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ENERGY : The Community to exhibit its achievements

- The American state of Tennessee in 1982 will play host to a vast international exposition entitled "Energy Turns the World". Replying to the invitation made by then President Carter in December 1978, the Member States of the European Community have decided to participate together in this important exhibit in order to show the public the nature of Europe's efforts to economise on energy and to develop existing and alternative sources of energy. It will mark the first time in a world exposition that the member countries and the European Commission will be grouped in a joint pavillion. The contract for this joint participation was officially signed in Knoxville, Tennessee on 10 March.

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Commission of the European Communities,
Rue de la Loi 200 - 1049 Brussels um.
Tel. 736 60 00 - Telex 21877 COMEU B.

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Editor : Will. J. Reckman



HEALTH : New aid programme for the handicapped under study

About 450 million persons, or 10 percent of the world population, are mentally or physically handicapped, according to United Nations estimates. Modern medicine has led to an increase in the proportion of persons handicapped by assuring the survival to adulthood of handicapped children and by permitting more adults to grow old, when various infirmities, such as blindness and deafness, are more frequent.

The causes of these infirmities frequently have their origins in congenital problems, malnutrition (for instance, each year 250,000 children lose their sight as a result of a lack of vitamin A), diseases, accidents, or alcohol or drug abuse. The broad scope of the problem posed by handicapped persons led the United Nations to declare 1981 "The International Year of the Handicapped". For this occasion, a number of public and private organizations have devoted special efforts, either at the local, regional, national or international level. One of the main objectives is to try to assure a better integration of the handicapped person in society, especially by making him or her participate more in normal active life. Currently, three-quarters of the handicapped in the world receive no professional help. The European Parliament on 10 March adopted a report prepared by Mrs Ann Clwyd (British Socialist) for the Committee on Social and Employment Affairs on the integration of the handicapped into society. This report urged a guaranteed minimum income for the handicapped and an invalidity indemnity in all the Member States of the European Community. It also proposed a certain number of measures concerning the adaptation of housing to the requirements of the handicapped, assistance for families, transport facilities, employment quotas, working conditions and a number of other areas. The European Parliament also urged that the resources of the European Social Fund be increased and proposed that a massive collection campaign be launched on television to finance a European Community programme. Addressing the 434 parliamentarians from the ten member countries, the European Commissioner for Social and Employment Affairs, Ivor Richard, indicated he was in the midst of preparing a new action programme in favour of the integration of the handicapped that would emphasize education and professional training. Mr Richard underlined the importance of involvement in educational life as well as the local community. For him, it is especially essential that deep-seated attitudes be changed. He also assured the Euro-MPs that he would insist that the Social Fund budget be sharply increased in 1982.

COURT OF JUSTICE : Number One on the EEC Court's Hit Parade

Just about everyone knows that there exists a law of natural science that allows the sound of music to waft pleasantly across fields, rivers, mountains and national frontiers. But just to confirm this happy note is a melodious refrain from an unexpected source. The robed Justices of the European Court may vaguely resemble members of a chorus, but they rarely burst out in harmony the way they did recently in a case involving swinging record companies and some of the musical world's top chart-busters.

As in most legal matters, the case was a complicated one -- involving the rights of authors, composers and publishers to collect royalties for the use of their creations. In most countries, these talented artists have organised societies staffed with specialised personnel, to collect the royalties for them.

One such organisation in Germany has been looking out so strenuously for the interests of composers and musicians that it became embroiled with a couple of music companies. One such case involved records and cassettes on which musical works were recorded originating in various European Community countries, and the other involved a shipment of some 100,000 records from the United Kingdom. The firms producing these records and cassettes had obtained the authorisation of the original copyright holder, but had not paid the usual higher royalties in Germany. This is where the German organisation stepped in and sought to collect the higher German royalties, whereupon a legal argument broke out over whether the European Community Treaty's guarantees on free circulation of goods between Member States did not run counter to the payment of such fees in order to sell goods in another Community country.

The case was so complicated that the German tribunal before which it was being tried asked the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg for its advice on this problem involving both EEC law and national law.

Once again, as so often in recent years, the Court ruled that the EEC laws did oppose the application of national laws permitting an organisation from collecting fees before the distribution of such background music once these had already been sold legally in another member country. The ruling is similar to other important reaffirmations of this right of free circulation throughout the EEC, which many have seen as a key fundamental benefit for businesses operating in the common market as a means of overcoming various administrative non-tariff barriers to free trade. Such unrestricted trade is generally an advantage to consumers, who benefit from lower prices on many imported products, which is just the note struck by the EEC Court in this recent musical ruling.

DEVELOPMENT AID : Rice grains by the millions

World production of rice was estimated at about 380 million tonnes in 1979, compared with 425 million tonnes of wheat and 394 million tonnes of maize. While third on the list of the world's major cereals, rice is the staple food for about 90 % of the world's poorer population. Rice production in the Third World, however, is not high enough to meet these growing needs.

African countries, for example, had to import about two million tonnes of rice in 1979. Imports went down by 179,000 tonnes in 1979 - compared with 1978 figures - because of increased rice production in Nigeria. However, the situation still remains dramatic. Experts note that the majority of African countries could become major producers of rice and other cereals like maize and millet, if the right economic, and technical procedures were applied.

The total production of paddy rice in Africa in 1980 is estimated at about 5.7 million tonnes. The Caribbean countries produced about 420,000 tonnes and the countries of the Pacific 30,000 tonnes. These regions are linked to the European Community through the wide-ranging Lomé Convention. Production of rice in these countries has not kept pace with rapid increase in population ... and there are indications that rice shortages could be around the corner.

EEC assistance for rice production in the ACP countries represents 2.7% of total EEC aid since 1958. Such aid, granted by the European Development Fund, includes assistance for rice production and processing, but also covers the construction of irrigation and water supply facilities to encourage rice cultivation. About 15 of the ACP countries have earmarked a percentage of their national aid programmes for the development of the rice sector.

EEC action has also focussed on regional programmes, particularly cooperation with the organisation for the exploitation of the Senegal river - which includes rice production activities in Senegal, Mali and Mauritania in its programme - and the West African Rice Development Association.

FINANCE : Keeping a closer watch on our money

Given the unfortunate fact that money nowadays is harder to get and just as difficult to keep, it's probably not a bad idea to keep a better watch over it. Some people put it in a sock under their mattress. Some hide it in the garden or in a sugar jar. But lots of private citizens, firms and organisations keep their money in a bank. Banking is serious business and most European Governments have set up systems of controls and requirements for assuring that the money entrusted to them by the public and businesses is safe and accounted for. But of course one major problem in these banking controls similar to the difficulties faced by many other businesses is that these rules were established largely at a time when banks and business were conducted on a national level and according to traditions that were particular to each country. In recent years, however, banking has experienced a spectacular international explosion. Most large banks now have to operate on the international market-place as they follow their clients and their money around.

As a result, there is a need in this sector, just as in many others, for coordination on joint international sets of rules. This is especially true within the 10 member countries of the European Community, where economic activity is becoming more and more integrated. That's why the European Community Commission in Brussels recently proposed a uniform set of standards for accounting and reporting of balance sheets for banks operating in the 10 member countries. Such standardised rules will require similar contents, information and physical appearance and presentation. This will not only be of useful value for the public, saver and investor, but will probably make life easier for the banks themselves to have a standard set of rules to comply with from country to country instead of the existing variation. Such banking rules, worked out with the help of advisory committees composed of banking and accounting experts, were anticipated years ago when the Community considered and adopted similar accounting and reporting requirements for general companies, and also when other requirements, which are still under consideration, were being drafted for multinational corporations. At that time, it was felt that banks were a particular type of institution that would require separate treatment and requirements. These proposed rules for banks, which still await the deliberations of the Council of Ministers of the Community, are, along with the other related company regulations, nevertheless part of a common system of business laws designed to create better security and amenities both for firms and the public throughout the European Community.

TEXTILES : A new look at Mediterranean imports

A determined effort to streamline the European Community's policy of textile imports from the Mediterranean countries was made recently by the European Commission. The EEC's imports of textiles from the different Mediterranean countries with which the EEC has "preferential" cooperation agreements constitute over a quarter of all "low-cost" imports, and about one-fifth of total textile imports of the European Community.

These preferential imports were valued at about 1.2 billion pounds in 1979. The search for a new approach to textile imports from major exporting countries in the Mediterranean, such as Spain, Portugal, Malta, Cyprus, Tunisia and Morocco coincides with the Community's attempts to overhaul its entire textiles policy.

Such a review of the basic principles set out by the EEC Council of Ministers in 1977 will take place on three fronts : renegotiation of the Multi-fibres Arrangement, the international agreement which currently regulates world textiles trade, the need to work out a better deal with the United States and Japan which have become major exporters of textiles to the European market, and finally, the need for a coherent policy on the restructuring of the EEC's own textile industry.

As a first step in its overall review, the Commission has come up with wide-ranging proposals for a reform of the existing textiles trade arrangements with the Mediterranean countries.

Textiles trade between the European Community and the Mediterranean countries is at the moment regulated by a series of voluntary export restraint agreements which were signed in 1978 and are due to expire in December 1981. The Commission has now proposed that instead of such formal agreements, the Community should adopt a more flexible and realistic approach to textiles trade. Such a new approach would reconcile the objectives of the EEC's textile policy with its development policy goals.

The new approach would be based on the conclusion of "administrative cooperation" agreements with the countries in the Mediterranean. These agreements would not fix strict quota limits such as those established by the current arrangements, but allow for the organisation of consultations between the two sides if Mediterranean exports are seen to exceed certain "internal global ceilings" which would be set up by the EEC. If such consultations did not succeed in leading to a down-turn in EEC imports, the Community would be authorised to apply the safeguard clause, thereby imposing strict limits on Mediterranean exports to the EEC.

The Commission has also recommended an overhauling of the Community's outward processing traffic with third countries and will soon be coming up with its preliminary negotiating position on the possible renewal of the Multifibres Arrangement.

IN BRIEF ... IN BRIEF ... IN BRIEF ... IN BRIEF ... IN BRIEF ...INDUSTRY : Paper problems

The European Community is currently running a trade deficit in its imports of wood and derived products, second only to its deficit in oil products. Specialists forecast a paper crisis in the coming years; it is high time therefore that the Community should make an attempt to deal with the problem before paper shortages become a reality.

The European Commissioner for industrial affairs, Etienne Davignon, will soon hold discussions with representatives of the EEC's paper and cardboard industry. The EEC paper industry is expected to submit a memorandum on the increased use of Community wood for the manufacture of pulpwood, as a way of improving the industry's competitiveness. The industry is also looking for Community assistance in order to undertake new investments and will attempt to solve certain problems plaguing trade relations with Canada and the Scandinavian countries.

ECONOMY : Business Managers regain confidence

The European Commission's monthly investigation of the Community's business climate produced very interesting results in January 1981. It showed that for the first time in several months, business managers were regaining confidence.

EEC businesses seemed less pessimistic as regards production trends in Community industry and indicated that they were satisfied with the number of delivery orders and the level of stocks. This, however, does not mean that the dark era of economic recession is quite over.

WOMEN : Making equal opportunity a reality

Those male employees of Lloyds Bank in London who are under 25 years of age receive a monthly contribution from their employers equal to 5 % of their regular salary and over and above it. This is paid into their pension accounts.

This preferential treatment is not granted to the Bank's female personnel in the under-25 year age bracket. Two female employees of the Bank took the question to the European Court of Justice, stressing that such discriminatory treatment effectively meant that the Bank's male workers are receiving 5 % more than their female colleagues. This difference also prompted discrimination as regards certain social welfare advantages such as unemployment and social security benefits and loans and benefits.

The Court backed up the two women, stressing that contributions to the pensions account constituted a form of payment. As a result of the judgment, Lloyds will be obliged to put an end to such discrimination with the rule that stresses that equal work deserves equal pay.