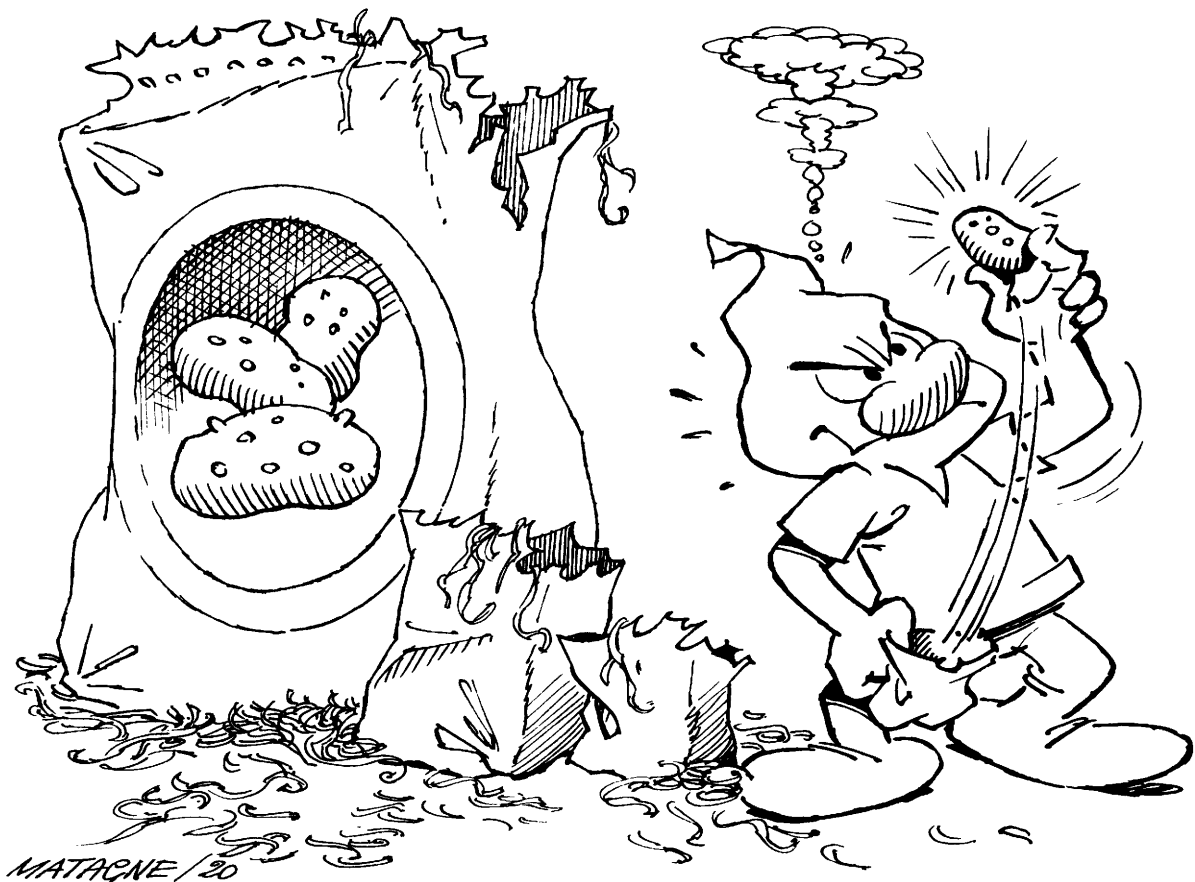


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With modern prepackaging the consumer can get a nasty shock when he inspects his purchases! The European Commission is now working on a directive which should take the surprise element out of shopping.

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**\*\* PREPACKAGED PRODUCTS: PHASE THREE**

It seems that for cosmetics alone no less than 120 different-sized containers in the 50 to 200 gram range are to be found on the Community market! This one example is enough to highlight the importance of the directive on prepackaged products now being prepared by the European Commission.

In ANNEX 1, Euroforum explains why harmonization is necessary and discusses the difficulties to be overcome.

**\*\* THE CONSUMERS' CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE**

The men and women who sit on the Consumers' Consultative Committee could be regarded as the consumers' "ambassadors" to the European Commission.

A full list of these champions of the consumer cause, showing the organizations to which they belong, is given in ANNEX 2.

**\*\* REPROCESSING IRRADIATED FUELS AND MATERIALS**

Judicious siting could keep the number of plutonium-processing plants in the Community to five instead of an estimated twenty. This good news was given by Mr Spinelli, Member of the European Commission, in a recent European Parliament debate on the reprocessing of irradiated fuels and materials. Speakers to the debate emphasized that reprocessing of radioactive fuel was essential to reduce the volume of radioactive waste and to produce the plutonium needed to feed fast reactors. They felt however that every effort should be made to develop technologies which would not harm the environment.

Mr Spinelli told the House that the European Commission was already working on specific proposals in the matter and hoped to submit them to the Council of Ministers before the end of the year. The proposals would have due regard to energy policy, uranium supplies, safety requirements and protection of the environment.

The European Parliament urged that the siting of large-scale plants "be carefully programmed and coordinated not only at Community but also at European level".

**\*\* COMMUNITY TRADE WITH COMECON AND CHINA**

In 1975 trade with Comecon countries (USSR, East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria) was a stabilizing factor in an otherwise difficult economic situation. Comecon exports to the Community only increased by 3% between 1974 and 1975 while Community exports to these countries rose by 17%. Community exports to the USSR alone jumped by 45% to 4 600 million units of account (1 u.a. = approx. US \$1.10) while Community imports from the USSR increased by no more than 5% to 3 600 million u.a. This meant that the Community's trading surplus with the USSR improved from 200 million u.a. in 1974 to 1 000 million u.a. in 1975.

Community earnings of foreign currency in 1975 were also boosted by trade with the People's Republic of China. Exports rose by 41% to a record level of 1 084 million u.a. This was mainly due to agreements signed in 1973 - particularly with France and Germany - for the supply of complete factories, delivery of which began in 1975. At the same time, imports from China declined with the general fall in demand throughout the Community. All in all, the Community's trading surplus with China rose from 8 million u.a. in 1974 to 458 million u.a. in 1975. This represents something like 23% of the foreign exchange surplus achieved in extra-Community trade.

**\*\* THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT**

A lengthy discussion on the vocational training of young people took place at the last meeting of the Community Standing Committee on Employment. The high number of under-25s out of work and the rather gloomy outlook for the years up to 1980 have prompted the European Commission to propose a number of measures designed to ensure that such employment opportunities as do exist are exploited to the full.

The measures recommended by the European Commission are aimed at

- giving young people the best possible vocational guidance and labour market information;
- providing young people, through appropriate educational and training programmes, with an opportunity of acquiring skills which are in demand;
- ensuring that employment services actively help young people to find and secure employment in specific occupations.

**\*\* CONSUMERS AND RADIO**

On 24 May the European Commission's information service organized a meeting in Brussels for journalists working on consumer information for the Community's various radio stations. The meeting laid the foundations for close cooperation between these journalists and between them and the Commission in the interests of Europe's consumers. The following radio stations were unable to send representatives to the meeting: RTB (Belgium's French-speaking station), Danmark Radio, KRO and VARA (Netherlands), Radio-France and Europe No 1.

**\*\* LEAD AND CADMIUM IN CERAMIC ARTICLES**

A recent proposal formulated by the European Commission should rule out all danger of consumers being poisoned if food is accidentally placed in ceramic ware not specifically designed for cooking purposes. The draft directive would require Member States to see to it that ceramic ware which fails to meet certain specifications carries a clear warning to the effect that it should not come into contact with food. The European Commission is thinking in particular of ceramic articles which resemble those designed for use with food (gratin dishes, fondue pots ...) but which are in fact intended for decorative purposes only. Ornamental wall plates are a good example.

The draft directive fixes conventional limit values which serve as an indicator of the quality, from the health point of view, of ceramic articles for cooking purposes; these values are in no way related to the quantities of lead or cadmium which could be ingested with food. They are tested by using a very strong simulating solvent - a 4% by volume acetic acid solution - which means that test conditions are far more rigorous than the conditions which would be encountered in normal usage. The fact that these limit values are absolute levels to which any ceramic article selected at random must conform makes them even more stringent: it means in fact that manufacturers will have to aim to keep values 50% lower for their entire production.

The test method prescribed by the proposal is the same for all ceramic articles but the limit values for articles for cooking purposes have been set 50% lower than those for tableware and kitchenware.

**\*\* EURATOM'S BASIC STANDARDS HAVE PROVED THEIR WORTH**

In ten years, EURATOM's safeguards inspectors have only had to report fifteen-odd cases of suspected exposure and three of contamination or slight exposure. But even here, doses were below the maximum permissible levels defined in Euratom's basic standards.

These inspectors, who form a sort of nuclear flying squad, are responsible for checking the safety of nuclear installations. They are carefully selected at the recruitment stage and subsequently undergo regular in-service training courses organized in conjunction with the Joint Research Centre in Ispra, Italy. Most of them have attended training courses in centres outside the Community - in the United States for example - in the most advanced techniques in the safeguards field.

Inspectors are issued with the appropriate protective equipment when they are given their written instructions and travel documents for each mission. Their training and experience enables them to identify and locate nuclear risks and to keep abreast of developments in radiation protection.

A very close watch is kept on their health. Like all Community officials they undergo an annual medical examination and like all workers exposed to ionising radiation they are

subjected to six-monthly check-ups. This is over and above the examinations carried out as a matter of routine in the event of malfunction or an accident.

## \*\* THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND

The European Commission recently approved a first series of non-repayable grants accounting for 38 of the 440 million units of account (1 u.a. = approx. US \$1.10) allocated to the European Social Fund for 1976. Some of this money (11.35 million u.a.) will be used to right imbalances caused by the operation of the common market or to adjust manpower supply to demand within the Community (Article 4 of the Fund's rules). The remainder (27.68 million u.a.) will be used to help regions in economic decline, industries hit by technical progress and special sections of the working population (women, young people, the disabled and older workers) (Article 5 of the Fund's rules).

The varied projects to be assisted include schemes to retrain 2 400 workers leaving agriculture in Germany, to promote the social and vocational integration of migrant workers in France and to retrain 2 400 workers in Greenland.

## \*\* SAVINGS IN THE COMMUNITY

How have savers reacted to inflation? The European Commission is at present collating such information as is available to assess the impact of inflation on the pattern of saving. Have savers opted for short or long-term investment? Have they been putting gold into mattresses or have they been using their savings books? The table below shows net saving of households as a percentage of net national saving:

	<u>1970</u>	<u>1971</u>	<u>1972</u>	<u>1973</u>	<u>1974</u>
Belgium	73.1	77.7	83.5	82.5	
Denmark		22.7	33.8	39.3	
France	57.7	58.7	56.7	60.8	69.3
Germany	42.0	44.2	51.3	47.3	
Ireland		78.0	85.2	98.7	
Italy	92.9	120.6	135.2		
Netherlands <sup>1</sup>	54.7	58.5	58.3	52.7	62.0
United Kingdom	31.8	32.5	49.0	56.9	96.3

<sup>1</sup>Including savings of non-financial corporate and quasi-corporate enterprises.

## \*\* IMPROVING AGRICULTURE

A wine cellar in Baden-Württemberg, a creamery in East Flanders, water engineering schemes in the department of Calvados, fishing boats in Ireland, huts for shepherds in the province of Potenza, a butter warehouse in Jutland, a cheese factory in southern Holland, a boning plant in Liverpool: these are just a few of the 374 schemes to have been granted aid to the tune of 104 million units of account (1 u.a. = approx. US \$1.11) from the EAGGF (European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund).

## \*\* WIRE-ROPES, CHAINS AND HOOKS

The "identity tag" or certificate to be attached to every wire-rope, chain and hook from now on will give the name and address of the manufacturer and detailed information on minimum breaking load and other technical characteristics. This is a logical development since the strength of a wire-rope, chain or hook can often be a matter of life and death. The directive recently adopted by the European Commission sets out all the information which must appear on the "identity tag". A first Community directive in the matter was adopted as early as 1973 - the new text merely takes account of technical progress in the lifting and mechanical handling appliances sector since then. Member governments now have a few months to bring their rules and regulations into line with the new Community provisions. The new "identity tag" will serve as a passport and mean that wire-ropes, chains and hooks can be sold freely in complete safety throughout the European Community (see Official Journal No L 122, 8 May 1976).

**\*\* A GREEN AND PLEASANT LAND**

The number of visitors to Britain from Western Europe increased by 60% between 1969 and 1974. In 1974 Germany came top of the table (960 000), followed by France (880 000), the Netherlands (520 000), Belgium and Luxembourg (370 000).

In 1974 European tourists spent a total of £308.7 million in Britain. Visitors from Belgium and Luxembourg spent more than their neighbours - an average of £9.1 per day. The Dutch came next with £8, followed by the Spanish with £7.9. Tourists from other countries spent an average of £6.7 a day.

PREPACKAGED PRODUCTS: PHASE THREE

For cosmetics alone no less than 120 different-sized containers in the 50 to 200 gram range are to be found on the Community market! This one example highlights the importance of the directive on prepackaged products now being prepared by the European Commission.

There are already two Community directives on prepackaging. The earlier of the two (published in Official Journal No L 42, 12 February 1975) deals with the approximation of national legislation on the making-up by volume of certain prepackaged liquids; the other (published in Official Journal No L 46, 21 February 1976) deals with the making-up by weight or by volume of certain prepackaged products.

The aim of the new proposal is to fix for each product a range of nominal quantities which would have to be admitted to the market in all Member States.

Several Member States have already adopted similar legislation to protect the consumer. If anyone who liked could market any quantity he liked in any old package he liked there would be lot of shady dealing by unscrupulous manufacturers to the detriment not only of the consumer but of honest manufacturers too. A slight change in packaging would be enough to disguise a price increase. And the consumer would be faced with a number of similar products presented in containers differing by 5%, 10% or 20% in capacity - some complicated mental arithmetic would be needed to compare prices.

However if the common market is to work properly the matter can't be left to the Member States: differing legislation could lead to compartmentalization in contradiction of all the Community stands for. If this happened manufacturers would be as badly hit as consumers: neither would benefit from the economies of scale offered by a 250 million strong market.

This is why the European Commission is planning to do what it did for liquids and fix a range of nominal quantities for the products most widely distributed in the Community. Prepackaged products conforming to the requirements of the directive would have to be allowed to circulate freely. The Commission's task is not an easy one. Manufacturers obviously don't like the idea of arbitrary decisions which upset production, interfere with brand image and affect buying habits. Consumers want as few container sizes as possible and have a preference for capacities which can be compared without the need for mental gymnastics. A further complication is that each country has its own little peculiarities which in some instances have been raised to the dignity of hallowed traditions.

Optional harmonization

To keep problems within bounds, the European Commission intends to suggest "optional harmonization": this would mean that Member States would have to admit products prepackaged as required by the directive but would also be free to admit any other size they considered to be necessary.

This "honourable" solution has the merit of respecting local specialities, many of which would lose their charm if they were standardized throughout the Community. But even more important it solves the problem of products imported from countries outside the Community where obviously neither manufacturers nor governments are bound by Community directives. With the "optional" solution it will be for the government of the importing country to decide whether a given product should be admitted to its national market or not.

The Community directive should serve as a common denominator and the European Commission is hoping that manufacturers will come to see that it is in their interests to conform to standards recognized and accepted throughout the European Community.

Difficult choices

All the ranges of nominal quantities listed in the directive were discussed by the Commission with government experts, the industries concerned (more than a hundred of them!) and consumers' associations. It is probable that, like any compromise, the Commission's final proposal will not please anyone but it will certainly provide a realistic basis for discussion in the European Parliament, the Community's Economic and Social Committee and the Council of Ministers.

The Commission did not find it easy to arrive at its final choice. For instance, although sweetened and non-sweetened condensed milk are put up in identical tins their densities are not the same: different values had therefore to be proposed for the two products. Then there were products like yogourt which are sold by weight in some countries, by volume in others. It is certainly not easy to satisfy 250 million consumers at one go!



THE CONSUMERS' CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

The men and women who sit on the Consumers' Consultative Committee could be regarded as the consumers' "ambassadors" to the European Commission. A full list of these champions of the consumer cause, showing the organizations to which they belong, is given below.

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