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HEALTH: Tobacco and the fight against cancer

The Twelve legislate on tar yields and the labelling of tobacco products.

The Twelve want to fight against cancer even while building the single market. On November 13 they agreed in principle to pursue, between 1990 and 1994, the "Europe against cancer" programme, which seeks to reduce the number of deaths from cancer by 15% between now and the year 2000. They want to devote between ECU 50 to 55mn.* to the implementation of this programme. The same day the Twelve adopted two measures, aimed at reducing the number of cancers caused by tobacco and harmonizing the legislation of the 12 Member States of the single market.

The measures adopted by the Community's health ministers included a directive which limits the tar yield in cigarettes to 15mg./cigarette, the level recommended by the World Health Organization. All European Community countries, with the exception of Greece, will have to meet this limit by 31 December 1992, the date set for the completion of the single market, at the latest. The text adopted by the Twelve, which must be examined by the European Parliament before it can be definitively adopted, provides for a maximum limit of 12 mg. from 31 December 1997, with a temporary derogation for Greece.

The measures are aimed both at reducing the risks from smoking and enabling tobacco products to move freely throughout the single market. The temporary derogation accorded Greece is due to the special characteristics of its tobacco; but the other Member States will not be entitled to take advantage of it to carry out checks at the Community's internal frontiers.

The health ministers adopted definitively a Community directive on the labelling of tobacco products - cigarettes, cigars and pipe tobacco. From 1 January 1992 all these products must carry a general warning - "Tobacco seriously damages your health" - as well as a specific warning, to be chosen from a list containing a certain number of such warnings, including "Smoking causes cancer", "Smoking causes cardio-vascular diseases" and "Smoking causes fatal disease".

The directive also stipulates the size and location of these warnings, so that they cannot be missed by smokers. This Community legislation will contribute to the free movement of tobacco products and the protection of the health of Europeans, some 440,000 of whom die prematurely each year from diseases caused by smoking.

* 1 ECU = UK£0.70 or IR£0.77.

TELEVISION: The Twelve ready to fight for high-definition television (HDTV)

The Community wants to sell its system to the rest of the world.

The 12 EC countries will speak with one voice next year at the plenary session of the International Radio Consultative Committee which must decide on a single world standard for high-definition television (HDTV). They want to use their combined strength in an effort to impose on the rest of the world the Community's own standards for HDTV, this television of the future which combines cinema quality pictures with compact disc quality sound.

The European system of HDTV was devised by companies from several EC countries, under the leadership of Philips (Netherlands), Thomson (France) and Bosch (Germany), in the framework of the EUREKA project. It was shown at Brighton just over a year ago. The Community's telecommunications ministers decided at the end of April to do all in their power to ensure that Europeans can enjoy HDTV at home as from 1992.

The ministers also resolved on November 7 to join forces in order to convince the rest of the world to adopt the European system, which is technically compatible with today's TV sets, unlike its Japanese competitor. The United States has yet to make up its mind. It could tilt the scales when it does.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS: The Twelve favour a European paging system
An agreement in principle on a cross-frontier service.

The electronic paging system is to go European. This is the system which allows a person to be contacted by means of a small electronic device when away from one's office, for example. The more sophisticated devices can transmit full messages. The paging systems now in operation within the 12-nation European Community are incompatible with each other and cannot operate outside their national frontiers. But the Community's telecommunications ministers agreed on November 7 to the two series of measures proposed by the European Commission to permit a cross-frontier service.

The first is in the form of European legislation which provides for specific wavelengths to be allocated to this service by 31 December 1992 at the very latest; the second a recommendation to the 12 national PTTs to coordinate the introduction of the European paging system in their respective countries.

TRANSPORT: Competition makes slow headway

The European Commission has looked at certain operating agreements between airlines individually.

European airlines are accustomed to settling problems of competition between them by simply dividing the cake in two - so much so that they prefer to deal with the problem in this way even after the adoption by the EC Council of Ministers in December 1987 of the first measures aimed at liberalizing air transport.

Between May and September of last year the airlines had effectively notified the European Commission of twelve agreements which provided for the joint operation, by two airlines in each case, of certain intra-EC routes. One of the two airlines was responsible for the flights, with programmes and timetable being agreed on jointly. The agreements also provided for commercial cooperation and the sharing of costs and revenues, of course.

In accordance with the undertaking it had given - to look at this type of agreement individually, given the numerous forms they can take and the variety of circumstances in which they are concluded - the Commission rejected 3 of the 12 agreements, which were finally torn up. As for the 9 remaining agreements, the airlines in question were asked on August 9 of this year to submit their observations within 30 days.

While the European Commission is an advocate of liberalization, it nevertheless accepts that the reorganization of a route, and more especially the opening of new routes, may make it necessary for them to be operated jointly - on a temporary basis, of course.

It was on the basis of this principle that the Commission finally decided on the agreements submitted to it. In the case of three of them, which had been concluded when new routes had been opened jointly by a national airline and one of more modest size, the Commission granted a derogation for a 6-year period in each case. Even so, it reserved the right to carry out a review of the economic and legal situation in two year's time. The routes in question were: Paris/Nuremburg (Air France-N.F.D.); Paris/London City Airport (Air France-Brymon) and Brussels/London City Airport (Sabena-London City Airways).

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As for the six remaining agreements, concluded between national airlines and covering routes which were already in operation for some time, the Commission held that the airlines in question had not shown that their joint operating agreements were needed for the continued operation of these routes. The routes in question were: Paris/Bilbao/St Jacques de Compostelle (Air France-Iberia) Paris/Milan/Turin (Air France-Alitalia); as well as three agreements between Air France and Sabena for the following routes: Paris/Brussels; Bourdeaux/Toulouse/Brussels and Brussels/Lyons/Marseilles. The Commission took the view that these joint operations could limit, even eliminate, all competition, whether actual or future, on the routes in question.

INTERNAL MARKET: A foretaste of Europe without frontiers

The five countries of the Schengen agreement abolish checks at their internal frontiers.

Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Luxembourg agreed in Bonn to sign on December 15 a complementary convention eliminating checks at their internal frontiers. This convention will be signed at Schengen, a small town in Luxembourg whose name is attached to the agreement which links the five countries that want to be the spearhead, as it were, of European integration. This is precisely what the European Commission Vice-President Martin Bangemann wanted to emphasize, when he recalled that this decision shows that whenever the EC countries display willingness and determination, the most complicated political and technical problems can be overcome for the purpose of a larger objective. "The five Schengen countries, all members of the Community, have shown the way: the European Commission hopes that similar progress can be made by the Twelve", he declared.

CANCER: A European training programme for doctors, nurses and dentists

The European Commission proposes the creation of three pilot networks of schools.

When a patient consults a cancer specialist, the disease often is at an advanced stage; on occasion it is too late. GPs, gynecologists and others, including nurses and dentists, would be in a position to diagnose a very large number of cases of cancer in time, were they but adequately trained to do so.

To help doctors, nurses and dentists throughout the 12-nation European Community acquire this training, the European Commission envisages the creation of three European networks, involving medical schools, nurse training schools and schools of dentistry. The scheme, which would be of an experimental nature to begin with, would be set up in the framework of the second phase of the "Europe against cancer" programme, covering the period from 1990 to 1994.

The Commission also intends to encourage exchanges of information and experience by means of training programmes for students and professionals, to be conducted in the different Member States and open to participants other than nationals.

INTERNAL MARKET: A European customs code for 1992

The European Commission wants to make life easier for companies.

The European Commission has embarked on a major task, aimed at making life in the single market easier for both companies and customs officials. It is bringing out a single volume containing the Community's entire foreign trade legislation.

The EC Commissioner for customs matters, Christiane Scrivener, announced on November 9 that the task of compiling the Community Customs Code was well advanced, and that the Commission would submit it to the Twelve before the end of the year for adoption. The fact that the various pieces of legislation are dispersed at present, makes it difficult to implement them uniformly throughout the Community. As Mrs Scrivener pointed out, the use of a single code will strengthen confidence in the Community's external frontiers, where all checks will be carried out with the elimination of the EC's internal frontiers.

ENERGY: A new European record

Thermonuclear fusion target is reached.

The goal of an energy source that is practically inexhaustible and virtually non-polluting is somewhat nearer: European scientists at the JET laboratory in Oxfordshire recently succeeded in establishing the scientific feasibility of thermonuclear fusion, at the experimental stage.

The fusion process takes advantage of the energy released by the fusion rather than the fission of atoms, the method currently used to generate electricity at nuclear power plants. The European Community has been financing fusion experiments at the laboratory in Culham for several years now. Here, scientists from the 12-nation Community, Sweden and Switzerland have been doing research into thermonuclear fusion using a dough-nut shaped machine, the Joint European Torus (JET).

The JET project has always been at the forefront of fusion research in the world, and has already beaten world records in this field. Over the past year it has more than doubled its best fusion factor, the target being the point at which the fusion reaction generates enough energy to burn by itself. This target is now less than a factor of ten away. In the 1970s, when JET was being designed, the best fusion factor was 25,000 times away.

As the atoms used in the process are drawn from water, it represents an almost inexhaustible source of energy. What is more, the process does not generate dangerous wastes, according to the experts. This gives it an added advantage over traditional sources of energy, as well as the nuclear process now in use, based on atomic fission.

The next important step is to build a larger machine, in order to test the process on a scale required for a full-size reactor. The Europeans will take it either on their own or in cooperation with the other scientific powers - the United States, Japan and the Soviet Union. The European Commission meanwhile considers it necessary to extend the JET project, in order to solve the remaining technical problems.

ENVIRONMENT: Europe's disappearing forests

The European Commission reports on the health of the Community's forests.

Trees are no more eternal than people. Like them, they die. Men have always known this. But they are now waking up to the fact that the death of trees might signal the end of man. Better late than never, even if there are regions of the globe where it is already too late. Happily this is not yet the case in Europe, although it is time to act.

The European Commission has just taken the first step by approving a report containing the results of national surveys into the health of trees, drawn up in 1987 and 1988 and a Community study of damage to forests. As a result, it is possible to evaluate the scale of the damage and envisage measures for dealing with it.

For some ten years now numerous regions of the Community have witnessed the steady damage to their forests, especially through atmospheric pollution and acid rain. The damage has been recorded in the Community's northern regions as well as its Mediterranean region. The situation is perhaps more serious in Germany than elsewhere, but no country has been spared and none can consider itself immune to the phenomenon. Forests are in a parlous condition in Scotland, the Netherlands, the north and southeast of France, in the northern and central regions of Greece, in southern Spain and in northwestern Italy. Nearly 15% of the trees studied had lost more than 25% of their leaves. This was notably true of silver pine, beech and oak.

It is clear from the survey that the Community's forests are not as vigorous as in the past. This state of affairs has led the European Commission to draw some conclusions as to the measures that need to be taken to improve forest growth and at the same time their resistance to aggressions of all kinds. The current levels of atmospheric pollution must be reduced and forest management techniques adopted, so that forests that have been damaged can be preserved or restored through use of the appropriate techniques.

TRANSPORT: An opportunity for the railways

An extraordinarily promising future for European railways, provided they seize the opportunity.

"The single market is not only a challenge, it is also an opportunity, especially for European railways", according to the European Transport Commissioner, Karel Van Miert. He is absolutely certain that trains have a bright, even radiant, future. He maintains that "the spectacular results of the TGV have shown that with new investment the railways can win back and generate new traffic on middle distances of up to 600 kms."

The key to success in the context of 1992 is, of course, that proposals in this field make it possible to eliminate the obstacles due to bureaucratic controls and restrictions imposed by national administrations. There are also the problems which arise from differences in certain pieces of equipment. The classic example of this is the difference in the track gauge between the Iberian Peninsula and the rest of the Community. Close, cross-border cooperation is even more essential therefore in this field than in others.

The way is now open for a complete re-think of the entire philosophy of the economic and commercial relations between the State and the railways. Up to now the Member States have bought and paid for "socially necessary" services. But this is a system which is conducive neither to the improvement of services nor the profitability of railways. It is necessary to begin by rethinking the capital structure of railways, because many Community railways have a capital structure which in no way reflects the real value of their assets.

Mr Karel Van Miert has stressed once again the importance of railways, and especially combined rail-road transport, for the protection of the environment. This was shown by the recent difficulties arising from the movement of heavy articulated lorries on the transit routes through the Swiss and Austrian Alps.

The European Commission is drafting a plan for a thorough going reorganization and return to profitability of the Community's railways. The plan could even go so far as to provide for the creation of a genuine Community setup in this field.