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ENVIRONMENT: A "European Year" gets off to a good start

The Twelve adopt three anti-pollution regulations.

The European Year of the Environment, which began on March 21, after its official inauguration by ministers on the 19th, has begun rather well. Before setting off on their "ecological" walk in the forest near Brussels, the European Community's environment ministers adopted three anti-pollution regulations dealing with sulphur, asbestos and other dangerous substances. They also approved the principle of the 1987-92 action programme submitted to them by the European Commission.

The ministers agreed to reduce further sulphur levels in heating oils and fuel for motor cars fitted with diesel engines. While the regulation currently in force sets a limit of 0.5%, the new regulation, which comes into force on 1 January 1989 at the latest, reduces sulphur levels to 0.3%.

Community countries can set it at only 0.2% if they so wish, and the Danish, Dutch, German and Italian ministers announced their countries would be adopting the lower figure. This would reduce sulphur emissions by 15% in the Community as a whole, according to the European Commission.

The Ministers also adopted a directive which seeks to prevent or reduce asbestos emissions likely to pollute the air, water or the soil and thus endanger the health of Europeans. The new regulation, which complements earlier ones, will apply especially to factories producing unprocessed asbestos, or which use this material in the manufacture or treatment of other products. The decision also covers the transport and storage of asbestos waste.

The Twelve also strengthened the provisions of the "Seveso Directive", the Community regulation adopted in 1982 after the accident in the Italian town of the same name. As a result, the procedure for the notification and control of dangerous substances stored or used in industry will apply to much smaller quantities than hitherto: 75t. for chlorine (instead of 200t.); 750 kgs. for phosgene (20t.) and 150 kgs. for methyl isocyanate (1,000 kgs.).

The Ministers also approved the principle and objectives of the fourth Community Environment action programme, which is to serve as the framework for the Community's ecological policies until 1992. The programme's priorities include the prevention of pollution and a more scrupulous management of natural resources.

### CULTURE: The European Community takes up the challenge

Commissioner Ripa di Meana talks about the Florence Conference in Hamburg, Paris and Rome.

The European Community's Commissioner for cultural affairs, Carlo Ripa di Meana, has been doing his own version of the European grand tour, informing the media of the European Conference on the cultural challenge, and the results of the studies carried out by various institutions on behalf of the European Commission. These studies are the working documents for the Conference, held in Florence from March 25 to 28.

Culture, broadly defined, is big business. In the Community's four largest member states - Britain, France, Germany and Italy - it represents a turnover of more than ECU 100 billion\*, or some 5% of Gross Domestic Product. As many as 3,750,000 jobs depend on it - which is around 4% of the working population, or a little less than half as many as for one of the major traditional sectors of the economy, such as agriculture.

As for trade in cultural products, including cultural tourism, the exports of these countries amount to nearly ECU 21 billion and their imports to ECU 18.5 billion. Among the sectors with a surplus are the cultural heritage, which covers cultural tourism and coins, and cultural creativity, including cinema production, works of art, etc. The trade balance is in deficit as regards products (hi-fi equipment; photography and the cinema; radio and television; the press; publishing), except for Germany.

What is more, demand is rising. In Italy, for example, the number of people visiting museums has risen from 11 million in 1960 to 50 million in 1985, despite poor equipment, severe shortages of personnel and the very limited opening hours which are the direct consequence of it.

Each family spends nearly ECU 680 on average each year on cultural goods, with the French spending as much as ECU 786 and the British as little as ECU 546. Total spending amounts to nearly ECU 60 billion, as against ECU 10 billion for regional and local budget and ECU 4.5 billion for national budget.

These figures give some idea of just how high the economic stakes are, and of the need for the Community to take account of them, faced as it is with the profound changes due to the new technology and to the challenge from the other major economic sectors.

\* 1 ECU = UK£ 0.74 or IR£ 0.78.

REGIONAL AID: ECU 386m. for investment projects

The year's first two allocations from the European Regional Development Fund.

Some 166 investment projects in eight European Community countries will share in the ECU 386m.\* which is being provided by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). This Community aid will help pay for equipment in seven countries - Belgium, France, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain - and provide additional possibilities for small and medium-sized firms in Denmark.

The money represents the year's first two allocations from the ERDF for individual projects. It would have been committed at the end of last year, but for the fact that the funds for 1986 had already been spent. In addition to this type of aid, the ERDF also provides financial support for regional development programmes.

Over ECU 217m., or more than half the total just allocated by the European Commission, is earmarked for Italy, mainly for the region around Naples. It will finance the construction of a road serving industrial zones, set up with the ERDF's financial support.

Greece is to get over ECU 72m., to help improve the telecommunications network in Crete, eastern Macedonia and the islands in the eastern part of the Aegean sea. Spain is to receive over ECU 40m., which will help finance a number of projects, including the gas pipeline in the northern Oviedo province.

More than ECU 26m. have been earmarked for Portugal, including ECU 16m. for Lisbon and the Tagus valley and ECU 6.5m. for the Azores. France will receive ECU 17.2m., to be shared between French Guiana and the country's southern regions, including Provence and the Côte d'Azur.

Belgium is to get ECU 5.9m., the Netherlands ECU 3.4m. and Denmark nearly ECU 3m. The totality of the ERDF's aid to Denmark will go towards helping small and medium-sized firms in industry and the crafts. Between them, they are expected to create over 1,000 jobs.

\* 1 ECU = UK£ 0.74 or IR£ 0.78.

SPORT: Two out of three Europeans would like to see the Community flag at Seoul

But the national Olympic committees in the 12 member states take a very different view.

With the exception of the Danes and British, Europeans rather like the idea of seeing the European Community's 12 gold stars flying alongside their national flags at next year's Olympic Games in Seoul. They would even like to see athletes from the 12 Community countries sporting its colours, together with their own.

These are among the findings of a survey on sport in general which was carried out for the European Commission. It also shows that those who are "more European" are also more interested in sport in principle, except in Belgium, Greece, Italy and Luxembourg. The idea of a European flag finds greater support among the young, which perhaps is only natural, given their greater interest in sport.

Sport leaves women indifferent, but this does not prevent them being good Europeans. In nearly all 12 countries they, even more than men, would like to see Community athletes marching behind the Community flag. However, women in Greece, Northern Ireland and Spain are a shade less enthusiastic.

Some two-thirds of the Community's citizens are ready to line up behind a single flag at the world's major sporting events - which is not bad at all, given the narrow nationalism which is all too evident in this field. Unhappily the national Olympic committees showed themselves true to form when they met the European Sports Commissioner, Carlo Ripa di Meana, recently.

With one, possibly two, exceptions (Luxembourg and Belgium) they were all hostile to the very idea of a single flag, largely because of narrow sectorial, not even national, interests. But this unity could collapse, in the face of the very favourable reactions, on the whole, of such well-known sporting figures as the cyclist Sean Kelly, the golfer Severiano Ballesteros, the judo expert Ingrid Berghmans, the swimmer Michael Gross, the sprinter Carlo Lopes, etc.

Even the Danish badminton champion, who began by claiming he would "never have taken part in any sporting event except under the Danish colours", switched to midstream to remark: "My motivation might be stronger were I to find myself in Seoul with the European flag in addition to the Danish". And he wound up with the words: "The more I think about it, the more attractive the idea becomes. There's no doubt that, properly stimulated, one can feel European."

THE UNITED STATES OF EUROPE: Europeans believe in it more than their governments

This is one of the findings of the special 30th anniversary edition of the Eurobarometer.

More than 70% of the French would vote for a political head of Europe who was not French, 80% of Europeans do not consider the United States of Europe to be an unfashionable mirage and 83% of the British (and 75% of the French) favour the creation of a European Defense Community in the coming years. Findings like these abound; they are drawn from the special edition of the Eurobarometer, published to mark the 30th anniversary of the signature of the European Treaties.

Presenting the results of the Eurobarometer opinion poll to the press the European Commissioner for a People's Europe, Carlo Ripa di Meana, stressed the fact that the people of Europe are more European than their governments. He was especially pleased that the poll had shown just how false stereotypes of the kind "The British are not Europeans" and "The French are the most nationalist" really are.

As for the young, while they recognize the benefits which Europe offers, they fail to understand why its construction should take so long and prove so complicated. They are uneasy, in fact, for their future. For Mr Ripa di Meana, this is the only disturbing feature of the poll results. "We must offer young people a genuine European project", he said, "one which meets their concern for a just and democratic Europe. But we must also offer them a Europe which is tangible, accessible, simpler and more effective and is the best guarantee of their identity and legitimate interests."

In drawing up a balance sheet on the Community's 30th anniversary, some two-thirds of those polled agreed that membership of it is "a good thing" for their country, while 80% regarded membership as "something very important". Most important of all, the numbers replying positively has continued to rise since the question was included in the poll.

If the citizens of the Community's six founding members remain firmly wedded to the European ideal, the conversion rate has been more dramatic among the newcomers. In 1970 no more than 30% of the British favoured a United States of Europe; as many as 48% were opposed to it. Today 58% are in favour of it and 42% against it. We are more European than we imagine.

ELECTRICITY: Nuclear energy - still growing, but more slowly

Atomic energy makes fresh gains in France and Belgium, but loses ground in the U.K. and Germany.

In 1986 nearly one-third of the electricity generated in the 12-nation European Community was nuclear in origin. This was a record but, as the Community's statistical office, Eurostat, points out, the growth in nuclear energy has slowed down, while electricity production by more conventional means had recovered for the first time in several years.

Electricity production and consumption both rose by some 2% last year, as compared to over 4% in the two previous years. Production rose in nearly all Community countries but fell in Germany.

Community electricity production from nuclear power stations rose by 7.5% last year, against 21.6% in 1985. While production went up in most countries, it fell in the U.K. and Germany.

In 1986 nuclear power accounted for 32.3% of Community electricity production, as compared to 30.7% in 1985 and 26.4% in 1984. Nuclear power stations therefore continue to account for a growing proportion of the electricity produced in the 12-nation Community, but the situation varies a great deal from country to country.

Nuclear power now accounts for 70% of the electricity generated in France and nearly 67% in Belgium, although as recently as 1984, the corresponding figures were 59% and 51%. Nuclear energy's share is rising in Spain also; it reached 29.4% last year as against 22.2% in 1985. In the U.K., however, its share has remained at 19.4% in both 1985 and 1986, while it has fallen slightly in Germany, from 31.1% in 1985 to 29.5% last year.

After declining for several years, electricity production from thermal power stations rose in 1986 by some 5 billion kWh for the Community as a whole. However, this did not prevent the continued fall in the share of conventional thermal production. Last year it fell to 56.1% of total electricity production, down from 56.9% in 1985. Even so, it rose slightly in Germany and Italy last year.

TRADE: The EC records its first-ever trade surplus

Because of falling commodity prices, imports fell 17% in value.

After 28 years of trade deficits, the European Community recorded its first surplus in 1986, admittedly a more welcome development than the rise in agricultural surpluses. But the surplus simply reflects the fact the the Community's import bill fell last year because of falling commodity, especially oil, prices and a weaker dollar, the currency in which most commodity prices are set.

The 12-nation European Community recorded a trade surplus of ECU 5 billion\* last year, as compared to a deficit of ECU 28 billion in 1985. While imports fell by a record 17% in value, exports were down 10%, the first year-on-year decline in the value of exports since the Community was set up in 1958.

In 1986 the Twelve saw their fuel import bill fall to ECU 61 billion, just half of what it had been the year before. The fact is that the Community's total imports rose by 7% in volume, but as import prices fell by some 23% on average, the total bill was smaller.

Community imports from the developing countries fell 30% in value last year as compared to 1985. The sharpest fall was in imports from the OPEC countries. On the other hand, imports from the newly industrialized countries (NICs), such as South Korea and Singapore, went up by 4%.

Imports from other industrialized countries declined by 7% in ECU terms. However, while imports from the United States fell by 18%, those from Japan increased by 16%.

The Community's exports fell 10% in ECU terms and 5% in volume. This was due to a fall of 17% in exports to all developing countries - and one of 27% of the OPEC countries. These countries, having seen their export earnings decline, were unable to import as much as before. Exports to the United States fell 12% but those to Japan increased by 9%.

In 1986 manufactured products accounted for 82% of total Community exports. This was more than in 1985.

\* 1 ECU = UK£ 0.74 or IR£ 0.78.