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TELEVISION : Europe of the airwaves

Nearly everyone in Europe is already familiar with Eurovision which is responsible for the annual song festival, but now comes an additional idea for a different form of international broadcasting.

Although there has been a rapid expansion of viewing across European borders by means of cable television relays of broadcasts from neighbouring countries, there is still no truly European source of programming to speak of. Audiences in various countries are now exposed to programmes from the adjacent countries. There is also some limited degree of joint production of programmes and also the Eurovision link-up which has a more international flavour. And there is an embryonic European Community operation which broadcasts and films Community events and makes its output available to television stations throughout the Community, the number of which is growing rapidly through the expansion of national state networks, the growth of independent stations in some countries and also the advent of European television satellites.

Some of these proposed satellites set aside for broadcasting are scheduled to be sent aloft in the relatively near future and a proposal has just been made in the European Parliament that one of the channels on the national orbiting devices be set aside, for truly European broadcasts. The suggestion was one of several made recently by Wilhelm Hahn, a German member of the European People's Party (Christian Democrat) for the European Parliament's Committee of Youth, Culture, Education, Information and Sports.

The aim of such a venture would be to improve and enlarge the information disseminated to the European public about regional themes and European cooperation and integration. The purpose would be to overcome the lack of information and understanding about the efforts which have been underway for decades to forge closer ties in Europe. The author of the report feels that, because of the inadequacy of information, there is either a lack of support or there is apathy or outright opposition to some worthwhile activities in the European Community, especially among young people. It would seek to explain what is going on and also to allow for greater public participation and involvement in the activities of Europe.

Another part of the report approved recently by the full Committee of the Parliament was for the formulation of a joint Community policy by the member states on general standards for broadcast programme content aimed at protecting young people and also establishing common controls for advertising at the European level.

The report is now expected to be considered by the full Parliament at a future session.

MICROELECTRONICS : For Europe's share of the market

When you get into the rarified world of information technology, some operations are so complex that they cannot be handled by any number of workers, no matter how gifted, but have to be performed instead by sophisticated computers.

This goes for the making of plans for equipment or any number of society's elaborate modern developments. One such type of operation is known as computer-aided design, which means that high-speed electronic devices actually can visualise abstract or other concepts better than human designers. To test such intricate machines, only other machines can be used to test their performances.

No matter how far removed from reality such activities may seem to many of us, the fact is that they are becoming an important part of modern industries and producers of such equipment are on the edge of a major market in the future. There are American and Japanese producers for the most part, because European firms have yet done little more than admire these wonders performed by their competitors.

European companies have only about 10 percent of the production of a world market in highly sophisticated micro-electronic equipment that will reach 1 billion dollars in 1984 when Europe buys about 30 percent of such devices. But after years of envy and worry over the situation, European industry and the European Community have just formed a partnership to challenge the rest of the world in this promising new field.

While many of the plans for industrial cooperation and improvement proposed by the European Community in recent years are still gathering dust in an office, this one was greeted with such enthusiasm by member governments and electronic companies that it was approved recently only a year after introduction.

Research Ministers of the Community countries meeting in Brussels decided to commit 40 million European currency units (€ 23,2 million) from 1982 to 1986 to co-finance a number of such projects along with European manufacturers and users. The idea is to make what are called pre-production prototypes in such fields as computer-aided design, electronic beams, wafers and testing equipment. This means that when producers and users have done their homework and say a project is both needed and feasible, the Community funds will help them construct a last test model.

In this way, the Community industries believe they stand a chance to catch up in the new field of micro-electronics which will put them in a position to create new manufacturing jobs instead of merely importing the tools of the future that could lead to unemployment.

ENVIRONMENT : An end to wildlife massacre

Europe's wildlife is in serious danger of extinction. Of the 13,200 types of mammals and birds which existed in the year 1,600, more than 130 have disappeared. According to estimates published by the World Wildlife Fund, more than a thousand species of animals could be extinct in a very short time; these include 297 mammals, 359 birds, 187 reptiles and amphibians and 79 species of fish. The existence of 50,000 plant species is also threatened.

It is clear that natural evolution implies the disappearance of certain species; at the same time, new forms of life emerge. The brontosaurus, for instance, did not survive the climatic changes which provoked a shortage of the food it ate, but encouraged the appearance of small mammals who ate up the brontosaurus' eggs. But it is undoubtedly man who is responsible for the most damage caused to nature. Not only does man fish, but he also hunts - more and more effectively. He has a particular fondness for destroying the natural environment and discharging increasing amounts of poisonous substances into the environment.

Species capable of adapting to environmental changes are the only ones that survive. Others succumb to environmental pressures and either disappear or have to be protected in small reserves.

Mankind has not yet realised one simple truth : that nature is a complex whole, where each element contributes to the global balance. By destroying this balance, man is, in fact, endangering his own existence.

Appeals for the protection of the environment have been made the world over, and special measures to enforce environmental protection have already been taken. The most important is the Washington Convention drawn up in March 1973. This Convention, known as CITES, is designed to regulate international trade in endangered wildlife species. It also defines a second category of less endangered species whose trade also needs to be strictly regulated.

Several European Community member states have ratified this Convention. They include Denmark, the Federal Republic of Germany, France, Italy and the United Kingdom. The European Commission has now suggested that the Community as such should become a member of CITES. This is necessary to ensure that the regulations included in the Convention are applied all over Europe in a coordinated manner. The European Parliament will

take up the issue shortly on the basis of a report drawn up by its committee on environment. The report echoes the recommendations made by the Commission. It stresses that the endangered species are threatened by more than just international trade, and that Europe needs a global policy on environmental protection.

While this is true, there has been an alarming growth in the importance of international trade in animals. This is essentially because of the demand made by zoological gardens, science laboratories and certain industries. In the United States, for instance, 9 million frogs are used for research purposes. In Africa alone, some 350 elephants are killed by hunters looking for tusks. Western Europe is a leading importer of ivory but also of whale oil, crocodile skins, furs, etc. The number of zoological gardens has grown from a mere 125 in 1925 to 981 in 1976.

It is therefore necessary that the Community become a member of the Washington Convention and also, as recommended by the Commission, that it adopt complementary emergency measures to protect marine vegetation, springs, and swamps.

DEVELOPMENT : Tourism in the Caribbean

Antigua, Grenada, Puerto Rico ... even the names evoke images of sunshine filled holidays, sandy beaches, palm trees swaying in the breeze.

Tourism plays a key role in the development of the Caribbean region. It has encouraged the creation of new jobs in a region where unemployment is rampant. Tourism represents 70% of the Gross National Product of the Bahamas, and 50% of the GNP in Antigua.

A large number of the tourists who make their way to the Caribbean every year are Europeans. Europe also plays a more direct role in the promotion of tourism through its development aid policies. The European Community which is linked to the Caribbean states through the Lomé Convention grants financial and technical assistance to several projects linked to the development of tourism infrastructure, travel facilities, transport, etc. It is no surprise, therefore, that the Caribbean Tourism Association gave its 1981 prize to the European Commission as a sign of its appreciation of EEC efforts.

SOCIAL : Helping European showmen

Despite the glamour attached to their profession, European showmen have their share of on-the-job problems which they would like the European Community to solve.

They would, for instance, like to benefit from the Community's rules on the right of free movement. The right is obviously an essential one for people whose job takes them to all corners of Europe.

The showmen, who move from fairground to fairground around Europe, have also called for increased Community harmonisation in the field of transport.

The special needs and requirements of Europe's 60,000 showmen - grouped within the European Showmen's Union - were conveyed to Karl Heinz Narjes, European Commissioner for the internal market recently.

During their discussions with the European Commission, the Union formulated a number of requests. These include a call for a special transport permit and the issuing of a European driving licence.

The showmen - travelling from country to country and earning their money in different currencies - also raised the question of the current income tax systems in the EEC and the different rates of value added tax (vat). They also pointed out the need to standardise the safety norms applied to showground equipment.

IN BRIEF ... IN BRIEF ... IN BRIEF ... IN BRIEF ... IN BRIEF ...AGRICULTURE : Holland should adjust to European natural gas prices

The European Commission has just decided that the advantage traditionally granted to Dutch growers in the cost of natural gas they use to heat their greenhouses is incompatible with the rules of the European Community treaty (see EUROFOCUS, Nos 1/81 and 34/81).

The Commission has just written to the Dutch Government asking it to end this situation which grants an unfair advantage over competitors from other Community countries. In case such practices which violate the EEC competition rules are not brought to an end, the Commission would be obliged to file suit before the European Court of Justice.

ENVIRONMENT : Compromise on Rhine pollution

An agreement was reached in November between the states bordering on the Rhine concerning pollution of the mighty river by salt discharged from Alsatian potash mines (see EUROFOCUS 4/81). A portion of this salt will in future be injected into the Alsatian soil. The operation will cost 92 million FF to be shared by the Governments of the Netherlands, Federal Republic of Germany, Switzerland and Luxembourg. For its part, the French Government will establish an industrial salt facility to evaporate salt-saturated water with a capacity of from 300 to 500,000 tonnes to cost about 150 million FF.

ENERGY : A slogan becomes a reality

Thirty-one million tonnes of crude oil were saved by Europeans during the first six months of 1981. Already in 1980, energy consumption inside the European Community fell by about 4.5 percent. During the first half of 1981, an additional reduction of 6.3 percent was made, the equivalent of 31 million tonnes.

This drop is, however, unevenly distributed between the member states. Denmark and Luxembourg achieved the best results, with 13.5 and 18.5 percent cuts respectively. On the other hand, Italy with 4.7 percent, France with 3 percent and Ireland with 0.9 percent lagged behind most of the other results in Europe.

In addition, the share of the different types of energy in Europe's total supply also varied somewhat. A substantial decline of 12 percent was registered in oil consumption, an intermediate drop of 5 percent for gas and a slight change of 2.8 percent for coal. On the contrary, there was an increase of 26 percent for nuclear energy. But, although energy consumption was cut in accordance with the aims of European and national authorities, this saving has not always been attributable to efforts to economise accepted by industry and public. The worsening economic situation has also been accountable for a large part.

In fact, industrial production in the EEC fell by about 4.4 percent for the first six months of the year, a drop which struck certain industries that were the largest energy consumers the hardest. But for whatever reason, it remains a fact that for the first time the share of oil in total energy consumption dropped below 50 percent. And, with oil production from the North Sea increasing by 11 percent in a year, the European Community is now dependent on outside sources of energy for only 48 percent of its total supplies, as against 64 percent during the first oil shock.

The European Commission in Brussels has expressed satisfaction over this development in a document published recently. At that time it underlined the need to prepare for a possible new increase in the cost of supplies on the one hand by reducing as quickly as possible the level of dependence on oil and also by taking effective measures to limit cost increase risks. The first phase of this programme seems at least to have become a reality.