

Week of 21 to 26 April

TOWARDS A "REAL" EUROPE: "Seeing is believing" as far as European citizens are concerned. Despite progress made in working towards an integrated and "real" Europe, Europeans still need to see external symbols of such European unity. Direct elections to the European Parliament represented one such proof. But Ireland, Denmark and the United Kingdom have still not aligned their postal tariffs to the uniform system existing in the six founder members of the European Community for mail weighing less than 20 grammes (80 % of all postal traffic). Similarly, the European passport is still to be introduced despite formal commitments made as early as 1974, and the fact that it would have both a symbolic and practical impact. A resolution recently adopted by the European Parliament calls on the European Commission to take a decision on the question before the end of the year. There are a number of technical problems which still need to be resolved, but the main obstacle, of course, is political.

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Rossi, Peureux & Co
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DEVELOPMENT: Helping Third World refugees

A refugee is a human being who has had to take one of the most difficult decisions ever: to cut his roots. Move. More often than not, the decision is taken out of blind fear because of danger to life, but refugees also leave their homelands because of lack of freedom to live a reasonable life. The growing number of refugees in the world today is an international tragedy. Refugees have left their troubled lands in Cambodia, Afghanistan, Chad, Ethiopia ... to seek shelter in, for example, hastily-built camps set up by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in neighbouring countries.

But these camps are ill-equipped to handle the increasing number of refugees who arrive daily. The vital needs of these displaced populations are met by international aid from such organisations as the Red Cross, the World Food Programme, and the UNHCR itself, but aid is also required from individual countries and from the European Economic Community.

In three decisions taken recently, the European Commission agreed to grant emergency aid to refugees from Cambodia, Angola and Chad. The Cambodian aid programme is by far the largest, with the Commission calling on the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers to approve £ 26.1 million (about 60 million dollars) immediately. This aid will cover the period from April to December, and will be within the framework of a new 275 million dollar emergency programme launched by the UNHCR.

EEC participation in last year's UNHCR programme was 80 million dollars. Of the new aid proposal, the Community is expected to give £ 24 million in cash, and the rest in the form of 35,000 tonnes of cereals. It is also hoped that the distribution problems for such food aid will be resolved shortly.

The Community is to contribute £ 120,000 to the International Red Cross which is helping 300,000 persons displaced following fighting in central parts of Cambodia. The programme will provide essential goods to the most affected refugees, including 32,000 children under twelve. The Community also plans to grant food aid to the refugees.

Refugees from Chad who have fled into Cameroon will also receive EEC aid of about £ 180,000. There are currently about 60,000 such displaced persons in Cameroon.

So that we can improve "EUROFOCUS" and the general service we try to offer to our subscribers, we should be happy to receive any comments, criticisms or suggestions. If you should use any of the copy a reference to "EUROFOCUS" (and possibly a copy of the final article) would be much appreciated.

AGRICULTURE: Agricultural labour force still too large

The European Community's active labour force working in the agricultural sector has fallen by more than 50 % over the last twenty years, and currently represents no more than 8 % of the total active labour force, compared with 40 % working in the industrial sector and 52 % in the services sector.

This average, however, disguises the often very strong differences between EEC member countries. While in the United Kingdom only 2.7 % of the population active labour force is employed in the farm sector, some 23 % of the overall active labour force works in this sector in Ireland, and 16% in Italy.

Generally speaking, the agricultural labour force is still too large because it is concentrated essentially in farms with an area of 20 hectares or less. 76 % of the European Community's farms fall into this category. Although these farms represent only 24 % of the agricultural area currently under use, they employ about 75 % of the agricultural labour force. A number of these small holdings have very limited financial resources and therefore the possibilities of finding paid jobs for farm workers are limited.

Given the unfavourable economic situation, the possibilities of recycling farm labourers who want to leave agricultural work are rather limited. The rural exodus is continuing, but there has been a general slowdown in recent years.

Age is another problem. A rather high proportion of farmers working on small holdings are very old. Generally speaking, 39 % of the farmers within the EEC are over 55 and work on farms smaller than 20 hectares.

The active agricultural labour force should therefore decrease, even if this reduction is due to natural causes stemming from old age.

In 1977, women represented 32 % of the total labour force employed in the agricultural sector, 6.7 % of the actual farm owners, 5.5 % of the agricultural employees, and 19.3 % of the family work force (essentially, farmers' wives).

While the female labour force working in the agricultural sector is decreasing, the number of women who actually run holdings is on the increase. There were 18 % more women in this category compared with 1975 and 1977.

One could ask if this means that the agricultural sector is particularly sensitive to feminist philosophy and demands ?

ENVIRONMENT: How to avoid more oil tanker spills

The wave of recent maritime oil pollution disasters which has seen tankers such as the Olympic Bravery, Torrey Canyon, Amoco Cadiz and more recently the Tanio cause environmental catastrophes off the European coast has also set the stage for a further crackdown against such hazards.

European authorities are now considering stiffer inspection and standards for safety on ships that call on their ports as part of the drive to rid the neighbouring seas of floating pollution dangers.

While these maritime accidents have sometimes been the result of the overcrowded sea lanes off the coast of France and elsewhere in the Channel, some of the problems also stem from unsafe conditions on many of the vessels that navigate the world's oceans.

International treaties have been negotiated that would improve shipping safety throughout the world, but another difficulty still standing in the way comes from the fact that many countries have either not signed or applied these world regulations.

That's why officials of the European Community in Brussels have also been looking at other regional rules that would help police the harbours and sea lanes all over the Nine (soon to be 10), Community countries.

A look at this new campaign was given recently by Richard BURKE, the European Commissioner in charge of transportation. He noted that the Community countries had recently agreed to new laws laying down requirements for oil, chemical and gas tankers approaching or entering EEC ports and that would require qualified deep-sea pilots to be on hand in the Channel and the North Sea, where an estimated 1000 ships a day pass.

He said his staff is now looking at new safety laws that would convert the Community "into an area which sub-standard ships will enter at their peril." He said that one regulation to be shortly introduced would require Community authorities to identify every sub-standard ship entering their ports and to ensure that before it leaves the Community it is brought up to international standards. This would mean inspection of the ship and crew certificates of incoming ships and also establishment of an information exchange system between the port authorities in the different member countries about the defects found on such ships.

ENERGY: Italians want to keep lid on their petrol tanks

While not yet ready to adopt a rationing system for petrol, some EEC governments are showing no lack of imagination in trying to come to terms with their oil supply problems. For example, since January 1 this year, the Italian authorities have put a 50 litres limit on the amount of petrol which cars leaving Italy can carry in their tanks. Cars with more petrol in their tanks are taxed heavily.

Italian petrol prices are lower than in neighbouring countries, prompting fears that this could lead to an influx of "visitors" who would pour into Italy to fill up their thirsty tanks. This could, of course, lead to serious petrol shortages in Italy.

The Italian initiative, however, has not met with Commission approval, as it is contrary to Community legislation, particularly as regards the free movement of goods within the EEC. In an attempt to modify its rules, the Italian authorities have indicated that people leaving the country will be able to drive out with the same quantities of petrol in their tanks as they had when they entered Italy.

The amount of administrative red tape and frontier checks this will lead to can be well-imagined. The move, of course, is still against the EEC Treaty, and Italy runs the danger of being brought before the Court of Justice for its continued infraction.

SOLAR ENERGY: A dream come true ?

Mankind's ancient dream of harnessing the energy of the sun is slowly turning into reality. Solar energy today is a growing area of research and development, both in the industrialised countries whose dependence on oil has prompted a search for alternative energy sources, and the developing countries which see in solar power an unlimited source of energy, particularly suited to use in the rural environment.

Solar energy is clean, cheap and abundant. However, given the lack of real interest in the sector until a few years ago, techniques for its utilisation have yet to receive adequate publicity. The European Commission, which has recognised the importance of this sector and is committed to encouraging the development of energy sources alternative to oil, is currently financing a number of projects in the EEC states to demonstrate the usefulness of solar power. A first series of 16 such projects was selected in December 1978, at a cost of just over £ 1.92 million. Ten more projects were selected recently with the Community agreeing to grant £ 1.8 million. Overall the Community has about £ 13.5 million which it could use in this sector, so more projects will undoubtedly be chosen in the coming months.

To obtain Community financing, which can cover between 30 to 40 % of the total cost of the project, solar power systems must be designed to prove their worth on an industrial basis. The ten projects just selected by the Commission are sited in Italy, Belgium, the United Kingdom, France and the Federal Republic of Germany. They include solar energy systems for houses, farms, swimming pools, a school and an electric car.

Nine prizes for young Community architects submitting designs for housing using solar energy for heating and lighting will be awarded by the European Commission in another effort to promote the use of solar energy in the Community.

In an open letter addressed to candidates, the EEC's Energy Commissioner, Guido BRUNNER, stresses that new ideas for solar energy use in new or renovated houses will contribute to efforts to reduce the Community's dependence on oil.

The total value of the nine prizes is put at £ 15.000, with prizes being given for three categories of construction: apartment buildings, new housing estates and individual houses. A first prize of £ 3.000 will be given to the best project in the first two categories.

Designs will have to be submitted by August, and the decisions of the jury, including several well-known architects in the Community, will be known in September.

THIS WEEK: What's been happening in the EEC this week

COMMISSION: EEC Commissioner for external relations Wilhelm HAFERKAMP began a two-week visit of Australia and New Zealand on April 19 to consult leaders in those countries about bilateral issues and problems, mainly dealing with agricultural trade and energy resources.

COUNCIL: Foreign Ministers of the European Community meeting in Luxembourg on April 21 and 22 adopted a series of economic and political sanctions against Iran designed to help win the release of American hostages held in Teheran.

COMMISSION: The "war on poverty" in the European Community was the subject of a seminar held in Brussels from April 22 to 24 attended by social scientists, officials, trade unionists and others.

COMMISSION: Major European automobile manufacturing firms from several countries reached agreement on April 17 to cooperate with each other in the field of research and design in an effort to meet the challenge of competition from foreign firms and produce vehicles that are more fuel-efficient and safer. Such a move has been promoted for some two years by the European Commission.

Claudino Rossi, who has never studied law, will know from now on what the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg stands for. It functions not only for the 'others', the States or the powerful. It saved Mr Rossi from an unending ping-pong match between two national administrations, one Belgian, the other Italian. Without the intervention of the Luxembourg judges nothing could have broken the vicious circle which has trapped M. Rossi. His case was only one of the 1,332 brought before the Court in 1979, but it is significant. M. Rossi, father of two children, was for a long time employed as a miner in Belgium. In December 1967 he was crippled and received a type of pension from Belgian funds for occupational diseases, along with family allowances. With homesickness affecting him more and more, Mr. Rossi returned in 1973 to Italy, where his wife found work to supplement the modest pension. What happened then ?

The payment of the Belgian family allowances was cut. In effect, Mrs. Rossi's work gave her the right - according to Belgian law - to family allowances. It was up to the Italian administration to pay these! 'Not at all' said the Italian administration. 'According to our law, the payment must be made to the head of the family and not to the spouse'.

The Rossi family took the case to the labour tribunal at Charleroi in Belgium. Wisely, the judge turned to the European Court in Luxembourg to bring the affair to light. The Court issued a verdict full of common sense. As long as the mother does not actually receive the payments in the country where she works, the father must continue to collect them in the State which paid them until then. Thus informed, the judge could finally take his decision. All's well that ends well, even if it took six years in this case.

On 106 occasions in 1979 the Luxembourg Court had to reply to questions put to it by national judges. Not all the cases concerned social laws. There were also the 'big money' cases, one of which wasn't lacking in zest, the zest of pear brandy. In 1977 the French monopoly on alcohol reorganised the system of taxes on alcohol to conform to the Treaty of Rome. A French producer could now import any drink, but the monopoly imposed a 'compensatory tax' on him in case his imported product had cost less in the country of origin than in France.

The Peureux distilleries were not afraid, despite their name, which means timid in French, to rebel against this tax which, according to them, violated the European Treaties. And the Luxembourg judges agreed with this claim.

A third case, which is both exemplary and more important: in 1978, the European Commission brought a complaint in a matter of contraband butter in Italy. Did Italy fail in her European duties? And if so, how? An importer imported into Italy 6,000 tonnes of cheap butter from a non-member country. But the documents accompanying the consignment were fakes. The importer pretended that the butter came from a neighbouring Community country. He thus hoped to avoid paying the 'levy' on agricultural products from outside the Community if they are cheaper than the similar European product. The plan was uncovered, however, and the man was charged. The European Commission, faithful to its role of supervising the application of levies, requested the assistance of the Italian customs in the inquiry. The customs department then asked the examining magistrate who was dealing with the case to send them the Fraud Squad report on the affair. 'No', replied the judge, 'these documents are covered by judicial secrecy!' Whereupon the Commission appealed to the Court in Luxembourg. Invoking the primacy of Community law, it insisted on its power of inspection. The judges in Luxembourg did not agree. They agreed that the Commission had the right to receive all information on a case and that national administrations themselves could make such a request to an examining magistrate, but that is as far as they could go. The Italian administration could not demand documents which were in the hands of an examining magistrate. In short, the Commission should have acted when the investigation was still at the administrative level. As soon as it was submitted to a judge, it was too late.

These are three cases out of 1,332, each touching on a different area: one social matter, one commercial and one 'political' (in the general sense of the word). Each time the plaintiff belonged to a different category: the private citizen, a business concern, an institution of the Community. These matters illustrate well the extensive range of the Court's activities. However, a large and important aspect is still missing from the picture: on 1,167 occasions the Court has received diverse complaints from European officials against their employers, the Commission, the Council and the European Parliament. These institutions face cases of discontent among employees from all areas who feel they have been badly treated. Perhaps the fact that numerous officials live far away from home, in a strange environment and in relative social isolation, increases the inevitable frictions in a big administration. In any case, the most 'European' of citizens, the Community civil servants, are not forgotten by the Court of Justice in Luxembourg.