



A NEWSHEET FOR JOURNALISTS • REPRODUCTION AUTHORIZED

No 36/80

BRUSSELS, November 3, 1980

Week of October 27 to November 1

PARLIAMENT : Reinforcing anti-terrorist action

A draft resolution submitted by members of different political parties and calling on all European authorities to take a close look at the reappearance of fascism, racism, and antisemitism in the Community has just been adopted by the European Parliament.

The recent attacks in Bologna, Munich and Paris have not only provoked unanimous indignation and reprobation, they could also lead to the rapid setting up of the "European area of jurisdiction", a concept which has been spoken of increasingly over the last few years. The European Parliament, however, has still to give its unanimous backing to this concept. While some parliamentarians would like governments to review the conditions for extradition of terrorists, improve penal procedures and reinforce cooperation between police forces, others fear that this could mean a cutback in democratic freedoms within the Community.

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The Community has just decided to take five specific actions in the field of regional development which mean the beginning of a new form of Community intervention.

This newsheet is published in six languages (English, French, German, Dutch, Italian and Danish) by the Directorate-General for Information of the

Commission of the European Communities,
Rue de la Loi 200 - 1049 Brussels Belgium.
Tel. 736 60 00 - Telex 21877 COMEU B.

Its contents do not necessarily reflect the official views of the Community institutions.

Editor : Will. J. Reckman



CONSUMER: How much protection is enough?

Is the European Consumer over or under-protected? That is the question that hundreds of representatives of citizens throughout the nine European Community countries debated in Strasbourg recently. The aim of this discussion was to produce recommendations for decisions to be taken by the European Community's Council of Ministers in adopting the second Consumer Action Programme for the EEC to cover the next few years.

The debate, which took place in the European Parliament, revealed the usual split in attitudes about consumer protection. The recent public uprising in several countries against the artificial treatment of veal with hormones proved that much work needed to be done to legislate protection. Other specific areas such as a close monitoring of prices, greater security in the organisation of packaged tours for holidaymakers, and the need to limit the consumption of alcohol, tobacco and drugs were also cited as priority areas.

While most of the membership of the Parliament agreed that these subjects were worthy of examination and perhaps Community-wide legislation, many disagreed about how far to control these areas. For instance, the member of the Parliament's Committee on Consumer Affairs who prepared the report that was the subject of the debate (John O'Connell), proposed a ban or at least a limit on the advertising of alcohol or tobacco, but the full membership of the House insisted only that the consumption of such products should be discouraged, without specifying how.

A number of members also countered that some caution should be exercised in drawing up consumer protection legislation lest the cost of products and services to the customer be increased as a result of the controls applied. The last thing the customer wanted, these members contended, was an increase in costs because of over-regulation or an increase in public spending for more and more consumer advisory commissions. Consumers were capable of making up their own minds about the value and safety of their purchases and should not be treated like children.

Trying to steer a middle course in this debate, the European Commissioner in charge of consumer affairs, Richard Burke, said that a constructive dialogue between consumers and producers should be developed and that voluntary codes of conduct for certain industries should be tried to supplement legislative restrictions. The recent consumer boycott of veal in Europe was an example of the lack of communications which had to be remedied -and which will probably continue to be debated everywhere for years to come.

ENERGY : The atom's share of European energy supply

The total generating capacity of the European Community's nuclear power plants increased by about 11 percent during the year 1979, according to figures supplied by the Community Statistical Office.

Nevertheless, since the latest installations built are not yet in full service, the nuclear share of the total energy output, which amounted to 10.5 percent in 1978, changed very little in 1979, reaching 10.8 percent for the entire Community.

Last year, Germany was the largest Community producer of nuclear energy, with an output reaching 39.8 billion kilowatt-hours, or 31 percent of the Community's total nuclear power. France occupied second place with 38 billion kilowatts, as opposed to only 29 billion the previous year. It is also anticipated that France's production will increase by 50 percent in 1980. However, the proportion of total energy produced through nuclear power in France amounted to 16.4 percent in 1979, as opposed to 11 percent in Germany.

In the other Community member countries, nuclear power development either stagnated or declined. In Italy it even registered a drop of more than 40 percent. This drop is due to the fact that all the Italian plants experienced technical shutdowns varying from 4 to 12 months during the year. Throughout the Community, there were 44 nuclear power plants in 1979 against 27 five years earlier. Thirteen were in France, 12 in the United Kingdom and 11 in Germany. Italy had four, Belgium three and the Netherlands one. Ireland, Denmark and Luxembourg had none.

The use of nuclear energy is thought to be indispensable by the authorities of the European Community to lessen the Community dependence on oil imports. But the European Commission also foresees the need for greater consultation and information of the public in the regions involved, as well as assuring that maximum precautions are taken to guarantee security and protection of the environment.

It is considered probable that the development of nuclear power stations will continue to meet considerable opposition from a segment of the public as long as certain major technical problems, such as the discharge of radioactive waste, are not satisfactorily resolved.

TRANSPORT: Priority action until 1983

A further attempt to boost the European Community's transport policy was taken by the European Commission recently. In keeping with a resolution adopted by the European Parliament in January 1979, the Commission has drawn up a programme of activity for priority action to be taken in the EEC's transport sector by the EEC Council of Ministers, during the period 1980-1983. The new programme of action takes account of economic and other changes which have affected the Community over the past few years and of progress made to date in Community transport policy.

Special attention in the new programme is given to the building up of a transport infrastructure which would match Community requirements. Commission experts note that infrastructure planning has usually been the subject of discreet national programmes and that due regard has not been given to the overall requirements of Community traffic. Work in this sector will become even more crucial once Greece joins the EEC next January. The Commission has already called for an approach allowing for a Community contribution towards the cost of a motorway across Austria to improve the road link between Greece and the existing nine Member States.

The programme also calls for improvements in the economic situation of national railways and cooperation between national services. Recent years have seen a continuing deterioration of railway undertakings, and Commission experts fear that the railways' share of total traffic will continue to fall if new initiatives and decisions are not taken urgently.

An appeal for more efficient air services is also made by the Commission. Proposals calling for improving the scope of interregional services, developing more flexible procedures for authorisation of regular services and simplification of formalities between EEC countries have also been formulated by the Commission.

Turning to the social aspects of the policy, the Commission calls for the full and effective application of the existing provisions for social working conditions in this sector.

Finally, the Commission recommends the development of combined transport and freer and more efficient intra-Community transport services.

ENERGY : Planning needs of developing countries

While energy problems today are universal, countries in the Third World face specific difficulties due not only to ever-increasing oil prices, but lack of infrastructure and personnel needed to plan their energy requirements in advance and make them an integral part of their overall development plans. It was to fulfil these objectives that the European Commission held an international seminar on "energy programming in the developing countries" in Brussels, from October 21 to 23. Attended by some 80 international experts, including representatives of OPEC, the World Bank, the International Energy Agency, and members of the energy planning departments of such Third World countries as India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Nigeria and Mexico, the seminar stressed that energy planning and programming should be treated as a key instrument in Third World development.

An ideal energy programme, said participants, should focus on the following elements: an evaluation of a country's needs, a taking account of its development level, an assessment of existing and potential resources, and finally, an appraisal of costs needed to implement the programme.

The importance of a regional approach to such energy planning was underlined by several Commission representatives who noted that the Commission has earmarked about 15 to 20% of EEC aid available under the Lomé Convention's regional cooperation chapter for energy development programmes for countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

The need to concentrate on small-scale energy projects, rather than larger and more expensive programmes, at least in the early stages of development, was also emphasized by the seminar.

Leonard Williams, the Director-General of the Commission's energy directorate made it clear that the absence of energy programming was very damaging to any country as it would inevitably mean more oil imports and consequent balance of payment problems.

He noted that the Community and its Member States had given some 700 million dollars in aid for energy programmes in the Third World, and that some 1 billion dollars in such aid could be expected at the end of 1980. The Community was thus, after the World Bank, the second largest aid donor in this sector.

IN BRIEF... IN BRIEF... IN BRIEF... IN BRIEF... IN BRIEF... IN BRIEF...

Commission reaffirms decision to follow up hunger debate with concrete action

A wide-ranging European Parliament debate on world hunger was held in Strasbourg in September (see Eurofocus 30/80). In its final resolution, the Parliament called on European authorities to take a number of concrete measures to combat the problem of world hunger. This has now been done by the European Commission. In a communication forwarded recently to the EEC Council, the Commission has reaffirmed that not only does it support the Parliament's resolutions but that it intends to take concrete measures in a number of key sectors such as food aid. The problems are expected to be discussed by the Nine's development Ministers at their meeting in Brussels, November 18. The Commission also indicates that it will undertake studies on the impact of EEC farm exports on Third World economies. The problem of rural development will also be analysed in further detail by the Commission.

Tackling EEC sludge

Water filtration in the Community produces about 700 kg of sludge per person per year. If sludge produced by the food industry, breweries, etc is included in this, the quantity of sludge produced by the EEC countries becomes really enormous. Its elimination requires a great deal of money and creates environmental pollution problems. Since 1977, the Community has been financing research aimed at finding ways and means of using such sludge as fertilizers, and destroying the remaining amount with minimal environmental risk. 150 leading scientists met in Vienna recently (October 21 to 24) to study the question and analyse the results of research undertaken in this sector in a number of EEC and non-EEC countries including Austria, Switzerland, Finland, Norway and Sweden.

About the European monetary system...

The European Monetary System, which has been in existence for the last 18 months, has prompted wide-ranging improvements in the Community's economic and political activities, according to Roy Jenkins, President of the European Commission. The European Currency Unit (ECU) is now firmly established as the monetary unit used for Community operations and, according to Jenkins, is also being used increasingly in the private sector. The President of the Commission, however, made it clear that the link between the ECU and gold, the price of which is increasingly unstable, would have to be changed, and the rate of exchange between the ECU and the dollar better monitored. Finally, Mr. Jenkins regretted the fact that Britain continued to resist full participation in the EMS.

A NEW STEP IN THE NINE'S REGIONAL POLICY

Europe is being made not only in Brussels, where most of the European Community institutions are located, but it is also being made through the development of regions from the south of Italy to the north of Ireland.

Since 1975, in fact, there has been a European Regional Development Fund which grants financial aid to regional development projects undertaken by the nine member states. Five years later, this common regional policy is undergoing a major transformation. Until now, the resources of the Fund were divided among the member states on a quota basis. Now a new segment has been set up outside this national quota system as a result of a 1979 decision. It is in this context that the Council of Ministers of the Community adopted on October 7 a first series of specifically Community-planned projects for regional development.

These actions represent a new departure for the common regional policy because they are not just contributions for actions undertaken at the national level, but specific Community initiatives which can even benefit regions that do not receive national aid.

In addition, this non-quota section of the fund will especially aim at aiding initiatives to develop and sustain a capacity to undertake projects even under discouraging economic conditions, instead of just capital aid. Finally, it will not be individual projects that will be sustained by this new section but broad multiannual programmes.

The Community leaders made this decision on the assumption that it was not enough to remedy the traditional imbalances between prosperous and underdeveloped regions, but that there was also a need to offset the side effects of other Community policies, such as the enlargement of the EEC or various specific programmes such as agriculture.

For the time being, the amount devoted to these new actions is limited to 5 percent of the Fund's total resources, though this could change. The first five actions in this series which have just been decided amount to £129 million.

The first action includes a series of measures aimed at adapting the economy of the Mezzogiorno in Italy and the regions of southern France to the enlargement of the Community to include first Greece and then Spain and Portugal, an enlargement that will directly affect these regions by providing competition for certain types of Mediterranean agricultural products. The measures envisioned aim at developing small and medium-sized firms and handicrafts as well as promoting industrial innovation and rural tourism. The second and third special actions decided by the Council are designed to eliminate obstacles to the development of new activities in the regions affected by either the restructuring of the steel industry or the decline in the shipbuilding industry. These zones, located in Belgium, Italy and the United Kingdom, were already faced with a high level of unemployment and were especially hard hit by a slump in their main industry. The Community Regional Fund will notably contribute to the improvement of industrial plants and deteriorating urban areas as well as the construction and modernisation of housing for workers. The fourth undertaking is aimed at improving the security of energy supplies in the Mezzogiorno region in the south of Italy by helping to install mini-turbines that generate electricity by using small waterfalls or by establishing wind or solar power plants or facilities that help recover the energy contained in natural biomass.

The objective of the last programme is to develop tourism and encourage the development of traditional craft industries in the Irish border regions. These regions are among the least developed in the Community because they depend on low-yield agriculture and are characterized by high unemployment and low personal income.

Generally, the participation of the Community in these five new programmes will be higher than in the normal regional action financed by the fund. It may go up to as high as 70 percent of the cost of aid to new initiatives. On certain projects the assistance will be degressive to emphasize its nature as a start-up aid for new viable activities.