particle accelerator ring is being built. And the Americans envy it: the true measure of success.

Space, too, has struck the right note: thanks to the Ariane programme, the Community is now the USA's direct competitor in the satellite market. And thanks again to the originality of its Space Agency, the Community can rely on access to the orbital stations of tomorrow.

The Ariane ethic, flexibility and perseverance, has thus become a model. The Esprit programme sought inspiration from Ariane in 1984. With a 10 billion franc budget, 50 % funded by the EEC, Esprit aims, in particular, to propel Europe into the race for fifth-generation computers. Following in its wake, the Race Programme, which aims to develop a unified telecommunications network, is approaching roll-out.

Even though they are related to 'star wars' technology, the six research areas collectively known as Eureka would thus add a few further pieces to this European jigsaw. The first three (high-speed microelectronics, supercomputers and artificial intelligence) could be seen as a sort of Esprit plus. The objective is to develop faster components and higher-performance languages and thus build more powerful and more intelligent computers. Sadly, the Ten are burdened with a serious handicap. Their IT industry now supplies only 10 % of the world market (a market growing by 10 % a year) and 40 % of their own market! Only software and computer languages, perhaps, offer significant openings for Europe.

The other three sectors are more promising. Europe has considerable expertise in the area of 'new materials' such as glass and carbon fibres. It is pursuing cutting-edge research into high-power lasers, which are useful not only for spaceborne weapons but also for industry down here on Earth, in such areas as machining. Finally, in opto-electronics — where the focus is on tomorrow's components in which information will be carried by light — Europe, and France in particular, are also well positioned. They will, however, have to make the leap from research to applications, which is far from being a local speciality.

And yet the countries of the Old World spend just as much as the United States on research and development! If they reap a smaller return, the reason is, of course, that their forces are scattered. One encouraging sign can, however, be identified: it seems that scientists are beginning to move about in the Community. The boldest among them are even going so far as to assert that crossing the Rhine is no harder than crossing the Atlantic! The heirs to the Enlightenment are acquiring a collective conscience. Who

knows? We may be in for a Renaissance.

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