

a newssheet for journalists

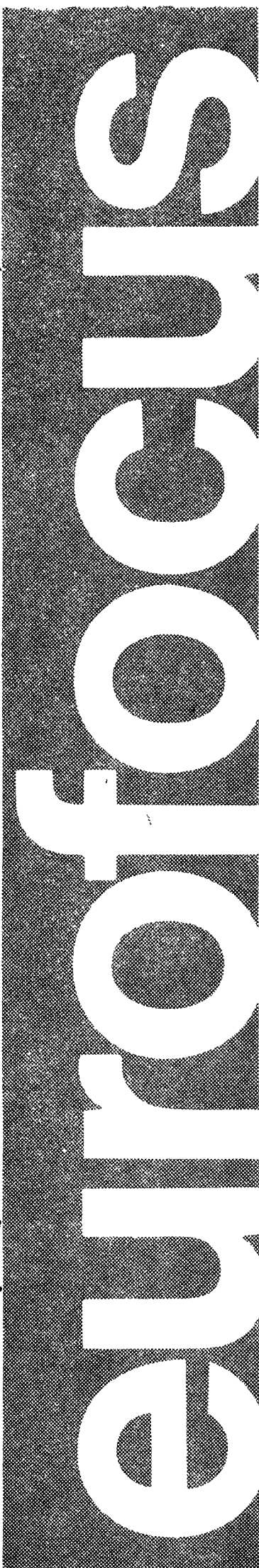
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Mailed from: Brussels X



CONSUMERS: They must have a hand in building "1992"

The European Commission is determined to ensure their rights are respected.

The 1992 single European market seems full of promise for European consumers. But they must be able to make their voices heard while Community legislation is being drafted. What is more, the "1992" legislation must grant them rights in keeping with the Community of Twelve and existing legislation should be effectively implemented. For his part, the European Commissioner for consumer affairs, Karel Van Miert, will be on the alert, as he stated before the first meeting of the new Consumers' Consultative Council (CCC), on April 23.

The new Council has been entrusted with the task of letting the European Commission know the consumers' point of view. European consumer organizations are represented on the Council, together with national organizations from the 12 EC countries as well as individual consumers with special problems, such as the elderly and handicapped. Hitherto the Commission consulted only European organizations, which meant that the Community's southern members were pushed into the background to some extent, their consumer organizations being less powerful than those based in the northern Member States.

The CCC's first meeting gave Mr Van Miert the opportunity to submit to consumers the measures which the European Commission will propose to the Twelve before the end of 1992. They deal with such matters as the authorization of comparative testing and comparative advertising throughout the Community; standard European contracts dealing with product guarantee and after sales service; better access to justice for consumers and the elimination of unfair contract terms in cross-border sales. The Commission also wants to support European efforts to defend consumers, such as those undertaken jointly by consumer organizations in Luxembourg and in the areas of Belgium, France and Germany that are close to the Luxembourg border.

For the moment the European Commission must get the Twelve to implement Community legislation already in force. Some EC countries, especially Italy and Belgium, have "forgotten" to embody Community directives in favour of consumers in their national legislation. As for consumers themselves, they must show themselves ... patient.

SOCIETY: 46mn. elderly people in the 12-nation Community

The European Commission wants them to have a "European Year" of their own.

There are already more than 46mn. people in the 12-nation European Community who are over 65 years of age. The elderly now account for more than 14% of the Community population. The figure will have risen to 16% in the year 2000 and nearly 20% in the year 2020. With the Old World "greying", the European Commission would like 1993 to be declared "European Year of the elderly people and solidarity of the generations", to encourage society to reflect on the problem at the Community level.

Hence its proposal to the 12 Member States at the end of March. If the experts are right, the percentage of the over-65s in the Community will have virtually doubled in the 55 years between 1965 and 2020. All EC countries are affected, with the exception of Ireland. Here the trend is towards a more youthful population until the beginning of the next century, according to the experts, thanks to a relatively high birth rate and substantial emigration.

An ageing population poses serious problems for the Community as a whole. Since the beginning of the 1980s the number of people of working age has grown more slowly than before; in the second half of the 1990s, their numbers will start to decline. The time is not far off when responsibility for meeting old age pensions will fall on a smaller workforce. At the same time the average age of European workers will be higher than that of their American and Asian counterparts - and competitors.

The Commission is asking the Twelve to pool their information on ageing and store it in a Community databank. It also wants them to set up an information network, so that the measures taken by the individual Member States are known to everyone throughout the Community. The Commission also plans to carry out studies on population issues and to have 1993 declared "European Year of elderly people and solidarity of generations". There can be a positive side to the greying of Europe, in the Commission's view, provided an attempt is made to discover and exploit it.

FOOD: Today in labs, tomorrow on our plates

The Community to launch its research programme, FLAIR.

Tomorrow's foodstuffs are to be found in today's laboratories. Between now and 1993 some 44 companies, both large and small; 39 universities and 55 research institutes will embark on the task of preparing more tasty, nourishing and healthier foodstuffs. All of these are taking part in FLAIR, the European Community's Food-Linked Agro-Industrial Research programme.

Its 35 projects were selected by the European Commission at the beginning of April. Under a well-established formula for Community research programmes, FLAIR projects are limited to precompetitive research - they do not include the translation of results into marketable products. Half the costs will be met from the Community budget - to the tune of ECU 25mn.* in all - half by the participants. Each project brings together institutions from at least two EC countries. Other West European countries and Yugoslavia are also taking part in the programme.

One of the FLAIR projects has been designed to find out more about the substances which give flavour to a series of vegetables. The aim is to be able to make the vegetables processed by food manufacturers more tasty.

Another FLAIR project, one on which 11 laboratories in eight countries will be working, seeks to identify a bacterium which, once introduced in the human intestine, would make it possible to bring down the cholesterol level, thus reducing the risk of cancer. Should the project succeed, the bacterium could be included in dairy products. Another product, involving 10 laboratories, will study certain substances found in plants and animals, to see if they can not replace the chemicals used to conserve processed foodstuffs.

The research should benefit both consumers and the European food industry. But FLAIR also plans to study consumer choice and behaviour as regards eating. Companies, universities and consumer organizations will work together to this end. Mouth-watering

* 1 ECU = UK£0.74 or IR£0.76

POLL: Europeans think more highly than ever of the Community

Its citizens are showing a growing interest in Europe.

Europeans have never been as interested in European Community affairs as at present. A poll conducted last autumn showed this to be true of a majority of them - 54% on average, with a peak of 64% in Greece and Denmark and 61% in Germany. Six months earlier only 40% of Europeans had claimed an interest in European questions, as shown by the latest Eurobarometer survey of public opinion in the 12-nation EC. It was carried out on behalf of the European Commission and its results were published at the beginning of April.

Even those who are indifferent to European Community matters agreed they were important for the future of their country. A record 82% of those polled in fact were convinced of this, with a peak of 87% in Italy and Luxembourg and a very respectable minimum - 78% - in Germany.

Last autumn 53% of those polled had heard of the European Commission, while 51% - another record figure - viewed it favourably. As for the 1992 single market, three Europeans out of four know about it, with the Belgians, Luxembourgers and Danes the best informed, at around 90%, and the British and Spanish the most ignorant - at around 60%.

A majority of Europeans continue to believe that "1992" will mean changes, which 90% of them think will be positive. For two Europeans out of three 1992 inspires hope, especially among Italians, Belgians, the Dutch and the Irish.

A majority of Europeans would like to entrust the European Commission with more important tasks after 1992. Of those polled, two out of three would like a European foreign policy and more than three-quarters favour common scientific research policies. However, Europeans are evenly divided on defense issues, while more than three Europeans out of five want education to remain in the hands of national governments.

Finally, only 13% of those polled consider the European Community to be truly democratic; some 46% of them regard it as democratic "to some extent". Here is food for thought for the Community's leaders.

HEALTH: European legislation to protect outside workers exposed to radiation?

The European Commission wants to see them better protected.

Workers from outside the nuclear industry - those who occasionally go into nuclear installations in order to clean or repair them, for example - are often more exposed to ionizing radiation than the industry's regular employees. Significantly, in some industry circles they are even described as "rem fodder", from the name of the unit of measurement of radioactivity. The fact is that in many cases outside workers do not enjoy the protection guaranteed in principle, under existing European safety standards, to all those working in the nuclear industry.

The European Commission therefore proposed to the Twelve, at the end of March, a Community directive which provides for a special acceptability certificate for every outside worker. The certificate, to be supplied by the employer, would stipulate the dose limits, which could not be exceeded during the task in question. The task completed, the operator of the installation would indicate on the certificate the doses evaluated by its radiation protection service and sent it on to the worker's employer. At present each Member State has its own system. The Commission, after having studied all of them, noted substantial differences between them.

HEALTH: The shadow of Chernobyl has not yet lifted

Community food protection measures are extended until 1995.

Agricultural products imported into the 12-nation European Community for human consumption will continue to be subject, until 31 March 1995, to the safety measures adopted by the EC after the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear plant four years ago. The Community's environment ministers decided at the end of March that the maximum permitted radioactivity levels currently in force will be maintained. However, given that the risk of radioactive contamination is decreasing as time passes, the Twelve have left it to the European Commission to decide which products could eventually be excluded from the scope of the Community regulation.

POLL: What is the role of the family in today's Europe?

The ideal number of children is two.

For most Europeans living in the 12-nation European Community, the ideal number of children for a family is two, according to the latest Eurobarometer survey of public opinion, carried out last autumn for the European Commission. In 10 of the 12 EC countries more than half of those polled regarded two as a good number. However, in Ireland the majority favoured three, while in Germany the two-child family came first, but not as clearly as elsewhere in the Community.

As for the role of the family, it is to bring up and educate children, according to 47% of Europeans on average, but with much larger majorities in the Community's southern regions. The British, however, see the family as providing love and affection; 41% of them are convinced of this, as compared to only 25% in the Community as a whole. In Germany, the family's affective role is considered almost as important as its educative role. Here, where birth rates are the lowest, 11% of those polled felt that the family must first ensure the survival of the species, a concern not shared by other Europeans.

The poll revealed other national particularities. For 18% of Dutch men and women - more than twice the European average - the family must look after the health of its members. For 13% of Luxembourgers - this is nearly three times the European average - the family must take care of the elderly.

POLL: A clear majority of Europeans believes in God

The Portuguese, Greeks and Italians are the most religious.

Nearly two-thirds of all Europeans - 65% to be exact - claim to be religious, as against 20% who claim to be not religious, 6% to be atheists and 4% agnostics. 5%, it should be added, were unable to answer the question, put to them in the context of the Eurobarometer survey of public opinion, carried out last autumn. The most religious - with more than 80% - are the Portuguese, Greeks and Italians. They are followed by the Irish at 72%. The Belgians, Germans, Luxembourgers and Spaniards are around the Community average, the British just below it, at 58%. The least religious are the French - 50% - the Dutch and the Danes - 48%. France holds the record when it comes to atheism, with 14%, and Italy the record for agnosticism, with 7%.

HEALTH: Everything you want to know about AIDS in 60 pages

A publication of the Pasteur Institute is recommended by the EC.

You cannot contract AIDS from using public conveniences or public transport; nor can you get it from swimming pools or cinemas. Treatment by an acupuncturist doesn't lead to AIDS, any more than having your ears pierced - provided the instruments used have been properly sterilized. This is the kind of information you will find in the latest edition of the booklet "AIDS - the facts - hope", published by the Pasteur Institute in Paris and recommended by the European Community.

The booklet, edited by Prof. Montagnier, the leading European expert on AIDS, contains 60 pages of down-to-earth explanations and pictures. It is available in not only French but also English, Spanish, Greek, Italian and Portuguese, as well as Arabic and Japanese. Other languages will follow. To obtain a copy - or more information - write to:

FIIS, Post Box 1215.16, F-75765 Paris Cedex 16.
Telephones: 45-70-38-62 and 45-70-30-78.

AGRICULTURE: Simpler rules will make it easier to fight fraud

The European Commission sets up an expert group to look at all agricultural "laws".

Complex regulations encourage fraud. This is especially true as regards the European Community's agricultural legislation, the cause of much of the fraud carried out at the expense of the European taxpayer. The European Commission therefore asked four independent experts at the end of March to examine closely the rules of all the agricultural market organizations, with a view to their simplification.

On the basis of their findings, the experts will submit to the Commission proposals aimed at simplifying the Community's agricultural "legislation", in order to facilitate administration and control. The Commission has already simplified certain regulations covering beef, a sector hard hit by fraud. The aim, this time round, is to cover all the agricultural sectors receiving Community subsidies.

BRIEFLY**90,000 EC documents at your fingertips**

If you have a personal computer, you can now consult any one of some 90,000 European Community documents. The fact is that since April 1 the general public can consult the database of the European Commission's central library, ECLAS. It contains all the Commission's reports and communications, together with European Parliament documents; 4,500 statistical publications; articles from newspapers and specialized publications and publications of international organizations, such as the United Nations and the International Labour Office. For detailed information contact Eurobases, Commission of the European Communities, 200 rue de la Loi, B-1049 Brussels, Belgium, Fax: 236.06.24.

Fuel consumption in the European Community

Europeans bought 455mn. tonnes of petroleum products in 1989, an increase of 1% over 1988. Deliveries of fuel for diesel engines rose sharply (by 6.7%) as did purchases of oil for thermal power stations (up 6%). On the other hand, deliveries of heating oil fell by some 9%. Deliveries of both petrol for cars and kerosene for aircraft rose by half as much as in 1988: by 1.7% and 2.8% respectively. Changes in consumption varied from one EC country to another. Purchases of petroleum products fell sharply in Belgium, Germany and Denmark but rose just as sharply in Luxembourg, Spain and Portugal.

Sharp rise in coal imports in 1989

The 12-nation European Community imported more than 100mn. tonnes of coal last year, an increase of 5.8% over 1988. The sharpest rises were recorded in France, Belgium, Spain and Portugal, while imports from third countries fell in the case of Germany, the Netherlands and Greece. The Community's main external supplier is the United States, with 40% of total EC imports, followed by South Africa (20%) and Australia (13%).