

Week of June 2 to June 7

EUROPE : Finally out of the tunnel

- The relief felt in EEC circles at the end of the European "crisis" last week is almost tangible. The problems of Britain's contribution to the budget had led to Europe's worst crisis since the "empty chair policy" followed by de Gaulle in the early years of the Community's history.

Eurofocus has not given a daily account of the vagaries of the crisis which was tossed from "summits" to "marathons". This was covered by the daily newspapers. Today we give a run-down of the solutions found to the two major issues which were under discussion : British contributions to the EEC budget (page 5) and the agricultural price-fixing for the Community (page 6).

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Progress in biology will, by the end of the century, lead to technological changes which will affect all walks of life : chemistry, food and health, etc.

The European Community believes in being forearmed ...

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EVALUATION : The European Parliament, one year after ...

It is now a year since we went to the polls to vote for the 410 (instead of the previous 198) members of the first European Parliament to be directly elected by EEC citizens. The voting took place in June, on the seventh in some countries and on the tenth in others. The number of people who voted in these first-ever direct elections was small in the United Kingdom, but 70 % of the population voted in the six founder members of the European Community.

The new members of the Parliament formed political groups, with the Socialists obtaining the highest number of seats, followed by the Christian Democrats, who, together with the Conservatives, Liberals and the European Progressive Democrats give the Parliament its centre-right colouring. The inaugural session which was held on July 17 was attended by some 720 journalists and photographers who made it into a really historical and international event.

During the past year the activities of the Parliament have been followed quite closely by the press. But, despite this coverage, an opinion poll taken in October 1979 (see Eurofocus of January 28, 1980) showed that, while 66 % of EEC citizens had read or heard "something about the European Parliament", only 44 % could explain what the Parliament really represented. The major action taken by the Parliament to date has been the rejection of the Community's budget for 1980. By provoking a European crisis, the Parliament proved its determination to play its full role as a fully-fledged European institution which intended to exercise its full powers and competence in its sectors. The Parliament indicated that farm expenditure in the budget (which has still not been adopted) should be reduced so as to allow for the development of other EEC-wide policies on such crucial issues as energy and industrial restructuring, for instance. In another major decision, the Parliament decided to hold its sessions in Strasbourg on a permanent basis, despite the fact that the earlier Parliament had accepted the principle of alternating its sessions between Strasbourg and Luxembourg, and the fact that a new building had been constructed in Luxembourg for the enlarged Parliament.

The European Parliament also played an important international role by its severe condemnation of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and of the continued detention of hostages in Iran. A large debate on the problem of world hunger was also organised by the Parliament.

The EEC Council of Ministers and the European Commission have come in for their share of criticism from the European Parliament. For one, the

Parliament stressed its disappointment at the programme of action for 1980 presented by the Commission which is, in fact, reaching the end of its mandate. Secondly, certain political groups have asked that the nomination of the future members of the Commission, including its president, should be subject to approval by the Parliament. They have also suggested that the Commission's programme of action should be voted on each year by the Parliament.

One of the major rights of the parliamentarians, that of questioning - both orally and by written procedure - the Council and the Commission on their activities has been amply used by the Parliament. The Parliamentarians' curiosity, which allows them to take initiatives and monitor the activities of other EEC institutions, would seem to be insatiable. In 1979, members of parliament sent up to 2.000 written questions to the European Commission, on subjects as varied as the right of establishment of doctors, to Vietnamese refugees, to the harmonisation of taxes on tobacco, to name but a few.

Just recently, the political committee of the European Parliament presented a draft proposal calling for closer cooperation with the different national parliaments in the EEC countries. This collaboration could take the form of coordination of activities between services, meetings between presidents of the different committees, and the continuation of national debates at a European level.

Generally speaking, the first year of the European Parliament has been positive. It has made its voice heard in international fora as is indicated by the warm welcome extended to its President, Mrs Simone Veil, by the different world leaders.

Members of the Parliament have also shown that they take their work very seriously, even if the leading European politicians who are members and who could liven up debates by their presence and interventions have remained surprisingly silent.

#### RESEARCH : Autocomatic translation technology

As of January 1, 1981, when Greece enters the European Community, there will be seven official languages used by the Community institutions. This would mean, in practical terms, that all EEC documents would have to be translated into French, English, German, Italian, Dutch, Danish, and Greek. The amount of qualified translators that would be required for such a task can be imagined ... not to mention the costs involved.

It comes as no surprise therefore to learn that the European Commission has been looking into the possibilities of computerised translations and more particularly the introduction of a data bank of technical terms for translators since 1975. The Commission has now acquired the "Systran" system of computer-assisted translations from English to French and vice versa, and from English into Italian.

This system is the brainchild of Dr Toma of the World Centre for Translations (United States). He has supplied the Commission with almost 22.000 pages of text to date, but the system is still in the experimental stages and will undoubtedly need to be improved. When it is finalised, the system will be used by all Community institutions, by the national services in Member States as well as by people using the data banks made available by the Euronet-Diane information network (see Eurofocus n° 4/80).

#### ENERGY : Energy saving begins in the kitchen

While efforts to reduce the consumption of energy in factories, on highways and in offices and other public buildings have received public recognition, very little has been done to date to cut-down on the amount of energy consumed daily in a very important part of every home : the kitchen.

Statistics show that each of the 84 million households in the Community consume an average of 2.300 kilowatt hours (KWh) of electricity a year. The kitchen plays an important part in this energy consumption. Today's modern kitchen has a number of labour-saving devices, which, while making it easier to cope with household chores, often adds to our electricity bills every month.

But wouldn't the task of choosing the right domestic appliance be made easier if we were provided information on its energy consumption characteristics ? Better still, if this were further supplemented by information on such points as water consumption or noise levels.

This consumer service has been studied by the European Commission which initiated a directive last year calling on the manufacturers of electric ovens to display labels on their products indicating the amount of energy they would use over a certain period (see Eurofocus n° 8/80).

This idea has now been taken a step further. The Commission has proposed that the labelling scheme should now be extended to cover refrigerators, freezers, washing machines and dishwashers.

In addition to providing a very useful consumer service, this directive should encourage manufacturers to develop more efficient domestic appliances.

The information on energy consumption would be printed on a light orange coloured label measuring 90 x 100 millimeters. A uniform labelling system will be useful for manufacturers who wish to sell their products throughout the Community. The system, however, will not be compulsory.

The directive is expected to be extended to other appliances such as television sets, tumble dryers and vacuum cleaners shortly.

#### BUDGET : Agreement on British contribution

After a 20-hour marathon negotiating session, European Community Foreign Ministers recently reached an accord on the British contribution to the joint budget which brought an end to months of controversy and should pave the way toward resolution of other problems.

As an example of the positive impact that the budget solution had on other issues, Agriculture Ministers afterwards rapidly reached agreement on the long-stalled question of raising agricultural prices (see page 6).

Britain's eight Community partners agreed to reduce London's estimated budget payment of £1.1 billion by £710 million in 1980 and £ 860 million in 1981 and committed themselves to a similar reduction for 1982. Part of the agreement also proposed that the Community seek a permanent restructuring next year of the budget system so that such massive deficits for a Member State would not be repeated.

These details were an improvement over previous offers made in summit meetings in Dublin and Luxembourg which had been rejected because they were either not enough or too short.

This difficult problem has been the stumbling block in the way of agreements in a number of related agricultural, fishing and other areas, which can now be tackled in future meetings.

Following the all-night session, Italian Foreign Minister Emilio Colombo, who presided the negotiations, agreed that the accord should end a period of "crisis, stagnation and much cause for concern that in a time of international crisis had prevented the Community from asserting its identity". He also said that the agreement "opens the way for a phase of intense activity in the Community".

This means that future Community meetings can now turn more attention to such problems as the economic slump, rising unemployment, continued energy problems and policies, and a number of other internal and structural needs. One such problem will have to be the related one of financing its various activities in the face of dwindling revenues.

AGRICULTURE : The broad harvest of the "green" policy

When agriculture ministers emerged recently from weeks of hard bargaining on farm prices and policy, their agreement affected not only the more than 8 million farmers and farm workers in the European Community but virtually all the rest of the 260 million residents as well.

This fact was underlined by the avid interest all during the negotiations of groups such as the European Bureau of Consumer Union Federations, which represents the consuming public in all the nine Community countries. For months, these consumer lobbyists had urged a policy of restraint on the annual fixing of Community farm prices for the coming year in order to keep rising food prices to the consumer under control. In contrast, the representatives of the farming community argued for increases of some 8 percent to allow farmers to keep pace of the rising living and production costs. At the beginning, the European Commission in Brussels had recommended a virtual freeze on farm prices, but the Ministers of the nine Member States finally agreed to an average 5 percent rise. This naturally represents a compromise for those on the Community's roughly 5 million farms and the millions of consumers in the population at large who will find food prices continuing to rise - although at a somewhat slower pace. Food represents about 20 percent of private consumption in Community households.

The impact of price increases for such products as beef, grains, dairy products and others as well as new special aid to sheep farmers will also mean increases in national governments' contributions to the Community budget, 7 percent of which goes for farm support programmes. This is not directly translated into repercussions for the taxpayers in the Community, since the budget is made up of contributions from a fixed maximum of 1 percent of value-added tax revenues.

But it does mean that other areas of Community activity ranging from aids for unemployed workers in retraining programmes and for the developing countries of the world to environmental protection or alternative energy sources may have to be scaled down to live within this budget.

With so many interests at stake and in some conflict, it's no wonder that the Community's farm ministers have so much trouble each year reconciling these various priorities and deciding on the Community's "green policy". But continuing efforts have been made and will continue to be directed at trying to retain an adequate production of foodstuffs in the EEC, assisting the farming population and not making the consumer and taxpayer pay too high a price.

THE NEW LIVING TECHNOLOGIES
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Although modern science still remains powerless in the face of volcanic or meteorological phenomenon, man's control of nature is expanding daily. The 1960's saw the conquest of outer space. Today, it seems, however, that it will be the mastery of the infinitely tiny that will be the first to bring about a fundamental change in our everyday lives.

In fact, the new "living technologies", based on the manipulation of microbes, cells, enzymes or genes, now offer significant prospects for practical application in a number of different areas. Fermentation has already long been used to produce foods such as wine, beer and cheese, and is beginning to be used for energy production through biomass. And penicillin is, after all, only the result of moulding.

Tomorrow, other micro-organisms or biological agents will lead to the invention of new products and services. In the field of chemistry, microbes or higher cells bred under certain conditions will soon be used for tasks as varied as water purification, vitamin production, hormones and remedies against cancer or allergies.

On the other hand, agriculture is also expected to experience a new development owing to biological fertilisers and pesticides, as well as through genetic interventions that will produce healthier vegetables better-suited to our needs. Animal species will themselves be the subject of improvements ranging from the elimination of parasites to the creation of new breeds. Ideally, the industrial production of proteins and "vegetable meats" could feed the peoples of the Third World as well.

Our natural resources will also be increased. Certain bacteria will be used to make leather - the way it is already done in Japan - and even plastics. They will also allow the recovery of numerous minerals contained in water or dispersed in low-yield deposits that are currently uneconomical to develop and exploit.

But the most astounding applications of bio-technologies are undoubtedly in the field of health and human behaviour. Determining the sex of babies, within some twenty years, will no longer be in the realm of science fiction. That would be a fundamental break - with potentially unforeseen consequences - with a natural balance which has always existed.

In the swarm of accomplishments, certain birth defects may also be prevented.

New vaccines and harmless drugs may also be created that will repress the need for alcohol or tobacco or that could influence an individual's temperament. The process of ageing may also be altered, the chances of successful organ transplants may be multiplied, artificial organs and bio-chemical replacements may even substitute for the functions of the liver, kidney or other defective system.

Quite naturally, many persons are concerned by these new discoveries and regard today's scientists in a worse light than yesterday's sorcerers. Even for the bulk of the population, all these innovations are expected at least to present problems of adjustment and acceptance. But these advances are also expected to provide satisfactory solutions to a number of society's health, nutritional or energy needs as well as others. The economic impact also should not be overlooked since the development of bio-technology could become the driving force behind a new growth spurt during the coming decades. For all these reasons, the European Economic Community is developing a programme in this field. Cooperation between the nine member countries should enable them to unite and therefore to multiply their capabilities and their human and financial means aimed at achieving joint objectives. It could also eliminate obstacles to this development through common standards. This cooperation is doubly necessary because European technology in this field has already been significantly surpassed by the United States and Japan, its biggest direct rivals.

The European Community has already produced a first action plan on this issue as part of its science and technology forecasting and evaluation programme known under the acronym of FAST (see Eurofocus N° 8 of 28 January 1980) which was initiated in early 1979 for an experimental period of five years. At that time bio-technology was regarded as one of the priority issues for Europe in the future, ranking alongside the problems of energy, labour and employment and new information technologies.

As part of this FAST programme, some £300.000 have been allocated to a project entirely devoted to the definition and preparation for what is already being called the "bio society".

The European Community has firmly decided that it will not be left behind in the race for progress and is actively preparing for the future.

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