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AGRICULTURE : The Community's wine prospects

The European Parliament's committee on agriculture submitted a report on the EEC's current wine situation at the plenary session held in Luxembourg, March 12. The report points to a number of factors which are responsible for the current gloomy situation. These include over-production, low prices, a general fall in consumption, and obstacles to intra-Community trade, etc. This has prompted Euro MP, Colleselli, to recommend a series of measures designed to remedy the existing situation.

Short-term measures include stocking procedures, distillation, the application of a floor price for table wines and the utilisation of must concentrates. On the longer term, a more determined export drive is needed, along with harmonisation of taxes, the improvement of production structures and marketing, etc. Colleselli also noted that while anti-alcoholic campaigns were legitimate, they should not focus on wine consumption alone.

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What are the current problems facing European newspapers ? What is the EEC doing to help ?

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LEISURE : Soon the first transatlantic air race

A few years ago, "The Treaty of Rome" a sailing ship flying the European banner, defended the European Community colours in a number of international long-distance races. Its alter ego now exists in the aviation field and is known as the "Eur Transat".

The European Community Aeroclub will put forward a crew for the first transatlantic air race planned for June 4 to 14 during the Paris air show at Le Bourget airport. This team will include Herbert Allgeier and Elda Stifani who will fly a twin-engine P 68 built by the Italian firm Partenavia.

For the competitors in this race, the first of its kind, it will mean flying from Paris to New York and back as quickly as possible. Some 100 crews, divided into four categories depending on the type of aircraft, will make the flight. A list of possible stopovers will be offered. These will include Ireland, Scotland, Iceland, Greenland, Newfoundland and New Brunswick. Two distinct classes will be established : the first in actual time and the second in compensated time (the gap between the theoretical flight time at 75 percent of the plane's capacity and the actual time elapsed). Awarding of the prizes will be broadcast through Eurovision on virtually all European television systems.

This "Air Transat 81" race is under the sponsorship of the French Ministry of Youth and Sports Activities. The objective of the organisers is to promote general aviation through a spectacular operation aimed at demonstrating airplane safety and performance and to improve the image of aviation among the public at large. Any eventual profits realised by this operation will be donated to the Paris Air Museum.

In the meantime, the European Community Aeroclub, which includes the pilots working in the EEC institutions, will attempt to make European aircraft manufacturers and pilots conscious of the role the Community could play in promoting general aviation. For example, it could establish the mutual recognition of licenses or qualification, simplify customs regulations, help develop air traffic control cooperation and undertake other activities. This could amount to another step in the advancement of the European aviation cause which has already been the subject of much interest to the European Parliament and the European Commission.

Nevertheless, many eyes in Europe will be focused skywards in June to follow the exploits of the European crew on the same trail blazed by Charles Lindbergh in 1927, even if flying conditions have changed somewhat since then. (For additional information, write to Air Transat, 83 Blvd Exelmans, 75016 Paris, France).

ENVIRONMENT : Rolling back the tide of Mediterranean pollution

The blue Mediterranean, which was once the cradle of civilisations and a main thoroughfare for trade and ideas, in recent years has become an increasingly dirty, overcrowded and neglected body of water which represents a hazard for the millions who live or holiday on its shores.

The popular television navigator and explorer, Jacques Cousteau, from his headquarters at the museum of Monaco, and many others have called attention in recent years to the growing plight of this troubled sea which is still a body shared by millions of diverse peoples and 18 countries around its shores. The increasing amount of industrial and urban waste discharged into the sea and rivers emptying into it as well as the dumping from passing oil tankers have raised pollution in recent years to an alarming level. Authorities have decreed some beaches unfit for bathing and fishermen have also complained about the destruction of their fishing grounds. As a result, in recent years there have been concerted efforts sponsored by the United Nations Environment Programme to encourage the states in the region to clean up their common heritage.

The first such meeting took place in Barcelona in 1975 and subsequent gatherings have produced specific treaties against certain polluting practices and in favour of research or monitoring activities. A network of some 83 marine laboratories in 16 countries in the Mediterranean basin has been established in this operation.

But all this costs more and more, and the United Nations has indicated in the past that it wanted to lessen its financial participation in the Mediterranean campaign in order to devote more resources to cleaning other regional seas in poorer regions of the world. A meeting just concluded in Cannes attended by Ministers representing most of the Mediterranean countries focused on this financing problem and decided to set up its headquarters in Athens.

The problem of Mediterranean pollution is of crucial importance to the European Community, which represents already 22,000 of the Mediterranean coasts 41,000 kilometers, a share which will grow substantially when Spain enters the Community. As a result, the European Commission in Brussels has just proposed that the Member States increase the Community's share in the budget of the Mediterranean clean-up effort beyond the previous token amount. This, it argues, would help cover some of the contributions once provided by the United Nations in the past. Failure to make up for the lost United Nations funds would seriously jeopardize some of the necessary research and monitoring work undertaken and could also have important political and economic consequences for some of the Community countries dependent on Mediterranean tourism or other activities.

STATISTICAL BRIEFS ... STATISTICAL BRIEFS ...ECONOMY : EEC 1980 inflation rate soars to 13.8 %

The European Community's consumer price index increased by an average of 13.8 % in 1980, according to latest information released by the European Community's Statistical Office. There were, however, wide-ranging differences between Member States. While prices increased by only 5.5 % in Germany, they rocketed by 18 % in the United Kingdom and Ireland and 21.2 % in Italy. The Community's rate of inflation is very similar to that of the United States, currently estimated at 13.5 %.

TRADE : A 10.7 billion dollar deficit with Japan

The European Community's current trade deficit with Japan is put at 10.7 billion dollars, compared with 7 billion dollars in 1979, according to latest trade figures drawn up by the European Commission. The ratio between European exports to Japan and imports from that country fell from 47 % in 1979 to 37 % in 1980.

The Japanese export drive is not limited to the automobile and electronics sectors. During the first eleven months of 1980, Japanese exports of chemical products to the EEC increased by 19 %, those of food products by 24 %, and exports of textiles and clothing by 36 %.

ENERGY : A 16.2 % annual leap for nuclear power production

The production of electricity through nuclear energy increased at an average of 16.2 % for the Community during the period September 1979 to September 1980. This increase was most marked in France, where production increased by 48.7 %. At the end of September 1980, the production of nuclear-powered electricity in the EEC reached 106,236 million KWh, of total electricity production of 863,347 million KWh. The share of nuclear power in electricity production overshot the 11 % mark in Germany and the United Kingdom, and reached 16.4 % in France and 21.8 % in Belgium.

AGRICULTURE : Record cereal harvests in 1980

Provisional statistics published by the European Community's Statistical Office indicate that the Community's 1980 cereals harvest reached record levels. The Nine produced 51.6 million tonnes of wheat and 40.4 million tonnes of barley.

However, the Community continued to import the equivalent of 9 million tonnes of fodder crops in the form of cassava (about 5 million tonnes),

bran-based animal feed-stuffs (about 2 million tonnes) and maize gluten (2 million tonnes - gluten is a protein substance contained in cereal flour).

These imports currently cost the Community about £ 410 million. Not only are these products subject to a very low import levy, but they also mean an increase in exports of the EEC's own animal feedstuff production. Here, once again, the export refund system means that the Community pays producers for the difference between world market prices and the higher prices paid in Europe.

ENVIRONMENT : Protection of our fine feathered friends

Wild birds, all too often, fall easy prey to man. Too many people have no regard for their survival nor to the effects of such eradication on the delicate balance of the environment. Because many wild birds are largely migratory, this problem affects all the Community Member States. Realizing the importance of protecting the various species, the Council of Ministers passed Community legislation to ensure their survival. This legislation limits both the number of species which may be hunted and offered for sale and the permitted methods of hunting. Emphasis is also placed on the conservation of their natural habitats.

The whale population, too, will be glad to learn it will not suffer the same fate as the extinct Dodo bird. January 1980, saw the adoption of a regulation banning the importation of most whale products.

In line with continued efforts to protect wildlife, the Commission forwarded to the Council a proposal on the implementation in the Community of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. In addition to this, the Community is also partaking in negotiations to draw up a Convention on the conservation of migratory species of wild animals.

Man is his own worst enemy. If he continues to disregard the delicate balance between himself and nature, it will be to his detriment most of all.

THE WRITTEN PRESS IN THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY
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Just about everyone agrees that the written press because of its informative and general cultural function is not just an economic commodity like any other. That's why the numerous difficulties currently experienced by the press have aroused considerable concern in several quarters. The major problems encountered are well-known - competition from other media, and especially television, the steadily escalating increase in the price of paper and other production costs, the acceleration of technological progress which requires sizeable investments and lastly, the tightening concentration of power in press activities.

A large number of written questions by European Parliamentarians to the European Community institutions display great preoccupation about these problems. But does the European Community have the means to intervene in this sector? The answer to this question is a complicated one.

The fundamental principle of freedom of the press is accepted in all the member countries of the European Community. This right concerns not only the freedom of expression, but also the right to create a press organ. As regards freedom of expression, each of the ten Member States has established legal safeguards against the abuse of this freedom. These define possible infringements, establish a system of controls, or set up various responsibilities for managers, proprietors, authors or others collectively responsible for a publication. In addition, the right of reply for persons attacked in a publication is generally recognised.

Since the European Community has established the right of free circulation throughout its single market, publications originating in the Member States cannot be stopped at the border except for reasons of public order, security, morality or other reasons cited in the Treaty of Rome which contains the basic Community law.

Regarding the freedom of establishment for a press organ, the European Commission is careful to ensure that all Community citizens benefit from the same right to establish such an operation as any citizen in the member country to which they choose to emigrate. This right has been granted to the press in the same way it is given to other businesses ever since the expiration of the membership transition period. Nevertheless, two member countries, Italy and France, still have not amended their legislation to conform to these Community principles.

The profession of journalist is also regarded in different legal fashion in the various Member States of the Community. Belgium, Luxembourg, France and Italy have adopted legal definitions for this profession. On the other hand, there are no special requirements for entry into this profession in Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Ireland or Denmark. In these latter cases, no specific degree or diploma is required and the professional journalist's card has no legal value. No recent effort has been undertaken to coordinate the national provisions or to agree on a common definition for this profession.

The problem of press concentration has been emerging since the 1960s. Some statistics clearly bring out the scope of the problem. In Belgium there were in 1945 44 groups accounting for some 59 different publications. In 1977 there remained only 17 groups issuing 39 publications. In France, for 151 provincial newspapers existing in 1951, there remained only 42 in 1973. In the United Kingdom four groups control about 80 percent of the press. In the Netherlands, seven national papers and 40 regional ones were bought or merged between 1950 and 1976, and a certain number did not survive these operations. In a number of states, there is even a multi-media concentration in that radio or television broadcasting firms are buying into the written press, and vice versa.

The widespread fear is being expressed that the disappearance or merger of publications, in addition to threatening employment, is also undermining the diversity of information sources and opinion. Some aid programmes have been set in motion by public authorities in a number of European states.

The aim of these measures, which have generally been judged to be inadequate, or even ineffective, is the continuation within each state of a varied and independent press.

The European Commission also monitors such financial aid to see that it conforms to the Community treaties. It also has undertaken its own study on press concentration from information furnished by the Member States. But it seems unlikely that it could intervene directly to block this trend, except when this concentration is likely to restrain or disrupt competition.

Nevertheless, Community measures of interest to the press sector are in operation. These tend to be aimed at ensuring a steady supply of newsprint paper at the best price. But the Community has also had to act cautiously because each Member State tends to jealously guard its prerogatives in relation to the important power represented by the press.