



# a newssheet for journalists

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Mailed from: Brussels X

**TRANSPORT: European hauliers refuse to be pushed around**

The European Court of Justice confirms the suspension of Germany's road tax.

There is to be no road tax on lorries - for the present, at least. The European Community Court of Justice has confirmed the provisional measures ordered on June 28, against the decision of the Federal Republic of Germany to tax lorries using German roads. True, German hauliers were also liable to the tax; but as they could deduct it from their vehicle tax, only foreign hauliers would have been subject to the new tax. Ranging between 1,000 and 9,000 German marks a year and set to come into force on July 1, the tax had been strongly denounced by hauliers based in other Community countries. The fact is they had threatened, among other things, to block the EC's frontiers at the start of the holiday season.

The war of the juggernauts will not take place after all - at least not just now. The German government has duly noted the Court's decision, which requires the Federal Republic only to continue to suspend collection of the road tax, pending a Court ruling on the substance of the case, which could take several months. This is a point worth bearing in mind. Bonn has justified the new tax on the grounds that German hauliers are at a disadvantage in relation to their competitors from the other EC countries because of the heavy German excise duty on petrol, on the one hand, and, on the other, the toll they must pay when using motorways in France and Italy in particular. Bonn, not surprisingly, wants the European Community to harmonize national road transport legislation as soon as possible and in all fields, including taxation, working conditions, environmental protection, etc.

The European Transport Commissioner, Karel Van Miert, is in agreement. While expressing satisfaction at the Court's decision, he underlined the need to take advantage of the respite it offered "to find quickly a solution for the harmonization of excise duties on road fuel and taxes on goods vehicles". The European Commission has already submitted the necessary proposals, but their approval must be speeded up, as noted by the Dublin summit. And it is precisely here that the shoe pinches. The fact is that for the last three years the Community's transport ministers have run up against the same problems and failed to reach an agreement.

When it comes to matters of substance, Mr. Van Miert has pointed out that the differences of opinion between the European Commission and the German government are not over "the principle of requiring users to pay for the infrastructure as well as the pollution and damage to the environment, but over the unilateral action taken by the German government, which discriminates against the rest of the Community".

**TOURISM: The 1990 edition of "Travelling in Europe" is out**

This guide for holiday-makers is available in eight Community countries.

Travel has become an integral part of modern living, whether the goal is a holiday away from home, a visit to relatives or friends or a business trip. To help those on the move within the 12-nation European Community, the European Commission has published a useful leaflet entitled "Travelling in Europe".

It is full of practical information on such matters as duty-free allowances; the identity papers to be produced when crossing the Community's internal frontiers; the green disc that smooths out frontier formalities; the E 111 form that all holiday-makers should carry in the event of illness; speed limits on European roads and motorways; postal charges within the Community; emergency telephone numbers and international telephone codes, etc.

Some half million copies of the leaflet have been published, with the financial help of sponsors, who have also undertaken the task of distributing it to travellers in their respective countries: Belgium, Denmark, the Federal Republic of Germany, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, Portugal and Spain.

**EUROBAROMETER POLL: Europeans prefer football to other sports**  
... and want teams to remain national.

The European Community's sports enthusiasts are more interested in football than other sports - and not because of the recent world championships either. The fact is that a Eurobarometer poll, carried out in the spring, showed a record 56% of those polled in favour of football. Tennis was next in popularity (51%), followed by athletics (49%), swimming (47%), gymnastics (44%) and skiing (43%).

But the Community's citizens are not keen to see their favourite clubs take on a "European" flavour. As many as 54% of those polled favoured the present restrictions on the number of foreign players in national professional club teams. This view, which is not shared by the European Commission, would seem to be in a majority in all EC countries except the Netherlands.

The Community's sports fans demonstrated greater enthusiasm for Europe when it came to the Olympic Games. Sixty-three percent of them claimed they are in favour of athletes from their country wearing the European Community emblem on their shirts, next to the national emblem. Some 80% of Italians backed the idea, followed by the French, Belgians and Spanish. Only Denmark turned out a majority against it. The 1992 Olympic Games will be held entirely in Europe: the Winter Games in Albertville, France, and the Summer Games in Barcelona, Spain.

**EUROBAROMETER POLL: Europeans like summer time**

The Danes and the Dutch are the most enthusiastic about it.

Fifty-seven percent of those living in the 12-nation European Community are satisfied with summer time, the period from end March to end September when clocks are an hour ahead of standard time. Introduced after the first oil crisis, the measure was intended to save energy; but research has shown the savings to be negligible in fact. Even so, summer time is popular throughout much of the Community, with Denmark and the Netherlands in the lead. Belgians are more reserved. Even so, only in France and Spain is there a majority against summer time.

**ENVIRONMENT: Fewer polluted beaches in future**

The Twelve want to reduce accidents at sea.

Oil pollution has disfigured more than one stretch of the European Community's coastline. After each accident the authorities have ritually exclaimed: "Never again!". Only to be proved wrong. But the 100,000t. of oil which two tankers discharged into the sea off the Canary and Madeira islands at the end of last year proved to be just too much. The European Community's transport ministers agreed at the end of June to take more energetic action and to cooperate more with each other to prevent accidents at sea.

The EC Council of Ministers adopted a resolution proposed by Spain's Transport Minister. Under this resolution the Member States will provide themselves with the necessary means to ensure strict compliance with the relevant international conventions. In practice, this implies the existence of an adequate and efficient maritime administration, capable of inspecting ships under the national flag as well as foreign ships docking in Community ports and of checking on the professional qualifications of their crews.

The Twelve have also undertaken to support each other in identifying the origin of and in monitoring and combatting pollution by crude oil and other substances harmful to the Community's maritime environment. They have asked the European Commission to improve its "task force" and provide it with the resources needed to coordinate more effectively action undertaken by the national authorities and ensure rapidity of response. The Community's transport ministers have also urged the Commission to step up its research in connection with the project for the establishment of a system of safety at sea, based on control posts and shore-based navigation aid systems.

**BRIEFLY****Fewer cancer-producing substances in factories**

The scourge of work-related cancers should recede shortly, thanks to legislation adopted by the Twelve at the end of June. The new Community directive requires employers to replace cancer-producing substances by others which are less dangerous. Where this is not technically possible, employers must implement a series of measures aimed at avoiding or reducing exposure.

**COURT OF JUSTICE: The obligation to seek authorization for sex shops is legal**

A Member State can ban the sale of pornographic articles in unauthorized shops.

It might seem the stuff of comedy, but the European Community Court of Justice dealt with the matter in all seriousness. Brian James Richards, manager of the company Quietlynn, had opened a sex shop in Southend, from which he sold pornographic articles, without the necessary authorization. Fined £2,000 for the offence, Mr Richards argued in his defense that the provisions of the law regarding the authorization to open sex shops were incompatible with Article 30 of the Treaty of Rome, the EC's "Constitution": they would impose a quantitative restriction on the import of pornographic articles from other Member States and would therefore objectively constitute an obstacle to the free movement of goods.

This daring argument did not convince the Community's judges. The Court of Justice viewed the authorization to sell to which Mr Richards had to conform as no more than "a simple rule of distribution which governs the sales outlets through the intermediary of which products can be marketed". What is more, the legislation in question "applies without distinction to imported as well as domestic goods".

The U.K. authorities having thus been cleared of any suspicion of seeking indirectly to favour British-made pornographic articles at the expense of the imported variety, the Court held that Mr Richards had failed to make out a legal case. What is more, intra-Community trade is safe, given that the articles in question can always be sold through authorized shops as well as through other channels - such as mail-order firms and shops which sell pornographic articles alongside a wide range of other goods. Sales of the former representing only a tiny proportion of total sales, these shops would not require an authorization.

**SOCIAL PROTECTION: The richest countries are also the most well-off**

Significant differences within the European Community.

Should you have the misfortune to be ill or unemployed, or even simply retired, or should you require any form of welfare assistance, you had best be registered in one of the six richest European Community countries. Not only are incomes higher in these countries (France, Germany, Denmark and the Benelux), but they also devote a larger share of their resources to social protection. This is clear from the data published by Eurostat, the EC's Statistical Office, at the beginning of July. Although the figures are for 1988, and Greece has been left to one side, the trend is clear.

The Community record in this matter is held by the Netherlands. The Dutch devote nearly 31% of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to social protection. They are followed by five countries within a band ranging between 26 1/2 and 29%: Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany and Luxembourg; three at around 23% (Britain, Italy and Ireland) and two at around 17% (Spain and Portugal).

Social protection benefits per head vary greatly; they are ten times higher in Denmark, the leading country, than in Portugal, if benefits are expressed in ECU, the European currency unit. However, if they are expressed in terms of purchasing power standards (PPS), a more accurate yardstick from the consumer's viewpoint, the range is less wide at 1 to 4, the two extremes being Luxembourg and Portugal. Even so, people in the less well-off countries are not necessarily as disadvantaged as these figures would suggest. As Eurostat points out, family solidarity is very strong in these countries, and has a favourable effect on the care of the elderly, for example.

At the Community level, the lion's share of expenditure on social protection (45%) is for old-age pensions and payments aimed at ensuring a minimum living standard for those without any resources. Next in order of importance is expenditure on health care (payments related to sickness, disability, occupational accidents and diseases), followed, if at a considerable distance, by spending on family and maternity benefits (8%), unemployment benefits (7 1/2%) and housing benefits (3 1/2%).

Who pays for social protection? At the Community level the three main sources of finance are (1) employers, whose contributions finance 42% of social protection expenditure; (2) public funds - in other words the taxpayer - provide another 28% while (3) the social contributions paid by the beneficiaries themselves bring in another 24%. In some countries, notably Britain, the Benelux and Denmark, interest on capital represents a fourth source of finance.

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The share of each of these sources of finance varies from country to country. In the southern half of the Community, employers contribute the most - as much as 52% of the total in France, Italy, Spain and Portugal. The share of taxpayers is highest in Denmark, Britain, Ireland and Luxembourg, while in the Netherlands it is the beneficiaries themselves who contribute the most. Belgium and Germany are close to the Community average.

Given these differences, some people may want to change their country of residence. What is more to the point, these differences could pose problems for the single European market of 1992, which is expected to witness a reduction in economic and social disparities. Clearly this is something for the Community's political leaders to think about.

**UNEMPLOYMENT: Unchanged in May ...**

... at 8.6% for the Community as a whole.

Unemployment in the 12-nation European Community appears to have stabilized at 8.6% since the beginning of 1990, according to Eurostat, the EC's statistical office. This was the seasonally-adjusted unemployment rate for May also, on the basis of the International Labour Office (ILO) definition.

Unemployment fell slightly in Belgium, Germany and Spain; it rose slightly in Denmark, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands and was unchanged elsewhere in the Community.

However, there was a considerable fall in the unemployment rate among young people in several EC countries. This was especially true of Spain, but also of Belgium, France and, if to a smaller degree, Ireland. Even so, the unemployment rate for young people remains high, at 16.2% for the Community as a whole, with a peak of 31.7% in Italy and another of 30% in Spain.



**ENVIRONMENT: Germans no longer have a soft spot for birds ...**

Their country has been convicted by the EC Court of Justice for failing to protect wild birds.

What is the world coming to? Even the Germans, who traditionally have been lovers of nature in general and of birds in particular, have found themselves in the dock for allowing hunters to engage in practices which are banned under a European Community directive. The sad fact is that the European Court of Justice has found the Federal Republic of Germany guilty of gross violation of the EC directive of 2 April 1987 protecting wild birds.

Under German law it has been perfectly legal to use nets to trap pheasants and to collect the eggs of such species as woodpigeons, turtledoves and herring and black-headed gulls. The wonder of course is that anyone would want to harm creatures bearing such poetic names. But the fact is that German law allows (because it does not explicitly ban) the use of tape recorders with which to lure birds and appliances with which to electrocute them. Some German states (lander) do not stop at this. In Baden-Wurtemberg hunters may shoot game that is puny or ill from their cars, in violation of Community legislation, while in Schleswig-Holstein they can hunt from motorboats if need be. In the latter state the law allows crows, magpies and jays to be hunted, although only in certain areas and at fixed periods of the year. And it must not be forgotten that this is not the first time Germany has been found guilty of violating the Community directive on the protection of wild birds, even if the earlier infringement was less severe.

Germany did not contest the charges brought against it by the European Commission. The Court of Justice held that Germany had failed to meet its obligations, and called on it to implement the directive in question as quickly as possible. Three states (Lower Saxony, Bremen and Hamburg) did so without waiting for the Court's decision. It is now up to the others to follow their good example and allow wild birds to fly in freedom.