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Report

drawn up on behalf of the Committee on Economic and
Monetary Affairs

on the ~~European~~ postage stamp

Rapporteur: Mr D. SCHINZEL

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On 19 May 1980 a motion for a resolution on a European postage stamp (Doc. 1-126/80) tabled by Mr Berkhouwer pursuant to Rule 47 of the Rules of Procedure was referred to the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs as the committee responsible and to the Political Affairs Committee for an opinion.

At its meeting of 28 May 1980 the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs appointed Mr Schinzel rapporteur.

The committee considered the draft report at its meeting of 13 July 1982 and adopted it unanimously with one abstention.

The following took part in the vote: Mr Moreau, chairman; Mr Schinzel, rapporteur; Mr Albers (deputizing for Mr Papantoniou), Mr Berkhouwer (deputizing for Mr de Gucht), Mr Beumer (deputizing for Mr Collomb), Mr von Bismarck, Mr Bonaccini, Mr Leonardi, Mr Mihr, Mr Nyborg, Mr Rogalla (deputizing for Mr Walter), Mr Wedekind (deputizing for Mr I. Friedrich) and Mr von Wogau.

The opinion of the Political Affairs Committee is attached.

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The Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs hereby submits to the European Parliament the following motion for a resolution together with explanatory statement:

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

on the European postage stamp

The European Parliament,

- A. having regard to the motion for a resolution tabled pursuant to Rule 47 of the Rules of Procedure (Doc. 1-126/80),
- B. whereas a harmonization of rates and the issue of European postage stamps would help Europe to become a more familiar concept,
- C. whereas a single economic and monetary area and close cooperation between the national postal administrations are prerequisites for a permanent solution,
- D. having regard to the report of the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs and the opinion of the Political Affairs Committee (Doc. 1-524/82);

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1. Calls on the Commission

Harmonization of rates

- (a) to propose Community legislation making the application of inland postal rates for letters in the first weight bracket and postcards mandatory in Community countries;
- (b) to examine possibilities for unifying postal rates, and to influence national policy on postal rates with a view to ensuring that when the latter are increased the disparities in the rates for letters in the first weight bracket and postcards within the European Community are further reduced;

Issue of European postage stamps

- (c) to enter without delay into discussions with the postal administrations of the Member States the technical aspects of the introduction of a postage stamp common to all Member States, even if rates cannot be made uniform or a common monetary area created;
 - (d) to submit to the Council a proposal for a directive on the issue of postage stamps common to all Member States - initially on the occasion of the 1984 elections to the European Parliament - on the understanding that this action should be repeated in subsequent years for a limited period (1 month) and with a limited issue;
 - (e) to establish contacts with the Universal Postal Union (UPU) and the CEPT pursuant to Article 229 of the EEC Treaty;
 - (f) to submit to Parliament a report setting out possible further measures which the Community might take in order to become active in the postal sector;
2. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Commission, the Council, the parliaments and governments of the Member States, the Universal Postal Union and the CEPT.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

1. The issue of European postage stamps valid in all Member States of the European Community and obtainable at uniform rates would be a desirable feature of a fully developed Community internal market.

European postage stamps would also have a positive psychological effect on Community citizens as they would be an outward sign of greater rapprochement between the Community states.

2. Since the idea was first mooted in 1959 the question of issuing a supra-national stamp has been discussed on several occasions by the postal administrations of the 26 European countries which form the European Conference of Postal and Telecommunications Administration (CEPT).

On each occasion the CEPT Assembly has concluded that the introduction of a European stamp which could be used on a uniform basis in all CEPT countries for franking postal items would face insurmountable difficulties. The main arguments raised against such a postage stamp relate to the differences in charges in the individual countries and to the discrepancies between the currencies of these countries. These differences would mean that the postage stamps would be purchased in the country where they could be obtained at the lowest price by virtue of the differences in charges and exchange rates, but that the mail franked with these stamps would be posted in the country in which the sender lived or in which his company was based. In many, probably the majority, of cases this would mean that individual administrations would receive a sizeable revenue for work which had to be carried out by other postal services. This would be unacceptable to the European postal administrations, which have to cover their expenditure with their revenue.

3. At Community level no serious steps have as yet been taken to introduce a European postage stamp. In answer to a question from Mr Berkhouwer (1980) the Commission merely called on Parliament to develop new initiatives.

4. The permanent introduction, in unlimited quantities, of a European postage stamp of a uniform value in ECU and valid in all Member States would not only be a symbol of a uniform European economic and monetary area but would also presuppose its existence. However, interim solutions of limited duration and scope are also possible.

STEPS TOWARDS A EUROPEAN POSTAGE STAMP

(a) Use of inland postage rates for mail within the European Community

At Community level the Commission has issued a recommendation on the use of inland rates in intra-Community mail in the form of letters in the first weight bracket and postcards (COM(79) 549). This recommendation has been disregarded by Ireland and the United Kingdom and implemented fully only by Denmark, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. Binding legislation is therefore necessary.

(b) Harmonization of rates

With inland letter rates ranging from Lit. 200, Lfrs. 8 (about 0.13 ECU) to DM 0.80 (0.30 ECU) with effect from 1.7.1982, it would clearly be very difficult to achieve genuine harmonization, i.e. a uniform postal rate throughout the Community.

The considerable differences in prosperity and economic situations in the Community, together with the differences in the organization of the postal administrations, necessarily result in differing costs for the postal services. It would therefore only be possible to harmonize charges to the extent that the economies of the individual Member States converged. The alternative would be to move away from the principle of covering costs and to give the postal administrations larger subsidies which, given the lack of government funds, would certainly - and with justification - fail to win the approval of the citizens of Europe. An increased approximation of the different postal charges could, of course, also occur as an incidental result of the greatly differing inflation rates in Community countries and of the consequent increases in charges in those countries which have the lowest postal rates. At all events it is essential to avoid artificial solutions to achieve the harmonization of rates which would impose a substantial additional administrative burden.

Such a burden would automatically be imposed if, because of differing cost structures, the individual postal administrations of Community Member States had to make compensatory payments to each other and if, because of the lack of a uniform European currency, officials had to be employed to prevent the unacceptable exploitation of fluctuations in exchange rates. Moreover, European citizens for whom a harmonization of rates meant a significant increase in postal charges would certainly not feel any better disposed towards the 'European ideal'.

Although the problem of harmonizing rates cannot be solved in the short-term, there is still the possibility that, at least as a token gesture, i.e. for a limited period and as a limited issue, a European postage stamp with a single design could be introduced and used in all Member States for letters in the first weight bracket or for postcards.

ISSUE OF A EUROPEAN POSTAGE STAMP

The above considerations provide scope only for a limited response to the desire for a European postage stamp:

1. In addition to the existing national postage stamps a common stamp could be issued for use in all Member States. This stamp would be sold in all Community countries for the same ECU value. It could also be used in every Community country and would have to be supplemented by national postage stamps to make up the rate applicable in that country for the postal item concerned. The issue would have to be for a limited period; the value of the postage stamp corresponding to the uniform ECU value could be printed in the national currencies on the postage stamps. However, the rapporteur does not support this option as in the majority of cases it would mean that Community citizens, instead of using one stamp for a letter to Community countries as hitherto, would have to obtain at least one supplementary stamp. Moreover, the national postal administration would have to produce such stamps in the first place.
2. Issue of a European postage stamp with no marked value to be used for letters in the first weight bracket for countries of the European Communities. In each Member State the amount to be paid for this postage stamp would be equivalent to the letter rate for mail to another Community country. To avoid exploitation of the differences in rates within the Community such a project would have to be for a limited period and the issue would also have to be limited. To prevent major users purchasing the new stamps in large numbers in the country where the charges were most reasonable, the amounts sold to individuals could be limited, for example to 5 stamps per person. A suitable time for such a project would be the period prior to the 1984 European elections.

It would be inherent in the nature of European postage stamps that a certain proportion of the issue would be used in a country other than the one in which they were purchased. It would be pure chance if this balanced out exactly. It must therefore be assumed that some postal administrations would sell European postage stamps but have to provide no services in return, whilst the reverse would be the case in other countries. The restricted duration and limitations on the issue and the amount sold to individuals would reduce the possible disadvantages to negligible proportions. In any case, the issue of such a European postage stamp would seem appropriate on the occasion of the 1984 European elections. The increased awareness amongst the citizens thereby aroused would probably more than offset any minimal changes in workload between the individual national postal administrations.

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION (DOCUMENT 1-126/80)
tabled by Mr BERKHOUWER
pursuant to Rule 25 of the Rules of Procedure
on the European postage stamp

The European Parliament,

- whereas it would make an important psychological impact on the construction of a Europe that puts the citizen first and help to promote a sense of community among the citizens of the Nine if European citizens could send letters to any Community destination with a stamp valid throughout the Community at a uniform price,
- welcoming the support given by Commissioner Davignon to plans for the issue of European postage stamps in his answer to Question No. 10 by Mr Berkhouwer at Question Time on 14 April 1980 in which, recalling a Commission recommendation to the Council of May 1979 on this matter, he called on Parliament to develop new initiatives on the European postage stamp.

Urges the Commission and the Council to take the necessary steps to provide the citizens of the Nine with a common postage stamp, valid throughout the Community at a uniform price, for their ordinary correspondence.

OPINION OF THE POLITICAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Draftsman: Mr C. BERKHOUWER

At its sitting of 19 May 1980 the European Parliament decided to refer the matter of a European postage stamp (Doc. 1-126/80) to the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs as the committee responsible and to the Political Affairs Committee for an opinion.

At its meeting of 24 September 1980 the Political Affairs Committee appointed Mr Berkhouwer draftsman.

At its meeting of 22 to 24 March the committee considered this matter and decided by 12 votes to 2 to instruct its draftsman to draw up the attached text.

The following took part in the vote: Mr Rumor, chairman; Mr Gawronski (deputizing for Mr Berkhouwer, draftsman); Mr Aigner (deputizing for Mrs Lenz), Mr Barbi, Mr Bettiza, Mr Beyer de Ryke (deputizing for Mr Haagerup), Mr Deschamps, Mr Donnez, Mr Habsburg, Mr Israel, Mr Klepsch, Mr Romualdi, Sir James Scott-Hopkins and Mr J. M. Taylor.

European postage stamp

1. Postage stamps are not only a means of paying postal charges, they are also symbols and - through the motifs they bear and occasions they commemorate - an expression of the issuing states' political and cultural conception of themselves. For decades European subjects have featured in many national postage stamp issues and in some cases they have been coordinated and carried the same motif (see particularly the issues under the auspices of CEPT and the Nordic Council). A European postage stamp, a stamp that is which can be used throughout the Community, would also make it possible to give the idea of Europe similar practical expression.

2. A European postage stamp would make the European Community a visible factor in the daily life of the most far-flung part of the Community. A stamp which could be used by people to send letters in Venice, Kiel, Utrecht, Bordeaux and Edinburgh would promote a sense of solidarity. The European Parliament must urge the Community to make full use of this instrument.

3. The political event of direct elections in 1984 would be an eminently suitable subject for commemoration on one or more European postage stamps. Other possible subjects for European stamps include the accession of the European Community to the Convention on Human Rights, the enlargement of the Community to include Spain and Portugal, the renewal of the Lomé Convention, the upholding of law by the Court of Justice, the introduction of the ECU as a means of payment, the 20th anniversary of the Customs Union, the issuing of European passports and driving licences and, last but not least, the introduction of uniform postal charges.

One could also imagine a series of European stamps with different face values corresponding to the current postal charges of the Member States.

4. An enthusiastic European citizen, Mr Volker Heydt, has also shown that such a stamp would be technically feasible by supporting his petition (No. 1/77) to the European Parliament on this subject with his own design for a European postage stamp and later actually printing it in postage stamp format.

5. As long ago as 1965 Yugoslavia and Romania jointly issued two stamps (bearing the names and currencies of both states) to commemorate the commissioning of the joint 'Iron Gate' power station on the Danube. The Community Member States should certainly be capable of doing the same given their much closer cooperation.

European postal charge

6. An even stronger sense of community solidarity could be achieved among citizens of the European Community if, as well as freely circulating European postage stamps, a standardized postage rate were introduced, to be expressed, if possible, in ECU. Uniform postal charges would also represent a positive feature of the European judicial area, as the latter should not consist merely of increased cooperation by the Member States in crime prevention.

7. The introduction of uniform postal charges would not require the creation of a European postal administration to replace those of the ten Member States; all that would be needed would be a decision by the Council to fix uniform charges for postal services within the Community. Then the postal administrations of all the Member States would have to agree on common charges, which would mean that some states would have to reduce and others increase their rates. What is important is that the calculation of charges would no longer be on the basis of national postal areas but on that of a uniform Community area. Such ideas are not new in the context of postal services as Article 1 of the Constitution of the Universal Postal Union states that the member countries form a unified postal area.

Relations between the European Community and international postal organizations

8. As the Community has not been involved up to now in international

postal structures, it is difficult for it to take initiatives in the postal field. As well as establishing administrative and information links with the Universal Postal Union (Article 229 EEC Treaty, Article 10 UPU Constitution) and the CEPT, the Commission should draw up proposals for the Community Member States to form a 'closer association' within the meaning of Article 8 of the UPU Constitution. Of course the CEPT (European Conference of Post and Telecommunications Administrations) with its 26 member bodies already constitutes a closer association for the purposes of postal cooperation in Europe. Yet for the political reasons mentioned above and the need to create an internal market in the Community, it is necessary for the postal administrations of the Community Member States to form an even closer association within the latter association in order to pursue objectives related more closely to the Community.

Legal basis

9. Before a European postage stamp could be issued and uniform postal charges introduced, a binding Community legal act would have to be adopted based if necessary on Article 235 of the EEC Treaty. The Council could also decide on the basis of a Commission proposal that the Community should (at the same time) form a closer association within the meaning of the Constitution of the Universal Postal Union.

Conclusions

10. The Political Affairs Committee approves the issuing of a European postage stamp and the introduction of uniform European postal charges. The European Parliament should therefore urge the Commission and the Council to propose and adopt respectively the appropriate legally binding Community measure.

The Commission should establish administrative contacts with CEPT and the Universal Postal Union and present a proposal for the European Community to become a closer association within the meaning of the Constitution of the Universal Postal Union. The resolution of the European Parliament should be forwarded not only to the Commission and the Council but also to the Member States (governments, postal administrations and parliaments), the CEPT and the Universal Postal Union.