

Week of September 15 to 20

ENERGY: The age of waste has ended

The most recent statistics concerning imports of petroleum into the European Community reveal that its residents and industries are ready to make sacrifices and economies. This is at least the opinion expressed by the European Commission after examining these figures with some satisfaction. For the year 1980 up to mid-August, the Community's imports of crude oil and of other processed oil products decreased by 12.5 percent compared with the same period of the previous year.

This lends support to the belief that in 1980, the Community will be well below the target it set out for itself to limit its oil import levels to no more than 472 million tonnes. In addition, on a longer-term basis it has also adopted a goal of reducing its dependence on imported oil from the current 54 percent to about 40 percent by 1990.

S U M M A R Y

- EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT : p. 2 The crusade against world hunger
- ENERGY : p. 3 Recycling the untapped source of oil
- LEISURE : p. 4 Hunting: a sport with a difference?
- IN BRIEF : p. 5 .Concentration of the retail trade
.Oaks will not wilt
.Publication of a solar atlas
- CLOSE-UP** : p. 6 Food additives and the European consumer
- Some 5000 food additives are currently being used by the food industry. All are probably not necessary and some may even present a danger...

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

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Editor Will J Reckman



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: Crusade against world hunger

Television has, unfortunately, made us familiar with the frightful vision of thin, emaciated, mournful children throughout the world. In comparison, our small daily problems seem suddenly fleeting and insignificant when measured against the never-ending ordeal of these millions of human beings whose main occupation is trying to keep themselves alive. The numbers are overwhelming. Some 800 million persons currently live in absolute misery. The problem is also growing in at least 13 Third World countries. There, the percentage of those not receiving the minimum daily ration of calories has increased from 8 percent to 12 percent in eight years. That's why the debate on world hunger that the European Parliament held on September 16 is of special importance. In October 1979, the Parliament already devoted a first session to this problem. Since then it has expanded its studies, consultations and public hearings. The result of this effort has been the adoption of a resolution on the contribution of the European Economic Community to the struggle against world hunger.

For European Parliamentarians, there is no doubt that "the fight to eliminate hunger is a priority objective in the quest for equitable and lasting solutions to the contradictions that threaten the future of mankind." They also requested the European institutions such as the Commission and the Council of Ministers to define a cohesive plan of action in this field, for the forthcoming North-South world dialogue and for the United Nations strategy for a decade on Third World development.

Among the priority tasks that should help to guarantee food security in the developing countries, attention should be granted in the first place to strengthening the domestic market and production base of these countries, which will mean massive transfers to them of finance and technology by the industrialized countries.

The European Parliament felt that the emphasis should be placed on rural development projects. It therefore asked the European Community to link the food aid it grants to the Third World to concrete rural and agricultural development projects. In addition, its aid in grains and cereals should increase next year to reach 2.5 million tonnes in 1982.

The European Community should also contribute to the stabilisation of major international markets and to open up the Community market to agricultural and processed goods from the Third World, according to the Parliament.

ENERGY: Recycling, the untapped source of oil

What to many seem like messy gunk and waste is also regarded by others as a valuable source of oil that could help resolve the existing energy crisis. What's more, much of this rich oil reserve is currently being wasted despite years of effort aimed at putting it into use as well as combatting environmental pollution at the same time.

This source of oil is not some just-discovered deposit in a distant uncharted area, but is actually right under our very noses. In fact, it is easily recognisable since we already use it as oil and then in many cases just discard it although it could effectively be recycled and re-used, thereby saving the world's limited resources of the raw material and also economising on everyone's bill of imported energy. It's not that no-one is doing anything about the problem, it's just that not enough is being done.

A number of countries and the European Community have for several years been trying to encourage the recycling and re-use of oils. In June 1975, the Community adopted a directive urging the member states to take all possible measures that were safe and environmentally clean to collect and reprocess the waste oil that is regularly emptied from our automobiles or dumped by industry. Community countries have responded in a number of ways. In Germany, France and Denmark legislation established a system of collection designed to eliminate harmless waste oils. Similar systems are being studied in other countries. In addition, Italy, Great Britain and Ireland offer reductions or exemptions from excise taxes on recycled lubricants. Statistics indicate that in 1978 Germany led the Community in every respect concerning the collection or re-use of oil, leading to a production of some 239,000 tonnes of regenerated oil out of a total of 450,000 tonnes for the five Community countries reporting such figures.

The European Commission in Brussels is also recommending that all public services contribute to this effort by recycling the oil from their extensive fleets of vehicles. It is also re-examining the application of the 1975 directive to draw up some supplementary proposals before the end of the year. A member of the European Parliament has also recommended that collection reservoirs be available to the public in all the member countries as a means of encouraging such an effort.

LEISURE: Hunting: a sport with a difference?

The 64 dollar question - is hunting a "good" sport or a crime - is with us again.

Two members of the European Parliament, Mmes March and Poirier have sent a strongly worded written question to the European Commission in which they defend hunting in Europe, and particularly in France. Their arguments can be summarised as follows: hunting is a social activity, a popular sport, there are about two million avid hunters in France, etc. Hunters are wrongfully accused of all possible evils: destruction of vegetation and the creation of ecological imbalances. They also complain against any European Community directive in this sector, stressing that regional hunting does not threaten animal species, and is, in any case, regulated. The "aware" hunter can even contribute to the ecological balance of the animal world, while industrial pollution, insecticides and haphazard urbanisation are the real enemies of wildlife.

The Commission argues that it has never considered hunting to be the only activity responsible for the disappearance of certain species of animals. But it feels that hunting should be monitored and regulated because even though there might be certain very "aware" hunters, there are others who are less enlightened; these hunters, through sheer ignorance, are capable of firing at just about anything, and could cause havoc. Wildlife has to be protected against such actions. One only has to think of the millions of wild birds that are dying out because of the rapacity of mankind. The worst kind of hunting, of course, is that which leads to the massive and indiscriminate destruction of game.

Member States are entirely responsible for determining the conditions under which such hunting is practised, and the Commission has no intention of formulating a common hunting policy.

An Indian chief from Seattle would appear to have the last word on the subject, even though he was speaking in the last century: if all animals were to disappear, he said, Man would die of loneliness, because whatever happens to beasts ultimately happens to Man.

IN BRIEF...

Concentration of the retail trade: The confederation of the trade unions representing the retail trade has just published statistics indicating that activity in this sector is most concentrated in Germany. Currently, 50 % of the market and sales (compared with 46 % in 1976 and 26 % in 1962) is concentrated in the hands of 1 % of the retail merchants.

The European Commission indicates that a similar trend can be noted in the Community as a whole, although the situation varies from country to country. This trend is most notable in the food sector. It is a fact, however, that for the Community as a whole, 70 % of the total sales in the retail sector are still made by the small and medium-sized businesses.

The Commission is currently studying the problem such concentration creates as regards supplies to rural zones and the less-favoured zones of the Community.

Oaks will not wilt: Without being protectionist, the Community must absolutely defend itself against the arrival on its territory of strange harmful bodies, linked undoubtedly to the import of seemingly harmless vegetables or animals.

The Commission has noticed the danger posed by the arrival from North America of a disease affecting oak trees. This disease is known as *Ceratocystis fagacearum*, or more commonly as "oak wilt". The Commission took measures last year to fight the problem.

Publication of a solar atlas: The European Commission has just published a European atlas of solar radiation which Mr Guido Brunner, European Commissioner responsible for energy policy has stressed in the preface is of the utmost importance for the development of solar technology of all types. The atlas, drawn up by the Commission in collaboration with national meteorological services, contains 17 maps in colour showing the level of solar radiation throughout the Community at various times of the year. It shows that solar energy could make an essential contribution to the energy provisions of the Community, even in its most northern regions. Copies of the Atlas can be obtained from the following address: W. Grosshen Verlag, Postfach 170, Sudwall 15, 4600 Dortmund 1, Germany. Price DM 14,-.

FOOD ADDITIVES AND THE EUROPEAN CONSUMER

Although it might seem unbelievable, more than 5000 composite elements are currently employed as additives in the food industry. Their increasing use is closely related to the multiplication of chemical products in our environment.

The story of additives is almost as long as the story of Man himself. Until the twentieth century, Man's major concern was to preserve food so that he could eat during the winter months or when harvests were especially bad. Methods used for the conservation of food, that is, to prevent chemical or microbic alterations, have formed an essential part of food technology since Man's very early days. These methods have become increasingly necessary with the development of food trade and transport facilities. For centuries now, Man has been drying, smoking, adding salt and pickling his food. Drying food is the most simple way of conserving it, and has been used for centuries. Our ancestors dried their fish, meat, as well as fruits and plants. "Smoking", which is still used today for fish and meat, was a method used by Europeans in prehistoric days. Later, the Romans even "smoked" their grapes. They also used vinegar to preserve their food. Increasing knowledge of the causes of alterations in food has prompted new methods of preservation and conservation: heat sterilisation, dehydration of meat, evaporation of milk, refrigeration by cold air, freezing and the use of chemicals...

Production structures have changed in our era of abundance: it is necessary to preserve food for a bad year or for distribution in out-of-the-way areas, but the major concern is with processing. The range of products added to food today has increased: in addition to traditional elements like salt and vinegar, a number of new substances, each with a specific action, has been born.

The development of the processing industry has led to the appearance of emulsions, thickeners, dyes and aromatic substances.

It is very difficult to determine whether or not additives should be used in order to facilitate processing activities. It is true that all substances are carefully analysed from the toxic point of view, but research in toxicology has its limits. Even a long-term experiment with toxic elements cannot produce the same results as those provoked by a life-long consumption of a certain substance. Moreover, there is the problem of cumulative effect.

Generally speaking, studies in toxicology deal with only one additive at a time. Our food, on the other hand, contains a number of additives (if not in one product, at least in several of them when we consume them together).

It is clear that no experiment can try to put together all the different types of additives, even if it is done by using groups of additives.

Additives can also cause certain types of reactions when they come into contact with medicines and other pharmaceutical products.

The use of additives in food therefore has to be monitored very closely.

It is particularly important to verify that all the additives are used correctly and in the prescribed quantities. Standards in this area, however, are still quite vague; different European countries still use different criteria which vary from the notion of "maximum tolerated dose" to "maximum recommended dose" to "allowed dose"...

Even taken in small quantities, certain additives, particularly dyes (which, moreover, have no value as far as conservation is concerned) can cause an allergic reaction in certain people.

Given these problems, the European Commission has drawn up a certain number of draft directives in the food sector, and particularly for additives.

Several of these directives have been adopted by the EEC Council of Ministers and their application today has contributed to improving consumer protection.

It is clear that additives might well be necessary and useful: nitrates, for instance, are necessary for the processing of ham; they prevent the proliferation of certain microbes and protect against food poisoning.

But there are other additives whose usefulness is less obvious, particularly in soft drinks. Sugar, dyes, acid and caffeine are used to make water look more interesting and attractive. But does something as natural as water really need disguising?