

A8330

COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES
Directorate-General Audiovisual Media, Information,
Communication, Culture



a newssheet for journalists

Weekly N° 10/93

8 - 15 March 1993

SUMMARY

- LIBRARY
- 2 EUROPE: East Europeans still rate the Community highly
The latest Eurobarometer survey shows that a majority of them would like to see their country join the EC.
 - 4 ECONOMIC RECOVERY: One billion ECUs for major infrastructure projects
The first tangible outcome of the Edinburgh summit.
 - PURCHASING POWER: Europeans are not as rich as the Americans and Japanese
Luxembourg leads the way in the Community - while Greece brings up the rear.
 - 5 FISHERIES: Minimum prices for imported white fish
European Commission wants to halt the fall in prices.
 - 6 INDUSTRY: Another testing time for the European steel industry
50,000 fewer jobs - the Community wants to soften the blow.
 - 7 MARITIME TRANSPORT: EC acts to prevent oil pollution
An "ecological" tanker and Commission guidelines.
 - 8 EASTERN EUROPE: A Eurobarometer poll finds that ...
... in the former Soviet Union a relative majority is against the market economy.

Mailed from Brussels X

The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the official views of the institutions of the Community.
Reproduction authorized.
200 rue de la Loi • T-120 7/56 • 1049 Brussels • Belgium • Tel.: 299.90.52 • Fax: 299.92.08

europaforjournalists

EUROPE: East Europeans still rate the Community highly

The latest Eurobarometer survey shows that a majority of them would like to see their country join the EC.

Seven people out of ten living in the former Soviet Union and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe have already heard about the European Community. An overwhelming majority of them (78%) would like their country to join the EC, now or in the future, as compared to the mere 4% who oppose membership.

What the latest Eurobarometer survey of public opinion in 18 Central and East European countries shows is that their populations still believe in the building of Europe, sometimes even more strongly than people living in the EC itself.

Of course this comprehensive and detailed survey also reveals attitudes which sometimes belie this infatuation. Thus only 8% of the people of Central and Eastern Europe "often" think of themselves as Europeans; another 24% do so "sometimes" and a massive 61% "never". The former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia is the only country a majority of whose citizens (36%) "often" think of themselves as Europeans - as compared to the 22% who do so "sometimes" and the 29% who "never" think of themselves as Europeans. Romania and Albania are next, while those who feel "least European" are to be found in the Ukraine, European Russia and, curiously enough, the Czech Republic. As for their views on the Community, which a large majority would like to join, they are positive for 44% of Central and East Europeans and negative for only 4% of them, although as many as 29% are neutral in their views.

It is true that the information on the EC available to them is both vague and fragmentary. Fewer than one in ten can name one of the three cities in which the most important EC institutions are located*, with a maximum of 25% in Romania and Slovakia and a minimum of 3% in Russia. It is hardly surprising, in view of this, that no more than 22% of those polled claimed to be "rather" or even "very interested" in the EC, its institutions and policies, while 71% stated they were not very much or not at all interested. How can one reconcile this indifference to the desire to be a part of the European Community?

It should be pointed out that the majority of the inhabitants of Central and Eastern Europe realize that full EC membership is not just around the corner - and might not even be desirable for their country. The fact is that only 17% of them want membership as from now, while 24% would rather wait five years, 15% some ten years and 18% even longer, when they do not refuse membership altogether. Thus 70% of those living in the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia favour immediate membership, as do some 65% of Romanians and 43% of Slovaks and Poles. At the other end of the spectrum are the 2% of the populations of Belarus, the Ukraine and Russia who favour early membership. But what Central and East Europeans particularly expect of full membership is an improvement in their living standards and other economic and practical benefits, such as financial aid, freedom to travel and the disappearance of all shortages. But they also envisage the drawbacks to membership, even if their fears are weaker than their hopes, such as economic domination, unemployment and political domination.

While waiting for ties between their country and the EC to be strengthened, a very large number of Central and East Europeans envisage reinforcing them directly and personally. Thus nearly 17 million of them are ready to leave their countries in order to live and work in Western Europe, while some 3 million are determined to do just that.

Infatuation with the European Community is a reality, even if economic difficulties and political preoccupations have something to do with it. Thus 56% of those polled claimed that human rights are not always respected in their respective countries. However, there is no reason to believe that this infatuation will not gradually turn into a genuine European consciousness.

* Brussels, Luxembourg and Strasbourg.

ECONOMIC RECOVERY: One billion ECUs for major infrastructure projects

The first tangible outcome of the Edinburgh summit.

The moves to promote economic recovery agreed on by the European Community's heads of state and government at their Edinburgh summit in December are taking shape. The European Investment Bank (EIB) decided on February 23 to lend roughly one billion ECUs* to finance 14 major infrastructure projects in seven EC countries: Britain, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain. The loans are being made under the ECU 5 billion temporary lending facility which the Twelve envisaged last December and now known as the "Edinburgh lending facility".

These initial loans to help promote economic recovery cover major projects already under way: the EIB has sought to achieve maximum effectiveness by accelerating their completion. The financing in question relates to sections of motorways, international rail links, airports, gas and electricity transmission networks, telephone networks and plant for wastewater treatment. The EIB can finance more than 50% of the cost of these projects.

PURCHASING POWER: Europeans are not as rich as the Americans and Japanese

Luxembourg leads the way in the Community - while Greece brings up the rear.

With 15,432 units of purchasing power per head, Europeans living in the 12-nation European Community produced less wealth in 1991 than the Americans and Japanese, who managed 20,847 units and 17,941 units respectively, according to figures published by the EC's statistical office, Eurostat, at the end of February.

Among the EC's Member States, Luxembourg led the way with 19,636 units of purchasing power per head; it was not far behind the United States. Germany (West) was next, with 18,345 units, ahead of Japan. It was followed by France with 17,250 units, Denmark - 16,576 - and Belgium - 16,193. Italy - 15,890 - and the Netherlands - 15,551 - were just above the Community average, while Britain was just below it - 14,732. The four remaining EC countries were well below the average: Spain, with 11,964 units, followed by Ireland - 10,815; Portugal - 9,064 and Greece - 7,397.

* 1 ECU = UK£0.83 or IR£0.80

FISHERIES: Minimum prices for imported white fish

European Commission wants to halt the fall in prices.

Prices of cod, haddock, angler and hake should recover in principle to more "normal" levels, after the recent drop in wholesale prices in the European Community of some 15% to 30%. The fact is the European Commission decided on February 25 to fix minimum prices for imports of white fish from non-EC countries, in order to halt the sharp fall in prices, which had aroused the anger of EC fishermen and led to violent demonstrations in France.

Breton fishermen had directed their anger indiscriminately against all "imported" fish, including fish from other EC countries, although the cut-price fish in fact was from Eastern Europe, particularly Russia. Moreover, it could be that the fish in question had entered the EC as of Icelandic or Norwegian origin, given that EC tariffs on fish from these two countries are much lower. If so, such fraud also calls into question the effectiveness of Community health standards.

These cut-price imports have been taking place at a time when the EC fisheries industry finds itself in a critical situation. There is not an unlimited quantity of fish to be caught. Worse, sales of fresh fish are falling in the Community, as a result of the general economic crisis. In addition, imports are having a major impact on prices in the EC, given that between 30% and 40% of the white fish consumed in the 12-nation Community comes from the rest of the world.

The minimum prices set by the Commission and in force since February 26 for a four-month period ending June 30, are equal to the reference prices for 1993 set by the Commission in order to allow the Twelve to keep the market under surveillance. If import prices are substantially different from the reference prices, the Commission can intervene, after consulting the industry and the Twelve. This is what it has just done, even while undertaking to alert the Icelandic, Norwegian and Russian authorities to the problem.

Should these measures prove inadequate, the EC could limit its imports of fish.

INDUSTRY: Another testing time for the European steel industry
50,000 fewer jobs - the Community wants to soften the blow.

Once again the European steel industry finds itself facing a painful choice. After having cut back its workforce by half between 1975 and 1990, it must now lay off some 50,000 workers - nearly one in seven - by the end of next year, and by the end of 1995 at the latest in exceptional cases. This diagnosis, presented by the European Commission in mid-February, was taken over by the EC's industry ministers on February 25. They set out the conditions for this fresh "restructuring" at the Community level. The companies themselves, rather than the European Commission or EC ministers, will have to decide which plants are to be closed down; but the EC will provide regional and social assistance in order to soften the loss of employment and to facilitate redeployment.

Given the overall economic situation, with a sharp fall in the demand for steel; the loss of the American market, following the "retaliatory" measures decided in by Washington and the substantial increase in cheap imports from Eastern Europe, there are not enough outlets for the Community's steel industry. The result is a surplus of EC steel. EC ministers have given the industry until 30 September 1993 to set out its intentions and present a firm and detailed programme of mill closures.

The Twelve are looking for an orderly retreat by the European steel industry. The European Commission, for its part, will seek to prevent a beggar-my-neighbour policy. The EC's competition commissioner, Karel Van Miert, has made it clear that all EC countries will have to pull together. The Commission will keep a strict control of state aids to the industry, in order to dissuade Member States from solving their problems at the expense of their neighbours.

EC ministers envisage special Community assistance for the retraining of workers who have been laid off, as well as social and regional assistance for the reconversion of areas dominated by the steel industry. They could take the necessary decisions in May. The Member States will also contribute financially to these measures.

Last but not least, the European Commission will negotiate with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, to secure price increases as regards their steel exports to the Community. If this is not possible it will limit imports by means of tariff quotas, at low rates of duty.

MARITIME TRANSPORT: The EC acts to prevent oil pollution

An "ecological" tanker and Commission guidelines.

Following the recent oil spills in the Shetland Islands and off the Spanish coast, the European Community is haunted by just one question - how to prevent further oil pollution. The elements of a response were provided by shipbuilders and the European Commission at the end of February.

Five shipyards and four EC countries have joined forces to plan a tanker whose name, "E3", is a programme in itself, for it stands for "European, Economic and Ecological". In planning the new tanker the European consortium, Euroyards, has banked on safety. Its President, Alain Grill, met the EC's industrial commissioner, Martin Bangemann, on February 23, in order to discuss the effect of this initiative.

The next day the European transport and environment commissioners, MM. Abel Matutes and Yannis Paleokrassas respectively, presented the Commission's guidelines for improving maritime safety at the political level. The Commission does not want to propose new, specifically European standards, it would like the Twelve to respect, in similar fashion, the rules laid down by the International Maritime Organization at the global level.

This means, as far as the Commission is concerned, that all the Community's maritime states must apply uniformly the principle of the responsibility of the State in which the vessel is registered, as well as the rules regarding the controls to be carried out in the ports the vessels call at. The Commission also thinks it necessary to modernize the equipment needed to inform vessels and ports and for the surveillance of maritime traffic. In addition, it will propose new rules to the competent international bodies.

The Commission also plans to propose to the Twelve measures aimed at improving the training of ships' crews.

EASTERN EUROPE: A Eurobarometer poll finds that ...

... in the former Soviet Union a relative majority is against the market economy.

Despite all difficulties, more than two people out of three in the countries which are not a part of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) favour a market economy, with the exception of Latvia and the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia. However, a relative majority of the inhabitants of the CIS, which consists of the former Soviet republics, with the exception of the Baltic states and Georgia, is opposed to it. Changes in attitudes to the economy are very significant since last year. Russia's economic reform programme clearly is proving painful; hence the reversal in public opinion. The proportion of those favouring the Western model has declined from 42% to 37%, of those opposed it has risen from 34% to 44%. But the turnaround has been the most spectacular in Latvia. To the question: "Do you personally feel that the creation of an economy that is largely free from state control, is a good thing for your country's future?" some 63% had answered "Yes" during an earlier survey, while only 20% had answered "No". This time round the figures were very different: 48% claimed to be against a market economy and barely 36% in favour of it. In Romania, on the other hand, the proportion of those against fell from 45% to 24%, while those in favour rose from 40% to 65%.

In the former Soviet empire as a whole, those who believe in the benefits of a market economy are in a slight majority (44%), as compared to those who do not. Whatever their views on this issue, the inhabitants of Central and Eastern Europe wish to see their country recover from its current stagnation; 44% are of the view that their country's economic reforms are going too slowly. 12% in fact spontaneously claimed there are no economic reforms under way. Only 11% think that the reforms are proceeding at a satisfactory pace, while 16% find the pace too fast.

Privatisation is on the economic reform agenda everywhere. Impressive starts have been made in many countries in selling off shops and restaurants to the private sector. The retail trade has blossomed in most countries, driving food shortages off the streets. The privatisation of larger companies has already started, the favoured method being their transfer to the citizens as a whole through an innovative voucher give-away scheme. Here, too, the results of the survey seem to contradict the doubts which surround the market economy, given that almost half (45%) of the people in the region as a whole think that the process of privatising their country's state enterprises is going too slowly, as compared to the 12% for whom it is progressing at "about the right speed" and the 15% who find the pace "too fast". People in the former Soviet Union are more likely than people in Central Europe to be impatient at the speed of privatisation, perhaps because the process is less advanced here.

Rome was not built in a day, however, and the market economy cannot hope to win over everyone, especially if one takes into account the serious economic difficulties, the inevitable disillusionment and, perhaps, the remnants of the former ideological distrust of the market economy. Despite all this, the majority of the people of both Central and Eastern Europe still want the economic reforms and the privatisation of their state enterprises to succeed.