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NUCLEAR ENERGY: More research, fewer risks

The European Commission seeks funds for research into the decommissioning of nuclear plants and remote handling techniques.

The risks involved in operating nuclear plants have already been reduced, thanks to research conducted over the years. The European Community has funded some of this research and the European Commission would like additional funds to be made available for a number of highly specialized programmes, two of which it has now forwarded to the Member States.

The first deals with the decommissioning of nuclear installations, including power stations and fuel reprocessing plants; the second, the so-called TELEMAN project, involves research into remote handling in the nuclear industry, in reactor operations as well as the decommissioning of plants.

The number of nuclear power plants which have already been shut down for good in the EC now stands at 17, as against only five in 1979. By the year 2000 it will have risen to around 50. Decommissioning, which involves much more than simply turning off the power, requires special techniques to ensure safety. The European Commission is now asking the Twelve for an additional ECU 31.5mn.\* over the period 1989 to 1993, to continue work that has been going on in this field for the last 10 years or so with Community help.

The activities envisaged by the Commission include the testing of new decommissioning techniques on sites which have been at the centre of controversy, for reasons of either safety or nuclear waste disposal: Sellafield (U.K.), Mol (Belgium), La Hague (France) and Gundremmingen (Germany).

The technique of dismantling nuclear installations safely should benefit from the TELEMAN programme, which is aimed at the development of remote-controlled devices, such as mechanical arms to which a variety of tools and sensors can be attached. Such "tele-operators" would make it easier to inspect, maintain and repair nuclear installations. The Commission is seeking ECU 19mn. for this programme.

RESEARCH: A new programme named MONITOR

To help forecast, evaluate - and think.

Research is expensive and research projects cannot be selected blindly or on the basis of chance. Their effectiveness is linked in fact to three types of complementary research: (1) detailed analysis of specific sectors, (2) long-term forecasts of the major trends in science and technology and (3) evaluation of the results of projects already undertaken.

These three forms of research are the raison d'être of the MONITOR programme, which the European Commission has just proposed to the 12 Member States. It covers the period 1988 to 1992 and its budget has been fixed at ECU 22mn.

\* 1 ECU = UK£0.65 or IR£0.78

TECHNOLOGY: SPRINT will turn into a gallop ...

if the Twelve heed the European Commission.

"Europeans are inventive but they are no good at marketing their inventions", is a frequently-heard remark. Europeans will have to give the lie to it if they are to meet the challenges of the year 2000 - and of 1992, to begin with. To help them, the European Commission launched the SPRINT programme, with the aim of speeding up (1) the diffusion of R&D results and (2) their translation into saleable products, especially by smaller companies.

The pilot stage of the SPRINT programme will end this year. The European Commission believes it should be established on a more permanent basis. It has therefore asked the Twelve to adopt a new, 5-year programme, to run until 1993, at a cost to the Community of ECU 130mn.\*

The new programme would focus on three main areas of activity. It would (1) create or consolidate, with the help of consultants, transborder networks for technology transfers between companies; (2) support projects involving the use of existing technologies in areas which are either lagging behind or facing industrial decline and (3) encourage the Twelve and the European Commission to exchange information and experiences.

EDUCATION: Taking ivory towers to company boardrooms

The European Commission wants to launch COMETT II.

Some 2,500 students and over 90 specialists from European Community universities and business and industrial enterprises were able to train in another Community country in 1987 and 1988. This cooperation between companies and universities was made possible by the COMETT programme, the first stage of which ends next year.

The European Commission sees no reason to stop there. It is therefore asking the Twelve to put up ECU 250mn.\* for COMETT II, to run from 1990 to 1994.

The Commission wants COMETT II to match more closely the needs of European companies for well-trained specialists. It also wants universities in the Community's outlying regions, such as Portugal, Ireland, Greece and the Italian Mezzogiorno, to take greater advantage of the new programme.

\* 1 ECU = UK£0.65 or IR£0.78

HEALTH: Heredity is at the root of most major diseases today

The European Commission puts forward a programme aimed at throwing more light on the problem.

With the exceptions of AIDS, infectious diseases can no longer be regarded as killers in the industrial world. Most serious diseases are now linked, partly at least, to hereditary factors. Defective genes can bring about diabetes, for example, or engender schizophrenia.

The European Commission has therefore asked the 12 European Community countries to approve a research programme aimed at achieving a better understanding of genes. The programme, to run from 1989 to 1991, would seek to localize genes with as much precision as possible, so as to make it possible to treat defective elements. The economic importance of such research is obvious, for it can lead to the development of new drugs. This fact has not been lost on the Americans and Japanese, who have already launched ambitious research projects.

The programme would cost ECU 30mn.\* Half the sum would be provided by the Community, the other half by those taking part in the various research projects - companies, universities and research institutes. Each project would involve participants from two EC countries at least. The Commission hopes small and medium-sized companies would join in.

\* 1 ECU = UK£ 0.65 or IR£0.78

SPACE: Is there room for the EC?

The European Commission envisages a Community space policy.

Space is not only the last frontier but also a fiercely competitive market. Western Europe, absent from the early years of the space race, has begun to carve out a place for itself, thanks in large part to the success of the Ariane rockets.

So far the European Community as such has remained somewhat in the background. But the European Commission believes that it has an extremely important coordinating role to play and should therefore formulate a space policy.

In a report to the Twelve, the Commission has come out in favour of wide-ranging coordination between the Community's own activities, on the one hand, and those of the various national agencies and the European Space Agency on the other. This effort at coordination would cover both research and the preparation of technical standards and regulations, especially for telecommunications, as well as training and trade policy towards the rest of the world.

LABOUR: Ireland, a striking champion

The largest number of working days lost through strikes in the European Community\* in 1986 was in Ireland. The Irish led with 374 per 1,000 employees, followed by Italy with 314, according to the EC's statistical office, Eurostat. There was least social unrest in Germany, where only one working day per 1,000 employees was lost in 1986.

Denmark was top of this particular league in 1985, when over 1,000 working days were lost through strike action. Britain held this unenviable record in 1984, the year of the miners' strike, dethroning Italy.

Strikes had their greatest impact on industry in all EC countries for which statistics are available for 1986, with one exception: in Ireland over two-thirds of the working days lost through strike action were in the services sector. The industrial sectors hardest hit in most countries were steel and mechanical engineering.

\* There are no 1986 statistics for Belgium, Denmark, Greece, Spain and Portugal.

EC FINANCES: Known frauds equal 0.5% of the Community budget

This, and other, features of the 1987 budget.

Frauds known to the European Commission on 31 December 1987 totalled nearly ECU 200mn.\*, or some 0.5% of the EC budget for 1987. This sum, which must be recovered, was roughly ECU 70mn. higher in 1986. More than half the frauds last year originated in Italy (ECU 122mn.). Germany was next, with ECU 41mn.

All the cases of fraud had to do with the farm price guarantee, which accounted for some 56% of Community expenditure, other than administrative, in 1987, or nearly ECU 23 billion. Regional aid came to ECU 2,600mn. and was equal to expenditure on the Community's social programmes.

Aid to the developing countries amounted to just over ECU 1 billion and expenditure on research and energy to a little under this amount. These, and other statistics, are to be found in a new publication on the Community's finances in 1987. Aimed at the general public, it is published by the European Commission.

\* 1 ECU = UK£0.65 or IRE0.78

TRANSPORT: When Dover will no longer be the end of the line

A report on the Channel tunnel is approved unanimously by the European Parliament.

John Marshall's report on the Channel tunnel has been adopted by the European Parliament by 204 votes to 0. It is an enthusiastic report, underlining the political as well as economic advantages the tunnel offers.

The tunnel, the British Euro-MP claims, will make travel cheaper and quicker. It will also encourage free movement of goods and persons, enlarge the horizons of the manufacturing as well as tourist sectors of the economy and, like other major infrastructure proposals before it, speed up the rate of economic development.

The tunnel will be used by the railways, to run fast trains between London, Paris, Amsterdam and Brussels, and by Euro-tunnel, the consortium whose 35-minute shuttle service between the French and British terminals will transport up to 190 cars at a time.

The report rejects criticism by environmentalists. It maintains that the shift in freight traffic from roads to rail can only benefit the environment. As for safety, no form of transport is free of danger, the report points out; the capsizing of "The Herald of Free Enterprise" was fresh proof of this. But tunnels are remarkably safe.

The Lötschberg, Simplon and Saint-Gotthard tunnels, which use the same basic technology as the one envisaged for the Channel tunnel, have not experienced the smallest incident since they were opened.

The large-scale economic development forecast for Kent and the Calais area will not be at the expense of the surrounding regions, according to the report, given the sheer scale of the project. Newcastle can be expected to benefit from the tunnel as well as Glasgow and Birmingham, and Cologne as well as Lyon, thanks to the growth in intra-Community trade which will follow its completion.

There are more immediate advantages for the Community's heavy industry, which can expect numerous orders. According to estimates, which Mr Marshall considers too prudent, the volume of goods transported by rail should rise to some 85mn. tonnes in 1993, as compared to 60mn. tonnes at present. Similarly, the number of passengers should rise from 48mn. to 84mn.

"Future generations," Mr Marshall proclaims, "will not ask why the tunnel was built but rather why it was not built earlier."

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A great deal of water has flowed through the Channel since 1802, when Albert Mathieu submitted the first project. In 1867 Queen Victoria and Napoleon III gave their backing to a project presented in the framework of the Paris world's fair. Companies were set up in Britain and France to build the tunnel but Parliament vetoed the project in 1882 - and again in 1930.

Then, in 1955, the British government declared a Channel tunnel could no longer be viewed as a threat to national security. Even so, the idea received a further setback with the first oil shock and the subsequent cutbacks in public spending.

The project was revived in 1982 when a joint study group, set up by the British and French governments, came out in favour of a rail tunnel. The project submitted by the Euro-tunnel consortium was adopted on 12 February 1986 and a Franco-British Treaty signed and ratified on 29 July 1987.

The dream could now become reality.

#### INFLATION: Slightly higher in 1988

Consumer prices rose by 0.3% in June.

Inflation is slightly higher this year in all EC countries except Belgium, France, Greece and Ireland, where it is below the 1987 level. In the 12-nation Community as a whole, the consumer price index rose by 3% in the 12 months to June 1988, as compared to a rise of 2.8% by the end of June 1987.

The inflation rate was higher in the United States at 3.9% but much lower in Japan, where it stood at 0.2%. Among Western European countries, both Austria (+1.4%) and Switzerland (+2%) fared better than the Community, while a number were worse off: Norway (+7.2%), Sweden (+6.4%) and Finland (+5.1%).

Within the Community itself the Dutch were the most successful in keeping price rises down to a minimum: their inflation rate was a mere 0.9% (as compared to -0.4% last year). Greece remained bottom of the class, although it managed to bring its inflation rate down to 11.8%, from last year's 18.1%.

BRIEFLY

**A YOGHURT BY ANY OTHER NAME ... :** When is a yoghurt not a yoghurt? When it is deep-frozen, say the French. Not so, says the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg. The label must show clearly, however, that the yoghurt is deep-frozen but made in the same way as fresh yoghurt.

The Court ruled in favour of a company which has patented a process for deep-freezing yoghurt. It argued that the French legislation amounted to a trade barrier.

**WORKER EXCHANGES:** Nearly 8,000 young workers, half of them women, have taken part during the first three years of a 5-year Community programme aimed at encouraging exchanges between workers. The programme's success is a step towards the single European market. It has both facilitated the free movement of persons and shown that it can effectively meet the needs and aspirations of today's young people.

**THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT DECLARES ITSELF A SMOKELESS ZONE:** All forms of tobacco are being banned from all meetings of the European Parliament from September 1. The ban will be applied in both Strasbourg, where the once-monthly plenary sessions are held, and Brussels, where all Parliamentary committees meet.

An announcement to this effect was made by the President, Lord Plumb, himself an inveterate cigar smoker. Those unable to kick the habit will have to smoke in the privacy of their offices or in the bars, pressroom and the part of the restaurant set aside for this purpose.

**MANY MPs FACE A CRUEL CHOICE:** The European Parliament has asked the Member States to amend the 1976 electoral law, which allows MPs to sit in both their national legislatures and the European Parliament. The Euro-MPs adopted the report drafted by their British colleague, Mr Geoffrey Hoon, because they do not want part-time MPs. However, Euro-MPs who also sit in their national Parliaments will be able to retain their seat in the European Parliament until the next European elections.



TO OUR COLLEAGUES OF THE EUROPEAN PRESS

Many of you have already filled in our questionnaire. Those of you in France, Germany and Belgium led the way, followed closely by our colleagues in the Netherlands, Portugal and Britain. Those in Italy and Spain have lagged behind, unless it is the postal service which is to blame.

We are reprinting the questionnaire for those of you who either did not receive it or overlooked it.\*

We shall analyse the results of our survey, in the hope it will help us improve our service.

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Do you find EUROFOCUS useful?
2. How many articles do you use on average in a year? Are they used, whether in full or in part, as received? Or do you edit them?
3. Our texts are from 15 to 60 lines in length. Would you prefer
  - more long articles?
  - more short articles?
  - the present mix?
4. Here is a list of 15 subjects normally covered by EUROFOCUS. Could you rank them from 1 to 15, in order of preference?
 

Social affairs	The economy	Internal market
Education	Transport	Technology
Regional issues	Environment	Agriculture
Women	Foreign trade	A People's Europe
Industry	Health	Research
5. Are there additional subjects you would like us to cover? Do you have any suggestions or criticisms?
6. We would welcome the following information, which is needed to update our files:
  - a) The title of your publication:
  - b) Address:
  - c) The name of the editor or manager:
  - d) Frequency of publication:
  - e) Circulation:
  - f) The readership you aim at:

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