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SUMMARY

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SOCIETY: 13 million women are looking for solutions to their problems

Survey throws light on the condition of working women who are not in paid employment.

Behind the clumsy expression "working women other than those in paid employment" are women you see every day - in the corner grocery, the lawyer's office and, most notably, in the countryside. They are the 8 million married women who share their husband's occupational activities, and another 5 million who are either self-employed or employ others.

Two very dissimilar groups of which the first clearly has more problems by far. Three out of four women in the first group have no legal responsibility in the running of the business, while nearly one in two receives no payment for her work. And the great majority of these 8 million women would be unable, were their husbands to die or leave them, to continue the business or retain control of it.

Women who work for their husbands are keenly aware of being under-paid, but nine out of 10 accept their situation; only two out of 10 would change occupations if given the choice. What they mainly want (42%) are improved retirement benefits, although some 34% also stress the need for greater equality in law and in practice between men and women in the same occupation. They also want a solution to the problem of maternity leave.

The difficulty of leading a normal family life also faces the five million women who are self-employed or are their own bosses, even though their situation is less uncertain and they enjoy greater job satisfaction. Few of them feel discriminated against as regards pay but many more regret being unable to be elected to, or hold positions of responsibility in, professional organisations. Above all, they find it more difficult than men to obtain bank loans. Even so, these women are enthusiastic about their work and aware that it depends entirely on them whether or not they continue in it.

The expectations voiced by these two groups of women, especially as regards the inadequacies of social protection in general, should be seen in relation to the Directive on the application of the principle of equal treatment as between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity, as well as the protection of self-employed women during pregnancy. This Directive was adopted by the EC Council of Ministers last December.

INDUSTRY: The crisis in the steel industry continues

While manufacturers hang back, the European Commission is uneasy.

The European Community continues to produce more steel than it can sell. But the industry throughout the 12-nation Community is not prepared to reduce production capacity by as much as the experts believe is necessary. The European Commission is preoccupied as a result, as the Industry Commissioner, Karl-Heinz Narjes, recently told the press.

For nearly 10 years the European steel industry has had to face dramatic problems. Its export markets have shrunk because of competition from new materials and new producers, especially in the Third World. The industry has already shed tens of thousands of jobs.

Since 1981 the industry, in agreement with the European Commission, has operated a stringent reorganisation programme aimed at saving its more viable parts. In five years some 31.2 million tonnes of production capacity has been scrapped.

But the industry's immediate future is not any rosier as a result. As Mr Narjes pointed out, demand for steel is falling by some 2% each year, while the weaker dollar is making exports more difficult.

European experts believe that in these conditions the Community's steel industry must scrap another 27 million tonnes of production capacity. The basis for this high figure is a forecast on the likely demand for steel, based on assumptions which are neither optimistic nor pessimistic. However, even an optimistic scenario puts the surplus capacity at some 22 million tonnes.

According to Mr Narjes these somewhat pessimistic analyses must be the starting point. But the major steel producers would be unwilling to scrap more than 9.1 million tonnes of production capacity - some 7.5 million tonnes immediately and another 1.6 million tonnes provided the national governments and the European Community undertake to meet all redundancy payments.

The European Commission is now waiting for the industry to put forward "convincing" proposals for further cutbacks in capacity. As for the social and regional problems which will arise, the Commission plans to take them up with the trade unions.

POLLS: The European Community moves ahead slowly ...

but Europeans want faster progress.

Nearly half the people living in the 12-nation European Community feel it is moving ahead slowly; over two-thirds of them would like progress to be much faster. These are among the most striking findings of the latest survey of public opinion in the Community, the Eurobarometer, carried out last October and November on behalf of the European Commission.

For the first time a new technique was added to the traditional questionnaire. Those interviewed were shown a card containing seven persons in silhouette, numbered from 1 to 7. No 1 was clearly standing still, while No 2 was walking very slowly and, at the other end, No 7 was running at top speed.

Those polled were asked to select the persons who best represented for them (1) the Community's present speed and (2) the speed at which they wanted it to move ahead.

Some 48% of those interviewed thought Europe was moving very slowly, when it was not at a standstill. As many as 69% wanted it to advance at a fast pace. This mixture of dissatisfaction and an ambitious target should give politicians food for thought.

The Luxemburgers, Germans and Italians were the most frustrated. It was in these three countries that the gulf was greatest between what those polled would like and what they believe the situation to be.

However, the trends recorded at Community level were to be found in nearly all Community countries. Thus Greece was the only country where 25% of those interviewed thought the Community was moving ahead quickly. Similarly, in all the countries except Denmark a clear majority thought that Europe must progress rapidly.

The most impatient were the Italians, French and Luxemburgers. But even in Great Britain, where public enthusiasm for the Community is generally limited, 65% of those interviewed wanted European unification to be much faster. This was equal to the figure for Belgium - and higher than that for Ireland. Only in Denmark were the advocates of a rapid advance in the minority, with 35%.

The 26th Eurobarometer poll also showed the Europeans relatively optimist as regards 1987.

ENERGY: France, the Community's largest exporter of electricity

A look at the Community's electricity grid.

The European Community imports more electricity than it exports to neighbouring countries. Even so, its net imports do not amount to even 1% of its consumption. France is the largest exporter among the Twelve, as the following Table shows:

Trade in electrical energy in the EC and member states, 1985
(in 1,000m. Kilowatt/hours)

Country	Imports(+)	Exports(-)	Balance	Balance/consumption
Community	76.1	62.4	+ 13.7	0.9%
Belgium	5.5	5.5	0	0%
Denmark	3.1	2.6	+ 0.5	1.8%
France	5.3	28.8	-23.5	7.7%
Germany	18.8	16.3	+ 2.5	0.6%
Greece	0.9	0.2	+ 0.7	2.6%
Italy	25.1	1.4	+23.7	12.1%
Luxembourg	4	0.4	+ 3.6	94.7%
Netherlands	6	0.9	+ 5.1	7.7%
Portugal	3.5	1.3	+ 2.2	10.8%
Spain	3.9	5	- 1.1	0.9%

The electricity grids of nearly all Community countries are interconnected with those of their neighbours, irrespective of whether or not they are member states. At present only Ireland is totally isolated from the other countries. The U.K. was in a similar situation until 1986, when it was linked to France through a cable financed partly by the European Investment Bank.

There are few electricity supply contracts between Community countries; in any case, they are generally short-term contracts. A common market in electricity hardly exists therefore. However, there are several electricity-generating stations in Belgium, France and Spain which are jointly owned by companies on both sides of the frontier and the electricity generated in one country is intended for the other.

However, 10 national utilities out of 12 know they can count on obtaining supplies from their neighbours in an emergency. They only exception to this, other than Ireland, is Greece, whose electricity grid is entirely interconnected with non-Community countries.

CULTURE: A key economic sector, with very high growth rates

The European Commissioner for cultural affairs presents the conference on culture, technology and the economy, to be held in Florence.

The Romans had a word for it: "carmina non dant panem". But it is no longer true that poetry doesn't fill the stomach. The fact is that culture, very broadly defined, is now a "mature" sector of the economy. Its growing share of the market in industrialized countries is evidence of this. Demand for its products is rising: consumer spending on them has doubled over a short space of time in many European countries, while investment, both public and, more especially private, has grown at an unprecedented rate.

Culture-based "industries" are expanding very fast, several to international proportions. Clearly this is a far more dynamic sector of the economy than many others. Part of its dynamism is due to the strong interaction between culture and the new technologies, which have made possible not only new techniques of creation, production and distribution but also new products and services, such as the computer and telematics. These in turn are being swiftly applied to culture, giving rise to new forms of artistic expression.

It is this rapid evolution which has led the European Commission to organise a conference on the general theme of the cultural challenge in a changing Europe. To be held in Florence this year, from 25 to 28 March, it will bring together leading figures in the Community's cultural life as well as businessmen, manufacturers and politicians.

The speed with which changes are taking place imposes on every cultural sector a continuous process of adaptation. This inevitably means a confrontation between the world's three major economic and industrial powers: Europe, the United States and Japan. Europe seems to have got off to a bad start, however. It is having difficulty in coordinating its actions and in setting common standards and removing barriers to the free movement of "cultural products".

In the absence of a single market Europe runs the risk, in this sector as in so many others, of losing out to the Americans and Japanese, with all that this implies for the development of its culture and economy.

It is to be hoped that Florence will act as a beacon, allowing Europe to set a true course in this area at least.

DEVELOPMENT AID: The desert's remorseless advance is weakening Africa

The European Commission backs efforts to stop the desert's advance and promote the economic and social development of the IGADD countries.

Africa's already meagre resources are being devoured day after day by the desert's remorseless advance. Six African countries are trying to fight back, however. They are Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, the Sudan, Somalia and Djibouti.

In 1986 they set up an Intergovernmental Authority for Draft and Development (IGADD), with the two-fold objective of stopping the desert's onward march and promoting the region's economic development. Their initiative will touch the lives of 100 million people, in an area of over five million square kilometres, representing 26% of the population and 23% of the area of sub-Saharan Africa.

The picture is a bleak one, needless to say. Only a small part of the arable land is actually cultivated. Water resources are unevenly distributed and insufficiently exploited, while the desert's advance threatens the lives of large numbers of people.

But it's an ill wind that blows no one any good. The drought and famine which have afflicted the region for several years now have nevertheless spurred countries, some of which were engaged in mortal combat with each other until very recently, to work together.

A delegation from IGADD has just met the European Development Commissioner, Lorenzo Natali, to present him the projects prepared by the authority and a list of its priorities. The delegation invited the European Community's member states and the European Commission to attend the conference in Djibouti, from March 16 to 18.

Mr Natali confirmed both the Commission's interest in the new organisation and the importance it attaches to the fight against desertification and to the economic development of Africa. He noted with satisfaction that IGADD's priorities and objectives are very close to those of the United Nations, the Organisation for African Unity and the third Lomé Convention.

REGIONAL AID: From the reconversion of fishing ports to a new technology centre

ECU 490m.* for 28 regional development programmes.

Seven European Community countries are to receive a total of ECU 490m. to help them redevelop traditional industrial regions in decline. The 28 regional programmes of economic regeneration which are being financed by the Community's Regional Development Fund (ERDF), cover a wide range of activities, including the reconversion of ports effected by the implementation of the Community's fisheries policy and the introduction of new technologies in the U.K., Ireland and Denmark.

The bulk of the funds released by the European Commission will finance national programmes of Community interest. These programmes seek to relaunch the economies of regions in decline in the Community, and have been made possible because of the reform of the ERDF, in force since 1 January 1985.

Five programmes of this type have been aided by the ERDF so far, and the funds now released by the Commission will add another 12 to the list. The ERDF's total contribution, amounting to over ECU 306m., represents 50% of the cost of these programmes. They are to be completed in 3 to 5 years and the beneficiary countries include Britain, Belgium, Denmark, France, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

The three national programmes of Community interest in Britain cover the Tees Corridor in Cleveland county, the Welsh county of mid-Glamorgan and northern Ireland. The main objective as regards the first two is the economic regeneration of once prosperous regions by developing their economic potential. The programme for northern Ireland provides for the development of small businesses.

Over ECU 183m. of ERDF funds have been allocated to the 14 "special programmes", whose aim is the economic recovery of regions dependent on a single industry. Thus five of these programmes cover regions in France and Ireland where the textile industry is located, another four steel centres in Britain and France and three other regions which depend on the fishing industry.

The remainder of the funds, some ECU 680,000 in all, will be used to launch business centres in Cork, Ireland, and Ypres, Belgium. These centres, which seek to encourage the growth of small businesses, will complete the European network set up with the European Commission's help.

* 1 ECU = ± UK£ 0.74 or IR£ 0.76.

FOOD: Flying the flag at mealtimes as well?

National eating habits - in figures.

Europeans as a whole are spending less and less of their budget on food. But national habits die hard. Germans remain wedded to rye, the French to beef, the Danes to sugar and the Greeks to tomatoes. The European Commission's latest annual report on Community agriculture contains enough statistics to prove this. And for the first time it includes information on the dietary habits of the Spaniards and Portuguese as well.

Seen in relation to the total household budget, spending on food declined in nearly all Community countries between 1975 and 1984. The fall was especially sharp in Ireland, Italy and Luxembourg. The only country in which the share of food had risen over this period was Greece.

The Irish and Greek devoted the largest share of their budget to food* - over 42% - in 1984, the latest year for which statistics are available. They were followed by the Italians and Spaniards, with roughly 30%. The Belgian, French, Luxemburgers and Danes were close to the Community average, with 20 to 25%, while the British and Dutch spent only 20% of their budget on food. Even so, the Germans succeeded in limiting spending on food to a mere 18% of their budget.

Since pasta is made from wheat, the Italians still ate the most cereals of any of their Community partners. Even so, their consumption has fallen in the last 10 years. The Danes and Germans remain the only major consumers of rye; but here, too, consumption is declining. The Spaniards headed the list of rice eaters in 1984. The Portuguese, however, ate twice as much - in 1982, the latest year for Portuguese statistics.

The Irish beat the British and Spaniards in their fondness for potatoes; they also led the field as regards sugar, beating the Danes by a short head. The Greeks ate the most vegetables, including the tinned variety, followed by the Italians, while the Greeks had a strong lead when it came to tomatoes.

The Dutch emerged as the leading consumers of citrus fruit: they ate their way through almost three times as many oranges, grapefruit and other citrus fruit in 1984 as 10 years before. The Dutch also managed to put away more apples than anyone else in the Community - but had to surrender first place to the Italians when it came to peaches and pears.

* includes drinks and tobacco.