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POPULATION : People come and go

Some statistical estimates recently issued by the European Commission furnish a fairly precise idea of the migrations of European populations since 1977. By and large these movements can be categorised in three groups : in Belgium, Denmark, France and Luxembourg immigration and emigration have been more or less stabilised in the past three years so that the total population has remained at virtually the same level. Italy and the United Kingdom, on the other hand, experienced a slight drop in the number of residents as a result of rising emigration. However, Ireland, the Netherlands and especially Germany have seen a sizeable increase in the number of workers from abroad. At the end of June 1980, they numbered 2,072,000 in Germany, which represented an increase of about 7.1 percent in one year. This development is largely the result of an increase in the number of Turkish workers, explained partly by the arrival of many seeking asylum and of others from the families of workers already established in Germany.

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Because of the Easter Holidays, this issue contains fewer pages than normal. In addition, EUROFOCUS will not be published next week and the next number will be dated April 27, 1981.

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EXTERNAL RELATIONS : Food aid to Poland

Poland, which has been experiencing a period of considerable economic and political upheaval in recent months, is particularly short of food supplies. Assembled at the Community Summit in Maastricht on March 24, the Heads of State or Government of the ten member countries had already expressed their willingness to continue to contribute to the recovery of the Polish economy. Already, in December 1980, European Ministers had decided to send Poland large quantities of food products at prices 15 percent below the world market prices. The list of these products, as well as the conditions of prices and delivery, had been worked out by the European Commission in coordination with Polish authorities.

The shipments began in January and should continue through May. They involve 50,000 tonnes of sugar, 30,000 tonnes of butter, 3,000 tonnes of milk powder, 15,000 tonnes of beef, 35,000 tonnes of pork, 40,000 tonnes of rape seed, 100,000 tonnes of barley, 100,000 tonnes of rye, 25,000 tonnes of rice and 600 tonnes of olive oil.

These shipments were handled by Community exporters who concluded contracts with the Polish import agency. The EEC Commission had adopted measures allowing these exporters to purchase supplies from Community surplus stocks at reduced prices or to export them on the world market while benefiting from a special Community export rebate. More recently, the Commission recommended the approval of new shipments also at reduced prices. The amount would be slightly below the first package, but it involved some 5,000 tonnes of cheese, which had not been included in the first order. The new shipments are currently under study by the Council of Ministers. These shipments would cost about £ 35.6 million to the Community budget. In addition, Poland also requested and obtained credit from a number of Community member countries. This assistance is considered exceptional and designed to allow Poland to confront the difficulties it is currently facing while giving the authorities time to make fundamental changes that would lead to a solution to the consumer-goods supply problems in the country.

TRADE : Chinese week in Brussels

Marco Polo trekked to the Orient in the 15th century in search of the highly sought after silk and spice trade and from that time onwards trade has continued to develop. In modern times, although silk and spice have been superseded by other commodities, both China and the European Community continue to exchange goods in a co-operative spirit.

In Brussels from March 30-April 10, both sides had the opportunity of coming together in an historic meeting between East and West. The EEC-China Business Week, the first of it's kind, attracted the largest delegation of Chinese officials ever to assemble in the modern Western World. Present were 100 top-level government people, notably Vice-Premier Gu Mu and representatives from the banking and business sectors, together with 450 Europeans, representing governments and 230 banks and business firms. Indicative of the importance of this event was the presence of American interests. The 12-day event provided a unique and outstanding opportunity to examine and discuss practical ways of mutually increasing business potential in key areas.

In his opening speech, Gaston Thorn, President of the European Commission, spoke of the Business Week in terms of a "new form of co-operation between the EEC and China". In broader terms, he cited the meeting as "one of the surest factors for peace and mutually beneficial development".

Mr. Gu Mu, Vice Premier of China shared the opinion expressed by Mr. Thorn, adding that "unfortunately, the international situation is turbulent ... The peoples of all countries must close their ranks to combat the hegemonistic policy of aggression and expansion". He felt that the EEC had become a major force in the world arena, and expressed the hope that the EEC would play a more active role in international affairs. Since the signing in 1978 of a framework trade agreement, EEC-China trade has grown substantially. During the first nine months of 1980 Europe imported goods to the tune of £ 697 million, while China imported £ 642 million worth of Community products.

During the last year, however, China cut back significantly on imports attributable to what the Chinese refer to as a period of economic readjustment.

Community officials hope that the Business Week will be successful in terms of clinching some important business deals. Due to a slump in trade in the western world, the Community is looking to countries such as China for markets for high technology goods such as chemicals and computers in exchange for raw materials

ECONOMICS : Exploitation of marine resources

Among the various developments which are frequently seen as providing a stimulus to stagnating economies in the medium-term are the growth of the telematic and bio-technology industries. But less attention is given to the exploitation of the resources on the seabed, even though considerable recognition is being given to the potential of the oceans, which cover two-thirds of the planet. Already efforts are underway to rationally and systematically exploit the possibilities of obtaining increased food supplies from sea-farming. In the field of energy, it is known that there are important reserves of underwater oil and natural gas. As far as mineral resources are concerned, there are also the now-familiar iron ore nodules on the floor of the oceans, whose exploitation has not yet really gotten underway because of a lack of appropriate technology. Since 1976 the European Community has also developed a policy of managing and conserving fish resources, but it has had considerable difficulty in agreeing to an overall common fishing policy which covers all the structural, social, scientific and commercial aspects of the industry. And as far as the prospecting or exploitation of oceanbed resources is concerned, nothing has yet got underway at the Community level.

On the other hand, these questions are at the heart of the United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea, which is currently at a crucial stage. The European Community is negotiating the possibility of being a contracting party, independently of the ten Member States, to the international convention which should eventually emerge from the conference.

Recently the Economic and Monetary Committee of the European Parliament issued a report seeking to draw the attention of Community authorities to certain essential aspects of the problem of the development of marine resources, such as the security of the Community in natural resources or pollution of the marine environment. The Parliamentary Committee declared that the Convention on the Law of the Sea currently being drafted should be considered as "an essential element of the new world economic order". But it also regretted that the establishment of exclusive economic zones by coastal states might lead to "an injustice, especially for developing countries which are geographically disadvantaged". One of the notable recommendations of the Committee report is the advice to the Community that it use the anticipated results of the Law of the Sea Conference as a "starting point for undertaking a Community policy for marine natural resources and energy".

TOWN PLANNING : Cities as poles of attraction

Our industrial society has led to the development of high urban centres. These serve as administrative centres where most of the nation's services are concentrated ... and whatever their origins, cities soon become the focus of a nation's economic and cultural life.

This is true in the majority of the EEC Member States where inevitably pulsating, dynamic, industrialised cities dominate the more far-flung and disadvantaged "provinces".

The problem is particularly serious in those countries which are dominated by one major city : Copenhagen in Denmark, Paris in France, London in the United Kingdom, Dublin in Ireland and Athens in Greece. Italy has two major urban centres : Rome and Milan. Belgium and the Netherlands are dominated by a region rather than by a city : the Brussels-Antwerp-Ghent "triangle" in Belgium and the "Randstad" in the Netherlands. Germany alone has a balanced distribution of urban centres, with no one city or region dominating national economic or cultural life.

Some EEC countries have adopted "dissuasion" measures designed to monitor the development of urban centres and discourage or prevent certain investment projects. This is true in the United Kingdom, France, Italy and the Netherlands. These four countries currently have rules under which firms seeking to invest in certain built-up areas have to seek prior permission and/or pay a special tax. These four systems, however, are not similar and their effectiveness is rather limited.

These points are made in a long and detailed study on town planning recently published by the European Commission. The study was drawn up by a group of experts from the International Management Institute, a subsidiary of the Berlin-based Centre of Sciences. Entitled "Deglomeration policy in the EEC", the report compares the current policies of Member States and analyzes if they can be harmonised at an EEC level.

While rules allowing for a better distribution of investments appear at first glance to be a useful back-up mechanism for regional aids, experts feel that such measures taken alone would not be adequate. It would be impossible, for instance, to transfer a project initially meant for the north of Belgium to southern Italy, note the authors of the report with a touch of humour !