



# a newssheet for journalists

Weekly n° 13/89

17 - 24 April 1989

## S U M M A R Y

- P. 2 EMPLOYMENT: Safety standards at the workplace in the Europe of 1992  
The agreement among the Twelve covers the workplace, machinery and protective systems.
- P. 3 INTERNAL MARKET: Bleepers for 30% of Europeans in 1993  
The European Commission proposes the creation of an electronic paging system.
- P. 4 RESEARCH: Watch out for genetic manipulation!  
The European Commission decides to "freeze" a programme still in preparation.
- INFLATION: Fresh price rises in February  
Inflation at 5% on a 12-monthly basis.
- P. 5 CONSUMERS: Some passports are worth more than others?  
Their cost varies substantially from one EC country to another.
- P. 6 LANGUAGES: The European Commission leads the world in its demand for translators  
It has now set up an independent translation department.
- TRADE: 52 young European executives set out to discover Japan  
The ninth European training programme gets under way.
- P. 7 CORDLESS TELEPHONES: A major market in the 1990s  
A study carried out for the European Commission predicts a bright future for the cordless telephone.
- P. 8 BANKING: Excessive!  
The high cost of transborder payments doesn't make economic integration easier.
- P. 9 SOCIETY: 5% of Europeans are illiterate  
A European Parliament report proposes concrete measures to help those who can neither read nor write.

Mailed from: Brussels X

The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the official views of the institutions of the Community.  
Reproduction authorized.

200 rue de la Loi • 1049 Brussels • Belgium • Tel.: 235.11.11 • Telex: 21877 COMEU B

Europe for journalists

**EMPLOYMENT: Safety standards at the workplace in the Europe of 1992**

The agreement among the Twelve covers the workplace, machinery and protective systems.

The European Community is taking steps in favour of its workforce also. Following its agreement last December on the general principles of health and safety at the workplace, the EC Council of Ministers adopted on April 5 three directives dealing with (1) the workplace, (2) the machines and other equipment used by workers and (3) their protective equipment. The three texts lay down the minimum requirements to be met by employers in the 12-nation Community as from 1 January 1993, but do not prevent national authorities from adopting stricter standards.

Community legislation regarding the workplace will apply to factories as well as offices, and to private companies as well as the Civil Service. It covers a wide range of subjects, including fire prevention, passageways, emergency exits, electrical installations, lighting, ventilation, sanitary installations, place of rest, rooms used to give first aid, etc.

The directive provides for relatively strict standards for workplaces, whether new or renovated, that will come into use for the first time after 1 January 1993. In the case of older buildings, the rules are less strict and employers will have until 1 January 1998 to meet them.

Similarly, the directive covering machines and equipment will be fully applicable from 1 January 1993 in the case of new equipment only; companies and government departments will have five years in which to comply with the Community "legislation" in the case of equipment already in operation on that date. The directive covering protective equipment for individuals is aimed at ensuring the right choice of helmets, special clothing, masks, etc. in keeping with specific circumstances and situations.

These three directives complete the Community legislation enabling manufacturers to sell their machines and other equipment throughout the 12-nation Community. They provide for the complete training and information of workers on questions of safety, and they could be adjusted to take account of technical developments whenever the need arises.

**INTERNAL MARKET: Bleepers for 30% of Europeans in 1993**

The European Commission proposes the creation of an electronic paging system.

If the Twelve accept the European Commission's latest recommendations, some 30% of the European workforce will have bleepers by 1 January 1993, the date for the completion of the single market. This is a pocket-size electronic device which enables one to be paged when far from one's office or factory.

So far each European country has insisted on having its own paging system. As a result, bleepers are often expensive and are used by less than 1% of working Europeans, as compared to nearly 5% of Japanese and 6% of Americans. The use of bleepers is most widespread in Britain and the Netherlands among European Community countries. Around 2% of the workforce is equipped with them in these two countries, as compared to five persons in 10,000 in Italy.

The price of the simplest bleeper varies between ECU 106 and 776\* in the Community; more elaborate versions, capable of receiving messages running into several hundred characters, cost anywhere between ECU 214 and 720. A European radio messaging system, such as the Commission wants the Twelve to adopt, could bring down prices to around ECU 100 for the simplest models and ECU 300 for one capable of receiving up to 400 characters.

The Commission has baptized its system ERMES (European radio messaging system). It would like to launch it in January 1992, so that 30% of the Community's workforce can have bleepers by January 1993, and up to 80% by January 1995.

The Commission is also asking the Twelve to adopt a Community directive setting aside an adequate number of frequencies to allow ERMES to operate effectively. The system could eventually be extended to all West European countries.

\* 1 ECU = UK£0.65 or IR£0.78.

**RESEARCH: Watch out for genetic manipulations!**

The European Commission decides to "freeze" a programme still in preparation.

For the first time in the short history of the European Community, the European Commission has suspended the preparations for a research programme. The decision was taken on the grounds that the work in question, which aims at analyzing genes, the elements which determine individual heredity, could result in manipulations harmful to both the liberty and dignity of Europeans.

The European Commissioner for research, Filippo Maria Pandolfi, has not called into question that part of the programme which seeks to draw up a genetic "map". But he is concerned over the use to which knowledge thus acquired could be put. He has therefore asked a group of experts to provide him additional information.

The European Parliament, asked to give its opinion on the programme in February, had already appeared apprehensive. Euro-MPs returned to the subject in a resolution adopted on March 16: they took the view that genetic science must not be used, whether by the State or private companies, to select the ideal citizen or the ideal employee. They held that the information obtained from genetic analysis must remain a matter for doctor and patient. The research in question had been planned by the Commission with a view to finding cures for certain diseases.

**INFLATION: Fresh price rises in February**

Inflation at 5% on a 12-monthly basis.

Inflationary pressures are continuing to build up within the 12-nation European Community since last summer. Prices rose by 0.5% in February and by 5% on an annual basis, according to Eurostat, the EC's statistical office in Luxembourg. The last time inflation was running at a higher rate - 5.3% to be exact - was in January 1986.

The Community now has a higher rate of inflation than the United States (4.8%), although since April 1987 prices had risen less sharply on this side of the Atlantic. Japan remains a haven of stability, with an annual inflation rate of 1.1%.

Prices rose sharply in Portugal (1.4%), Italy (0.8%), the U.K. (0.7%) and Denmark (0.6%). There was a moderate rise in other Community countries. The price index even fell in Greece, thanks to the winter sales.

CONSUMERS: Some passports are worth more than others?

Their cost varies substantially from one EC country to another.

The privilege of leaving his country can cost an Italian 18 times more than a Luxembourger, while a German can sojourn abroad for seven years for the price a Frenchman pays for a year's absence, as the following Table makes clear:

	<u>The cost of a passport</u> <u>(valid 10 years)</u> <u>on 1.2.88</u>	<u>Price in ECU</u> <u>(rate on 12.2.88)</u>
Luxembourg	Fr.Lux. 420 to 500	9.27 to 11.57
Germany	DM 30	14.53
Spain	Pesetas 2,790	19.96
United Kingdom	£15	21.64
Portugal	Escudos 5,280	31.25
Greece	Drachmas 5,448	33.06
Belgium	Bel.Frs. 1,660 to 2,060	38.42 to 47.67
Ireland	IR£30	38.65
Denmark	Danish crowns 400	50.63
Netherlands	Florins 165.5	71.87
France	French francs 700	100.27
Italy	Lira 260,000	170.85

The differences are substantial. The French Euro-MP Vanlerenberghe was so struck by them that he asked the European Commission if there was not a case for harmonizing the conditions required to obtain a European passport and the period of its validity. The Commission in fact has already pointed out on a number of occasions that Europeans may be reluctant to acquire a passport that costs too much, even though its possession is a sign of membership of the same community.

As for the effects on the free movement of individuals, they are not as important as one might imagine, given that the possession of a valid identity card (which usually costs less than a passport) is all that is required to travel within the European Community. However, the system of identity cards is unknown in four Member States: Britain, Denmark, Ireland and the Netherlands. A passport being the only document, therefore, that allows one to travel freely from one Member State to another, its cost can have some effect on the free movement of EEC nationals. The European Commission has assured the Euro-MP that it plans to re-examine the possibility of harmonizing the cost of passports, or at least gradually reducing the differences in their cost.

**LANGUAGES: The European Commission leads the world in its demand for translators**

It has now set up an independent translation department.

The new translation department, set up by the European Commission at the beginning of April, is the largest in the world, with 1,137 translators and 549 administrative and other supporting staff. Even so, their numbers are not adequate for a Community with nine official languages and as many as 72 combinations, such as English/French, English/German, etc.

The decision to give the translation unit its independence reflects the much greater demands being made on it because of the 1992 project and the entry into force of the Single European Act. The Act, which amends the Community's "Constitution", has added to its powers, thus giving rise to even more paperwork, which must be translated into nine languages. The Commission in fact prefers to send the national governments documents in their own language, even when the text in question is not an official one.

**TRADE: 52 young European executives set out to discover Japan**

The ninth European training programme gets under way.

At the beginning of April, 52 young executives from 11 European Community countries left for an 18-month stay in Japan. They will spend 12 months learning the language and six months serving an apprenticeship in a Japanese company, under a programme which introduces young executives from Community countries to Japanese management techniques.

The programme, financed largely by the European Community, has already enabled 300 Europeans to familiarize themselves with Japanese manners and business customs. Some 80% of them have specialized in exports to Japan, thus contributing, however modestly, to the search for a more balanced EC-Japan trade relationship.

**CORDLESS TELEPHONES: A major market in the 1990s**

A study carried out for the European Commission predicts a bright future for the cordless telephone.

The digital European cordless telephone (DECT), with its pocket handset, will lend itself to use in the home, at work and at "telepoints" located in public places throughout the European Community, according to a report carried out for the European Commission.

The system will enable the transmission of words as well as data for computers, thus making it possible to move equipment about without the necessity of costly rewiring. The professional market for cordless telephone exchanges could reach ECU 1,000mn.\* by 1995. As for the home market for cordless telephones, it is evaluated at ECU 1.000mn. to ECU 1,500mn. To this must be added the supplementary market for "telepoints", estimated at another ECU 200mn. in the case of domestic users and ECU 1,000mn. to ECU 1,500mn. in the case of professional users.

DECT's advantages, according to the study, are due to the fact that it will have three main uses - at home, at work and through a network of telepoints. Its sales prospects are better precisely because it combines a variety of uses. Prices will be below those for cellular telephones, such as those used in cars.

The very high level of production envisaged for the handsets should make possible prices in the range of ECU 200 to 250. Sales should be as brisk as for other electronic products, such as videorecorders, according to the study.

\* 1 ECU = UK£0.65 or IR£0.78.

**BANKING: Excessive!**

The high cost of transborder payments doesn't make economic integration easier.

You can transfer 280 Belgian francs (under £5) from one Belgian bank account to another free of charge. But just try transferring the same amount to a bank account in the Netherlands, for example. Bank commission and charges will be more than double the amount transferred, and will include 150 francs in payment commission, 75 francs in exchange commission, 168 francs in carriage charges, 100 francs in postal charges and 94 francs in taxes (VAT at 19%).

The costs are roughly the same in all European Community countries, and have led Euro-MPs, determined to defend both the interests of European citizens and the single market, to express their concern. Two of them, MM Metten and Rogalla, have even asked the European Commission if it does not regard the level of commission and charges as an abuse of a monopoly situation. They also want to know if the Commission plans to take steps to eliminate the internal frontiers in the world of banking.

In its reply the Commission has admitted that the present level of commission and charges on crossborder transactions is not generally such as to facilitate the economic integration to be achieved through completion of the single market. It notes, however, that the trade organizations concerned take the view that crossborder transactions are not as computerized as domestic transactions and are often more complicated, resulting in higher costs, in part at least.

The European Commission has therefore asked a group of national experts to study the practices and rules in force in each Member State, together with the procedures for carrying out such transactions. The aim is to improve the transparency of the commission and charges involved and, above all, to improve the prior information available to customers on the nature and amount of charges. This would allow people to choose the least expensive methods of transferring funds and, where appropriate, the institutions offering the best terms.



**SOCIETY: 5% of Europeans are illiterate**

A European Parliament report proposes concrete measures to help those who can neither read nor write.

Some 60% of those who receive unemployment benefits in Belgium have barely finished primary school. This situation is a matter of great concern, given that a low level of schooling and poor qualifications generally go hand in hand. It complicates attempts to provide further training and limits professional choice - when work of this type is available - to work that is repetitive and requires no special skills. In France and Belgium, where literacy tests are used during the period of national service, it has been estimated that some 5% of the recruits are illiterate. The figure probably is far too low if these results, which relate to male adult nationals, are extrapolated to the population as a whole.

In the absence of reliable statistics, it is estimated that 5% of Europeans are functional illiterates - that is to say, they learned to read and write but gradually lost this capacity. It is a serious social problem, which affects an important section of the Community's working population.

The continued existence of illiteracy in industrialized countries is perhaps surprising at first sight, given that schooling is compulsory in the Community's Member States since the end of the 19th or beginning of the 20th century. But illiteracy is a fact, and the Community, aware of its socio-economic consequences, is determined to remedy the situation.

The Community's education ministers devoted part of their discussions in 1984 to the problems of illiteracy in the Community for the first time. They supplemented the national measures then in force with a work programme adopted in May 1987. The Commission's research programme provides, for its part, a series of preventive and curative measures. The European Parliament presented a report on illiteracy during its February session this year.

The report notably calls for an improvement in teacher training; a global approach to teaching and training, on the one hand, and the fight against poverty, unemployment and social backwardness on the other; a reform of the Social Fund, so that projects to stamp out illiteracy can be conducted without restrictions and a concrete action programme of the Commission, aimed at resolving the problems of teaching children of nomad parents.