



*European Communities
Commission
Press Release*

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EMBARGO : 20.00 HOURS

FRIDAY, JANUARY 30, 1976

January 29, 1976

Speech by Mr George Thomson, Commissioner for
Regional Policy, at Normal College, Bangor, on
the 150th Anniversary of the Menai Suspension Bridge,
on Friday, January 30.

For 150 years the Telford Bridge across the Menai Straits has provided a key link in the highway from Dublin to London. It has now taken on a new significance as part of the main route linking Ireland, Wales, and England with their new partners in the European Community.

The United Kingdom and Ireland have joined the European Community just in time to face the worst problems of slump and unemployment since between the wars. It is worth remembering how much worse and how much more dangerous these problems would be if we were not part of the mutual assistance arrangements of the European Community.

In the 30s the absence of any Community meant that recession led to trade war and trade war led inexorably to real war. Today the European Community is the best guarantee against the perils of trying to face the problems of unemployment by beggar-my-neighbour policies of competitive protectionism. It is the best guarantee that the nations of the European Community can share real negotiating muscle on behalf of their citizens as our dangerous modern world seeks to work out a more stable economic order.

The European Community also helps national governments to deal with the human problems of the present recession in a more civilised way by providing resources to deal with redundancy and to help to modernise the structure of our industry and our agriculture. In my job as Regional Commissioner, I have a special responsibility for co-ordinating the Community's aid to both Ireland and Wales. I congratulate the Secretary of State for Wales, the Welsh Local Authorities, the industrialists and agriculturalists who have so enthusiastically and skilfully taken advantage of the opportunities offered by the new European dimension. Thanks to their efforts some 17 per cent of the Community's latest Regional Development Fund has already come to Wales - which I notice the Western Mail describing as far more than the Welsh share of the British population or of British unemployment.

I was particularly glad to see that amongst the projects which the Welsh Office put up to us in Brussels and which we are now helping are four in Anglesey - two advance factories at Gaerwen, and in Holyhead the land purchase cost for a new advance factory and the provision of drains and sewers for the Penrhos Beach Industrial Estate. On the neighbouring part of the mainland we are collaborating in advance factory projects at Bangor, Caernarvon, Pwllheli and Portmadoc, the access road to the industrial estate at Cibyn and a similar project at Bala, and the reclamation of derelict land at Blaenau-Ffestiniog : all these in the Gwynedd special development area, and there are others of course in Clwyd.

Now I have an additional bit of good news for North Wales. In the next group of grants from the Regional Development Fund which I have just signed on behalf of the European Commission in Brussels, there are in fact two new grants for North Wales. One is a metal filter factory in Wrexham and the other an extension of BSK's aluminium casting works at Llanidloes. The Community's contribution will amount to a further £61,000. These are modest sums and of course all they mean is that about half the public aid for these projects is coming from Brussels instead of all of it coming from the UK Government, but at the end of the day every little helps.

But the next Regional Development Fund is by no means the whole story of Community help for Wales. It is now possible for the first time to add up the totals for the first three years of Community membership. Altogether Wales has benefited from Community aid directly and distinctively by at least £132 million in loans at favourable rates of interest and outright grants of some £13 million. On top of these there are Community Funds that come into the United Kingdom as a whole of which the Welsh people can expect to enjoy a fair proportion.

The Welsh coal industry has benefited by cheap loans for mining development at Bettwys, Blaenant, Taff Merthyr and Merthyr Vale.

The Welsh Steel Industry has benefited from loans of now altogether £60 million for modernisation at Ebbw Vale, Port Talbot, Llanwern - and now at GKN Cardiff. The latest £20 million loan to GKN which was announced only on Tuesday is part of a new batch of loans of £85 million which will contribute to modernising the steel industry in the UK and the creation of a substantial number of the new jobs which Wales so badly needs. This latest batch brings the total of European Community industrial loans to the UK coal and steel industry to £316 million since January 1973.

There is a £17.5 million European Investment Bank loan for the modernisation of the Welsh Telecommunications Network and Welsh Agriculture has benefited from £1.2 million under the Community's modernisation schemes, as well as new aid to British Government subsidies for hill farmers of which the Welsh share should be around £3 million.

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