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POLLING EUROPE: Faithful to Europe

The results of the latest "Eurobarometer" survey.

Public opinion in the 12 countries of the European Community was still in favour of European integration this spring, but less firmly than six months before. Even so, the great majority of Europeans continued to support the unification of the Old World. And if we take into account the various surveys since 1981, support for Europe is on a rising curve. This was the main conclusion drawn by the European Commissioner for information and a People's Europe, Carlo Ripa di Meana, from the latest "Eurobarometer" survey conducted on behalf of the European Commission.

The fact is that more than three-quarters of the Europeans continue to favour the unification of Western Europe. If the "pro-European" spirit seems to have weakened slightly in Germany, Spain and Italy, it is making a recovery in the Netherlands, rising steadily in Britain while in France it has even managed a quantum jump.

Mr Ripa di Meana expressed his satisfaction at the ambition for Europe shown by the Europeans. According to the survey, over three-quarters of the population of the 12-nation European Community wants faster progress. One European in five wishes the 12 countries were one while one in five would like a federation. However, one in three wants the economic, scientific and cultural exchanges among the Twelve to intensify, as provided for by the reform of the "European constitution", in force since July 1.

In nearly all the Community countries over half those polled want progress towards European integration, although in Denmark the proportion was down to 46%.

For 53% of the Europeans the prosperity of a country is measured by the level of employment. The other favoured criteria for a successful country, selected from a list which included success in international sports and the fame of its writers and artists, were a well-developed system of social security, industrial prosperity, environmental protection and a strong currency.

Employment headed the list in nearly all countries, although in Denmark, the Netherlands and Luxembourg those polled ranked social security first. In Italy environmental protection was ranked second to employment, while in France successful enterprises represented the second most important criterion in measuring a country's level of success.

SOCIAL: Better prospects for safety and hygiene at work

The European Commission wants to make full use of the EC's "constitutional" reform.

The standards of hygiene and safety which apply to factories and building sites in the 12-nation European Community will be substantially improved if the EC Council of Ministers approves the proposals which the European Commission announced at the end of July. They aim at taking advantage of the reform of the "European constitution", which came into effect on July 1, to speed up improvements in working conditions.

The reform of the Treaty of Rome, the European Community's "constitution", provides for decisions regarding European standards which apply to conditions of work to be taken by the Council of Ministers on a majority basis. The standards will set the objectives to be reached, leaving the choice of means to the national governments. So far a decision to this effect has required unanimity among the Twelve.

The European Commission has already drafted the proposals it plans to submit very shortly to the Council of Ministers, once it has the opinion of the experts. These proposals cover not only safety at the place of work and hygiene but also the protection of workers' health.

The Commission would like, for example, to see safety in the building sector improved. For other sectors, it wants the current requirements as regards protective devices adapted. The projected standards should also reinforce the protection of workers against cancer-forming substances - cadmium, lead and asbestos - as well as noise.

The Commission has also decided to inform interested circles about dangerous substances, on the basis of the research which has been conducted on its behalf. It also intends to set up a European network involving collaboration between training centres specializing in questions of safety and health at the workplace.

Finally, to take account of the specific problems of small businesses, the proposals envisage a system of rapid information regarding safety standards and protective equipment, for the use of company managers. This type of information would also be included in the guides aimed at those who create small businesses.

ENVIRONMENT: Ozone layer and microchips in the balance.

Some Euro-MPs favour radical measures against CFCs.

Will we have to wait for an increase in the frequency of skin cancers and cataracts before banning the production of chemicals which are destroying the ozone layer? This, in a nutshell, is the disturbing question that several Euro-MPs have put to the European Commission and the European Community Council of Ministers at a time when international negotiations to resolve this problem open in Geneva.

In a report to the European Parliament's Environment Committee in July, the French Euro-MP, Mrs Simone Martin, recalled that certain man-made chemicals, the chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs for short) are held responsible for the depletion of the ozone layer, which plays an important role in filtering out harmful ultraviolet rays from the sun.

Since 1979 international experts have noticed that a "hole" forms each September and October in the ozone layer above the Antarctic. While it has not been proved that CFCs are responsible for it, scientists are agreed that these chemicals have already led to a worrying development - the expansion of the ozone layer at low altitudes and its depletion at high altitudes.

The fate of CFCs would be quickly sealed but for the fact that they are used in the manufacture of a wide range of products, from aerosols to microchips and including fire extinguishers and car seats.

In 1978 the United States and Canada banned the use of CFCs in the manufacture of aerosols. The European Community limited itself, however, in 1980 to a 30% reduction in the quantity of CFCs used for this purpose. As Mrs Martin has underlined, although this cutback was made, European manufacturers of CFCs found other uses for them, including exports.

Since its signature in 1985 the international convention on the protection of the ozone layer and the U.N. Environment Programme are trying to persuade the international community to apply global measures. Negotiations will resume this month in Geneva and the majority of the Euro-MPs on the Environment Committee want the European Commission to take a very strong line against CFCs.

AGRICULTURE: War on plenty

The European Commission takes stock and proposes new measures.

Since 1984 the reform of the common agricultural policy (CAP) has brought considerable savings to the European Community budget. Agricultural expenditure has nevertheless risen and the surpluses have not disappeared. On the basis of this rather poor balance sheet, contained in its latest agricultural report, published this summer, the European Commission has concluded that surplus production must be discouraged even more forcefully. To this end it has proposed new austerity measures for producers who exceed the quantities and sums budgeted by the Twelve.

Thanks to the reforms undertaken since 1984, the Community budget has saved over one million ECU* in 1984, nearly ECU 3m. in 1985 and more than ECU 4m. in 1986. According to the Commission's estimates, savings this year will amount to ECU 6m. - i.e. more than 20% of the expenditure on farm price guarantees in 1987.

However, this expenditure has increased by over 40% between 1984 and 1987, rising from ECU 18,400m. to ECU 27,300m. In its report the Commission stresses that the greater part of this rise is due to causes external to the 12-nation Community: the fall in the value of the dollar, surpluses other than those held in the Community and a worsening of the economic situation in the developing countries. All these factors have led to a fall in world prices and forced the Community to make larger payments to its farmers than forecast.

But the Community's surplus stocks are also having a ruinous effect on its budget. The Commission has put at ECU 6,800m. the net loss arising from the stocks held in Community warehouses at the end of 1986. Butter stocks account for half of this.

To avoid unpleasant surprises in the future, the Commission has proposed stricter measures to limit agricultural production and to stabilize the expenditure on farm price guarantees that is met from the Community budget. The Commission is also seeking to limit the use of guaranteed prices and to tax automatically, as it were, any new surplus production, depending on the product involved.

The Commission has pointed out that its proposals do not conflict with its desire to maintain family farms. Finally, it favours a firm stand vis-à-vis other countries with agricultural surpluses. The U.S. comesto mind in this connection.

* 1 ECU = UK£ 0.70 or IR£ 0.77.

REGIONAL AND SOCIAL AID: Effectiveness above all

The European Commission proposes an ambitious reform programme to the Twelve as a prelude to 1992.

If the European Community's disadvantaged regions, and those of its citizens who are the least well off, are to benefit from the creation of the single market, foreseen for the end of 1992, the resources made available to the Community's regional and social funds must be doubled, to enable them effectively to aid those most in need. Such is the spirit of the reform proposed by the European Commission to the Twelve at the end of July.

If the reform were to be adopted, only the regions facing the most severe problems would be entitled hereafter to help from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). These regions would cover roughly one-third of the population of the 12-nation Community, as against one-half at present.

The lion's share of ERDF funds (up to 80%) would go to the regions that have fallen behind - those whose per-capita Gross Domestic Product is below 75% of the Community average. These regions, with some 20% of the total population, would include essentially all of Greece and Portugal, the Italian Mezzogiorno, the southwestern half of Spain and Ireland. Northern Ireland would be included because of its special problems.

The remainder of the ERDF funds would be allocated to industrial regions suffering from very serious industrial problems and with high levels of unemployment. These declining regions would account for 12 to 15% of the Community population, as against 28% in the case of the regions, other than those that have fallen behind, which at present are entitled to ERDF funds.

Thanks to the European Social Fund, the Community would partly finance the training of the long-term unemployed as well as unemployed young people. It would also provide funds to encourage firms to take on people. The grants would be more selective than at present.

Finally, the funds earmarked for the agricultural sector would go to the farmers who are the most affected by the current reform of the common agricultural policy. They would also be used to develop the infrastructure of mountainous areas and the most disadvantaged rural areas.

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: Still waiting in the wings

Some additional powers since July 1, but not enough to make it a power centre.

Since July 1 the European Parliament has a somewhat bigger say in the drafting of European Community legislation. And with the Spanish elections of June 10 and the Portuguese elections of July 19 it has assumed its "final" shape. But last spring fewer than half the voters had heard Parliament mentioned recently in the media; and if they had been called on to vote again, most would have stayed away - at least if one is to believe the results of the latest "Eurobarometer" survey of public opinion in the European Community, published by the European Commission at the end of July.

Last spring only 45% of those polled had seen or heard recently news of the European Parliament or read an article on it in their daily paper. This poor result confirms that, except during elections, public awareness of the very existence of the European Parliament is slight.

According to the survey, more than half of those polled felt Parliament's role to be "important" or even "very important"; but if elections were held tomorrow in the 10 Community countries in which direct elections to the European Parliament were held in 1984*, voters would stay away in much greater numbers than three years ago. Many Europeans in fact would vote in national elections but not in elections to the European Parliament.

A few weeks after the survey direct elections to the European Parliament were held in Spain and, a month later, in Portugal. As a result, all 518 Euro-MPs are now elected by the people.

The outcome of these elections has changed Parliament's political make-up only slightly. The Socialist group remains the largest, but with 164 members instead of 172. The Christian Democrats now have 115 seats, having lost three. The Conservatives (the European Democratic Group) won three, and now number 66. There are 48 Communists, two more than before, and 43 Liberals, an increase of two.

The neo-Gaullists and their associates (the Group of the European Democratic Alliance) have three fewer members, while the European Right and the Rainbow group (consisting of the Greens and regional parties) have seen their numbers remain constant.

Now that the Single European Act is in force (since July 1) Euro-MPs enjoy slightly greater powers ... and could make themselves better known to the voters.

* The Twelve, except for Spain and Portugal. The Euro-MPs from these two countries were nominated by their national Parliaments in 1986, at the time of entry.

TECHNOLOGY: Cooperation between companies and universities off to a good start

COMETT's success exceeds only ... its budget.

Companies such as British Telecom, British Aerospace, Siemens and IBM will soon be able to collaborate with universities specializing in the new technologies, from Dublin to Patras (Greece) and from Porto to Berlin. Students, scientists and industrialists are being given a chance to work together, thanks to COMETT, the COMMunity Action Programme in Education and Training for Technology.

The European Commission has just selected the first series of projects to be funded by COMETT. The fact is the first round of applications, for which the deadline was 31 March 1987, was an overwhelming success. Had the Commission accepted all the proposals it received - some 500 in all - it would have needed a sum 15 times bigger than the ECU 5.8m.* it had available for this purpose. Nearly 1,000 universities and more than 1,500 firms, including many small ones, asked to join in the programme.

This first round of COMETT will allow 217 European students to train in a firm in another Community country and enable specialists from the universities to spend some time in a company - and vice versa. There will be 15 such scholarships in all.

A European network of 70 university-company associations for training will be set up under this first phase. Each of them has its main centre of interest. This can be a region - Northern Ireland or Brittany, for example, or a centre of activity, such as off-shore technologies or robotics. Chambers of commerce and industry as well as professional bodies are also taking part in these associations.

The first application round has also given the go-ahead to 45 continuous training programmes, to be carried out jointly by universities and companies in different countries, and 23 multilateral initiatives aimed at developing the use of the new technologies in university education.

The European Commission has already begun to examine the proposals received in response to its second call for applications for 1987, which closed on July 1. Choosing the most worthwhile projects from among the 570 received will be no easy task. Unfortunately the Commission has no more than ECU 7.2m. available. The results will be published towards mid-November.

* 1 ECU = UK£ 0.70 or IR£ 0.77.

ENVIRONMENT: Saving lives in the Antarctic

A report of the European Parliament explains why the South Pole is not all snowy wastes.

It is easy to imagine the Antarctic as endless snowy wastes, devoid of all life. But it is enough to read the recent report of the British Euro-MP, James Moorehouse, to discover that the region around the South Pole is teeming with life ... for as long as men respect it. In his report, adopted at the beginning of summer by the European Parliament's Committee on External Economic Relations, Mr Moorehouse in fact asks the 12 European Community countries to join forces in protecting the environment in this remote part of the world.

The Antarctic obviously is far from Europe. But among the seven countries with territorial claims, two are part of the Community. They are Britain and France. Seven other member countries* are sufficiently interested in the region to have signed the Antarctic Treaty. In force since 1961, it stipulates that the Antarctic should be used for peaceful purposes only and provides for freedom of scientific investigation.

The Treaty, to which all the major countries are signatories, covers all the territory south of the 60th parallel - i.e. not only the continent but also the seabed. While it authorizes scientific research, the Treaty is silent on the subject of fishing and the exploitation of minerals.

And this is where the shoe pinches for Mr Moorehouse. According to him the large-scale fishing carried on by the Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries threatens the very existence of several species. Thus the Antarctic cod population has been reduced to a mere 10% of what it was 20 years ago.

Mr Moorehouse is equally worried over the fate of the krill, the tiny organism fish and seabirds feed on. Krill is used by the Russians in the manufacture of butter, sausages and various snacks. The South Koreans are also taking a growing interest in krill. Certain species of whales also inhabit Antarctic waters but fortunately are not hunted, according to the report.

Finally, the Antarctic is rich in minerals, including coal, iron and probably oil. The Antarctic Treaty will no doubt come up for review in 1991 and the report recommends the creation of a common legal framework for all future exploration or extraction of minerals ... before the rush begins.

* Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain.