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Mailed from Brussels X

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SINGLE MARKET: The European Commission takes a stronger stand ...
... against the continuing border checks on people.

Identity checks at the European Community's internal borders did not end on 1 January of this year, the date set for the completion of the single market. If there were no good reasons for this, the motives at least were understandable. But the European Commission has now begun to have serious doubts as to the willingness of the Twelve to eliminate such checks quickly - by the end of the year, for example. And as it is not resigned to the possibility that the free movement of persons may be put off indefinitely, it has toughened its stand. It has warned the Twelve, in a declaration published on June 3, that it would take "the necessary initiatives" if they did not make substantial progress in the coming months.

The Commission is concerned at the contents of a recent report of the EC Council of Ministers. Prepared at the request of the EC heads of state or government for their "summit" in Copenhagen, on June 21 and 22, the report gives the state of play as regards the free movement of people within the Community - but it mentions neither a precise undertaking by the Twelve as regards identity checks nor a deadline for ending them.

If the issue of principle, raised especially by Britain but also Denmark and Ireland, who want to continue checks at their borders on travellers from non-EC countries, is left to one side, three major obstacles remain, according to the report by EC ministers. To begin with, the convention on asylum, concluded more than three years ago, has been adopted definitively by only six of the 12 EC countries. Next, the convention on the crossing of the Community's external borders has been blocked for two years now, because of the dispute between Britain and Spain over Gibraltar. Finally, the European Information System, designed to enable national border police to cooperate with each other, is taking shape only slowly. The fact is that the conditions needed to create confidence among the Twelve in the face of illegal immigration, false asylum seekers and organized crime do not exist as yet.

The European Commission is looking for a quantum leap at the Copenhagen summit. Otherwise

EMPLOYMENT: "European" limits on working hours

The Twelve decide to end abuses.

No more than 48 working hours a week on average, including overtime. This is one of the measures to limit working hours contained in a directive ("European law") adopted by EC ministers in early June. This might seem ridiculous to many Europeans, at the end of the 20th century. Yet 16% of British workers and 8% of their Irish colleagues were working more than 48 hours a week in 1989, the latest year for which statistics are available.

The directive will therefore have a certain impact in the U.K., which has no legislation in this area, even if the British government secured the right to authorize workers to put in more than 48 hours, if they choose to do so. In Denmark, which also has no legislation in this field, it also will be necessary to introduce it. In other EC countries, where the law allows people to work more than 48 hours if they put in overtime, the directive will mean an improvement. This is the case as regards Ireland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Portugal.

The directive, which must be submitted to the European Parliament before its definitive adoption by the Twelve, guarantees in addition a minimum daily rest period of 11 hours in a row. Only in Denmark and Spain does existing legislation meet this requirement in full. The directive also provides for 24 hours off a week at least, without a break. All national laws contain a similar provision, with the exception of British law. But if these 24 hours are added to the 11 hours each day, you arrive at 35 hours, which only the laws of Spain and Luxembourg guarantee workers.

The directive also gives workers the right to four weeks' paid holiday a year. But there is no such legislation in Britain and Italy; German law provides for only 18 days while workers in Ireland are entitled to three weeks and those in Portugal to 22 days. Finally, the directive limits night work to eight hours at a stretch on average.

SINGLE MARKET: A programme this autumn to keep up the momentum
European Commission makes fresh suggestions.

The problem of identity checks at the EC's internal borders no doubt represents the most spectacular example of the delays in completing the single market (see p. 2). But it is not the only one. There remain all sorts of gaps, which are prejudicial to the people and companies in the EC and which prevent, to some extent, the single market from having the expected impact: greater freedom and higher levels of economic activity and jobs. With a view to solving these problems, without getting bogged down in technical details, and in order to enable the single market to operate effectively, the European Commission plans to submit this autumn a strategic programme for the management and development of the internal market. It indicated the outlines of this programme in early June, in order to be able to consult the 12 EC governments, employers organizations and trade unions in time.

As of May 11, 18 "European laws" needed to complete the single market still awaited adoption. Of the 214 "laws" already in force, only 101 were being implemented in all 12 EC countries. But the proper functioning of the single market also requires effective cooperation between the Twelve and the European Commission, as well as the existence of sanctions and the possibility of an appeal when the rules of the game are flouted.

After having noted the reactions of all interested parties, and received their comments, the Commission plans to draw up a programme likely to maintain the momentum and degree of mobilization which was evident during the building of the single market. It will involve keeping an eye on the effectiveness of EC legislation and examining its economic impact. It will also be necessary to give this legislation wider publicity and control its implementation, by fostering mutual confidence between the 12 governments. And this without losing sight of the fact that the single market forms a whole, according to the Commission.

ENVIRONMENT: A cleaner dip in EC waters ...

... even if 19% of the beaches which were tested still failed to meet EC standards.

The seas around Greece were the cleanest in Europe last summer: 97% of the littoral waters that were analyzed conformed to the rules laid down by the European Community. Denmark was next, with 95%, just ahead of Ireland (94%). German bathers were in a less happy situation: only 76% of German beaches passed the test, as compared to 79% of British beaches and 87% of French beaches. The results for coastal regions were rather encouraging on the whole, with 89% of beaches meeting EC standards. But the results were less encouraging as regards inland waters: only 63% of lakes and rivers met the criteria laid down by EC legislation. Greece and Ireland received full marks (although for only 4 or 5 places under supervision), followed by Denmark, with a score of 92% for 109 places that were checked. It is best to be prudent if you bathe in Germany, where only 54% of the 1,841 places checked out passed the test; in Belgium, which did hardly better with 60% of the 85 places under surveillance and in Spain, with 63% for 301 places checked out.

One reason for these differences is that coastal waters are renewed more quickly than inland waters. On the whole Community waters meet the standards laid down by the EC directive of 1976 in 81% of cases. This "European law" sets levels which Member States must make sure are not exceeded, in order to ensure that bathing waters meet certain minimum quality standards - whether as regards the presence of coliform bacteria, particularly fecal coliform, salmonella and enterovirus, or the colour and transparency of the water and the presence of mineral oils and phenols. Tests must be carried out at least twice a month during the holiday season and the results set out each year in a report on the quality of bathing waters.

The tenth edition of this report, which has just appeared, offers the opportunity to look at the results achieved in the last 10 years. To begin with, the number of beaches at which tests are carried out has more than doubled, having risen from roughly 7,000 in 1982 to 16,000 last year. As regards the quality of bathing waters, the proportion of beaches failing to meet EC standards has fallen from 30% in 1982 to 19%. This substantial improvement is due to the considerable funds spent by the Member States, particularly in order to limit the discharge of liquid waste near beaches used for swimming. Such action must be strengthened by the implementation of Community legislation regarding the treatment of residual urban waters.

One must remember, however, that all that glitters is not gold. To begin with, the results set out in the report can be misleading, given that tests for some of the parameters can be carried out in a number of ways under the provisions of the European law in question. This very diversity, while not necessarily invalidating the published results, can make comparisons between Member States misleading. What is more, the same law requires that certain minimum standards be met; but at the same time it also proposes "indicative levels" which are much more stringent, and represent quality objectives Member States should try to reach. But the differences between the required and indicative levels can be substantial on occasion. As regards the total quantity of coliform bacteria, the required level is a maximum of 10,000 for 100 ml., while the indicative level is a maximum of 500. In the case of fecal coliform bacteria, the two levels are 2,000 and 100 per 100 ml. respectively. In accordance with Article 7 of the directive, some Member States have already adopted legislation setting levels which are far stricter than the required levels contained in the directive itself. The European Commission intends to modify the directive this year, in order to take account of scientific advances in this field.

ENVIRONMENT: Ground rules for Community policies ...

... which will have to incorporate the environmental dimension more effectively.

If the European Community is to have a genuine environmental policy, its demands must be met during the preparation and implementation of other European Community policies. This is why the European Commission has just adopted a text setting out a series of "mechanisms" designed to reach this objective, and at the same time allow its own departments to "assess better the impact of the decisions they propose on the environment." What is involved is examining the eventual repercussions on the environment of all proposals; describing and justifying the resulting effects, costs and environmental benefits and examining regularly the Commission's contribution to the integration of environmental considerations in Community policies.

In concrete terms, each of the Commission's 23 divisions will choose an official, whose task it will be to see to it that the environmental effects of legislative proposals are taken into account. At the same time, a special unit in the environmental division will coordinate the entire operation. And, as is only natural, the Commission itself will give itself an environmental code of conduct, to be applied particularly as regards its policies in the fields of purchases, waste management and energy conservation.

The code will round off the action already undertaken by the Commission, which last year made substantial progress towards integrating environmental concerns in fields as varied as transport, energy, industrial competitiveness and employment and during the review of the regulations governing the EC's structural funds.

POSTAL SERVICES: No early liberalization

The Commission has submitted its proposals, but the Twelve are not ready to give up their monopoly on postal services.

"In the long run, no monopoly on postal services can escape the demands of competition, if only for technical reasons", the EC Commissioner for industry, Martin Bangemann, declared recently, adding, "If postal charges are too high, or delivery times for letters are too long, customers will switch to fax machines and personal computers."

But the Twelve have turned a deaf ear to Mr. Bangemann and appear unwilling to accept the break-up of their monopoly on postal services. All the Member States are agreed on the need to maintain a "universal" postal service, so that mail can be delivered throughout the Community's territory, and take the view that certain services must be set aside for the postal monopolies, in order to ensure their profitability.

It is precisely over the question of the services to be set aside and, consequently, over the sectors to be liberalized, that agreement has proved difficult. In the hopes of getting things moving again, the European Commission has just indicated the guidelines for the development of postal services, in the framework of a communication to the EC Council of Ministers, which sets out the state of play as regards the consultation procedure launched during the adoption of the Green Paper in May 1992, a procedure which is not over yet. The Commission plans to present to the Council, before the end of the year, draft directives which would take into account the need to maintain a balance between liberalizing the postal services and continuing to provide a "universal" service. It is equally necessary to proceed with technical harmonization, as well as negotiations between the various postal authorities as regards the final cost of transborder mail. In any case, the Commission wants to stick to a consensual dialogue based on the Green Paper, and has already rejected the idea of looking for a solution by turning to the Court of Justice.

It is worth pointing out that the stakes are very high: the postal services account for 1.3% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employ more than 1.7 million people. "They are a key factor", Mr. Bangemann has pointed out, "in trade and in communications between European citizens. They favour the cohesion of Member States as well as our industrial competitiveness."

As for the Commissioner responsible for competition policy, Karel Van Miert, he has spoken out in favour of liberalization: "It benefits customers as regards price, choice and quality." True, quality varies from one EC country to another; in some countries, including Britain, Denmark and Ireland, some 90% of letters are delivered the next day; in other countries the percentage is no higher than 15. Mail to be delivered in another Member State takes twice as long on average, while 40% of mail for delivery within the country of posting takes three days.

UNEMPLOYMENT: A further rise in April ...

... to 10.4%, as compared to 10.3% in March.

Unemployment in the European Community stood at 10.4% as against 10.3% in March, according to estimates published by Eurostat, the EC's statistical office, in early June. Since April 1992, when it stood at 9.4% for the Community as a whole, the level of unemployment has risen in all 12 EC countries. The sharpest increases have been recorded in Spain, Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands.

Spain has the highest level of unemployment in the EC, at 20.7%. It is followed by Ireland (18.4%), Britain (11.4%) and France (10.6%). Italy is close to the Community average with 10.4%. Next come Belgium (9.2%), the Netherlands (7.8% in March), Germany (5.4%) and Luxembourg (2.5%). There are no precise figures for Greece and Portugal.

In the 12 months to April, male unemployment rose more rapidly - from 7.9 to 9.1% - than female - from 11.5 to 12.3%.

CULTURE: Frontier-free theatre

The Twelve want contemporary hits translated.

Contemporary plays often are a hit in their own country but fail to reach audiences in other EC countries because of language barriers. Plays written in the less widely used EC languages are especially hard hit by them. The fact is that the work of a modern playwright is more likely to be staged in several countries if he or she writes in English or French, rather than in Danish or Greek. In order to help contemporary European drama reach a wider audience, and offer theatre goers a wider choice, the Community's arts ministers decided in mid-May to use EC funds to subsidize translations of successful plays.

As a result, each year several plays by living European playwrights will be translated into at least two EC languages. A similar scheme was introduced a few years ago for novels and collections of poetry. The Twelve have asked the European Commission to submit proposals.