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Mailed from Brussels X

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200 rue de la Loi • T-120 7/56 • 1049 Brussels • Belgium • Tel.: 299.90.52 • Fax: 299.92.08

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CARS: Fewer Japanese cars in 1993 than forecast

Brussels and Tokyo agree on new import figures.

The number of cars sold in the 12-nation European Community this year is expected to fall by 15.9% as compared to 1992. EC imports of Japanese cars should fall even more to around 980,000 vehicles, a drop of 18.5%. The European Commission and Japanese government reached agreement in early September on these figures, adjusting the forecast adopted last April by Brussels and Tokyo, which envisaged 1,089,000 vehicles, a drop of only 9.4% as compared to 1992. In April both Europeans and Japanese based themselves on a fall of 6.5% in total car sales. But the fall recorded in recent months led the European Commission to ask Tokyo to revise earlier estimates downwards.

Under an arrangement concluded by the EC and Japan in July 1991, Brussels and Tokyo must agree each year on the number of Japanese cars to be imported into the 12-nation Community as a whole and into each of the five countries that had set a ceiling on Japanese imports before 1993: Britain, France, Italy, Portugal and Spain. This arrangement guarantees the free movement of cars since January 1 of this year and the complete liberalization of the EC market for Japanese cars after 1999. In order to cushion the effects on European manufacturers, the arrangement provides for the progressive opening up of these five protected markets between 1993 and 1999. It leaves to one side, however, Japanese cars made within the EC - in Britain, in this case.

Imports of Japanese cars will fall this year in Spain and, if slightly, in France. Imports will rise somewhat in Italy and Portugal and show a clear increase in Britain, the only EC country in which car sales have held up. Japanese import penetration will remain unchanged in the EC as a whole, however.

In settling the problem this year, Europeans and Japanese have developed a procedure aimed at adjusting future forecasts more easily, should this prove necessary.

TECHNOLOGY: 7,000 students to receive "European" training in firms
They will be taking part in the 1993 COMETT programme.

The 1993 COMETT* programme will involve more than 7,000 students, who will receive training in firms located in another EC country than their own; nearly 500 courses in technology, aimed at engineers and researchers nominated by their companies and, finally, as many as 11,000 private and public bodies. The beneficiaries of this Community-wide programme were selected by the European Commission at the end of July.

Launched in 1986, the COMETT programme operates through associations of universities and firms in all EC countries, which bring together bodies located in neighbouring regions or interested in the same sector of activity. COMETT allows technology students to gain practical experience and engineers to keep abreast of theoretical developments. The aim of the programme is to provide European industry with the highly qualified personnel which it often lacks by offering students better openings.

COMETT entered its second stage in 1990; it will last until the end of 1994 and will bring it ECU 230m.* in Community funds. The lion's share of these funds will go to new manufacturing technologies, followed by the environment, information technologies and town planning.

* COMMunity programme for Education and Training in Technology

** 1 ECU = UK£0.77 or IR£0.82.

SINGLE MARKET: 5,000 customs officers received a "European" training last year
The 1992 report of the EC's MATTHAEUS programme.

Last year more than 5,000 customs officers from the 12 EC countries benefitted from the MATTHAEUS programme, according to the programme's annual report, published by the European Commission at the end of July. The programme was launched by the Commission in 1990 in order to give a "European" training to as many customs officers as possible.

The fact is that in the single market, which has been in operation since January 1, customs officers no longer work for only their national authorities; they now have the task of safeguarding the EC's external frontiers. They must implement "European" laws, and in the same way as far as possible, whatever the country in which they work. Hence the value of a programme which gives customs officers a chance to work in another EC country. This is just what 394 of them did last year, and as many as 1,419 since the MATTHAEUS programme was set up. Their numbers will be swelled by another 400 this year.

The programme also makes it possible to round off the "European" training given customs officers by offering them an opportunity to attend seminars and by improving the quality of the training they receive in their national establishments. Finally, 4,637 customs officers followed language courses in 1992, so that they could communicate more easily with their colleagues from other EC countries.

REGIONAL AID: The first projects under the Cohesion Fund are adopted
Financial support for the four EC countries that are the least well-off.

One of the most tangible effects of the Maastricht Treaty can already be felt, even though the Treaty itself has not yet come into force, for it still awaits ratification by Germany. This is the financial help that is being offered to the four EC countries that are the least well-off: Ireland, Greece, Spain and Portugal. The European Commission adopted, in July and early September, the first 22 projects to be financed by the interim cohesion instrument, which foreshadows the definitive Cohesion fund provided for by the Maastricht Treaty.

With its 1993 budget of ECU 1,560m.*, the cohesion instrument must finance major infrastructure projects in transport and the environment. The temporary instrument and the Cohesion Fund will pay out some ECU 15,150m. in all until 1999.

The first projects to be approved total nearly ECU 300m. and are located in Ireland, Spain and Portugal. Seventeen of them are in the transport field, and include the ring road for Madrid. The five remaining projects are in the field of environmental protection, with the quality of water receiving priority.

* 1 ECU = UK£0.77 or IR£0.82

EMPLOYMENT: The labourer is worthy of his hire ...

... but it must be fair, in the European Commission's view.

The problem of low wages is one that is encountered throughout the European Community. Unfortunately there is no miracle solution nor a system for deciding which wages can serve as a model.

The European Commission, even while pointing out that it has no intention of proposing Community legislation in this field, has nevertheless set out its views on the matter. It has done so in order to stress the right of all workers, and the most vulnerable in particular, to a fair wage.

"The concept of a fair wage implies that all workers receive, for work done, wages which, in the context of the society in which they live and work, are fair and allow them a decent standard of living."

To this end the Commission has laid down four principles, which must be met in order to guarantee fair wages.

The search for fair wages must be considered, firstly, as an integral part of a process leading to greater economic and social cohesion. Secondly, one must not forget that the Community's future rests on a high level of productivity and high quality jobs. This implies increased investment, not only in capital goods but also education and training. Thirdly, wages are set by factors which are both social and economic. Discriminatory practices in the matter of wages should be eliminated.

And last but not least, attitudes as regards workers who traditionally are poorly paid must be reassessed, within the framework of the fight against discrimination and for equality of opportunity.

The principle according to which all work must be fairly remunerated comes within the scope of the EC charter of workers' fundamental rights, but its place is, above all, in the line of the Treaty of Rome, and the points of view of the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee.

COURT OF JUSTICE: Free movement of workers

Restricting the period of validity of contracts for foreign language university assistants is discriminatory, under the EC Treaty.

Pilar Allue, Carmel Mary Coonan, Susanne Herman Barta, Beatrice Sellinger, Rosalba Del Maestro and Gillian Mansfield had two things in common: they were nationals of European Community countries and had held the post of university assistant in foreign languages in the Italian universities of Venice and Parma between 1980 and 1986. They also shared the misfortune of being told, at the beginning of the 1986/87 academic year, that the two establishments had decided not to renew their contracts. Under a provision of the presidential order dealing with foreign language assistants it was possible to draw up contracts for a one-year period, and then to renew them annually for a maximum of five years. The Italian government found the provision perfectly valid, given that it ensured the proper management of the country's universities.

The university assistants took their cases to the EC Court of Justice in Luxembourg, which has now ruled in their favour. The Court has taken the view that if it is true that "the provisions of the Treaty do not oppose the adoption by Member States of indiscriminately applicable measures aimed at ensuring the proper management of their universities", such measures nevertheless must appear "appropriate and necessary to reach their objective". If, for example, teaching requirements do not exceed a fixed period, nothing in Community law prevents a Member State from entering into contracts limited to the period in question with university assistants in foreign languages. However, contracts which are supposed to meet continuing teaching needs, as is the case with languages, whose study is obligatory, or languages that, generally speaking, are much in demand, must be concluded for an indefinite period of time.

This should allow today's "wandering scholars" to settle down in greater security and, who knows, perhaps even put down roots.

CULTURE: The 1994 Kaleidoscope programme

European Commission sets out the conditions for taking part in it.

The Kaleidoscope programme was set up in 1991, with the aim of promoting (1) greater public access to and familiarity with the culture and history of the European peoples and (2) artistic and cultural cooperation between professional circles. For 1994 the Kaleidoscope programme is organized around three main lines of action: cultural events, the encouragement of artistic and cultural creation, and cultural cooperation in the form of networks. The programme is open to projects and events involving participants from three Member States, as well as partners and nationals of countries with which the EC has signed association agreements containing cultural clauses. These countries are Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.

As regards cultural events, the Community supports cultural activities and events of a European dimension - i.e. involving partners from at least three EC countries in the planning and participation - scheduled for next year. The EC's contribution may not exceed 25% of the total cost of the event, up to a maximum of ECU 30,000*. Audiovisual events are excluded, given that a specific programme has been established for them.

As regards the encouragement of artistic and cultural creation, the Community supports projects concerned with the mobility and further training of creative and performing artists. Entries can be received from organizations involved in running workshops and training courses in 1994 for creative and performing artists, and other operators in the cultural field, from at least three Member States. The EC's contribution will take the form of grants, for amounts ranging from ECU 500 to ECU 4,500 per participant. A limited lump sum contribution of no more than ECU 10,000 may be awarded towards covering the cost of organizing the project, but total Community support may not exceed ECU 50,000.

The Community is also supporting transnational cooperation between cultural organizations from at least three EC countries and collaborating on an equal basis through cultural cooperation networks. This aid will be given to cultural projects realized in 1994 by cultural networks, as well as for the extension, in 1994, of existing networks to allow development of their activities in other Member States. The Community's contribution will be in addition to the financial participation of the members of the networks. It may not exceed 30% of the total cost of a project, with a maximum of ECU 50,000.

Application forms are available from the offices of the Commission of the European Communities in the Member States or from the "Culture Unit" in Brussels. Successful applicants will be chosen on the basis of the opinion of an independent jury of experts before 30 March 1994.

Commission offices in:

England: Jean Monnet House, 8 Storey's Gate, London SW1P 3AT.
Tel.: 071-973 19 92

Wales: 4 Cathedral Road, Cardiff CF1 9SG. Tel.: 37 16 31

Scotland: 9 Alva Street, Edinburgh EH2 4PPH. Tel.: 225 20 58

Northern Ireland: Windsor House, 9/15 Bedford Street, Belfast BT2 7EG.
Tel.: 24 07 08

Ireland: 39 Molesworth Street, Dublin 2. Tel.: 671 22 44

"Culture Unit" in Brussels: Commission of the European Communities
DGX - C/1 (Cultural Action)
Kaleidoscope Programme - Bur. 4/2
120, rue de Trèves, B-1049 Brussels

* 1 ECU = UK£0.77 or IR£0.82

UNEMPLOYMENT: A slight drop in July ...

... but it does not represent a turnaround.

Unemployment fell slightly in the 12-nation European Community in July, when it dropped to 10.6%, as compared to 10.7% the month before, according to Eurostat, the EC's statistical office. This was the first fall in nearly three years - but "it does not mean an improvement in the situation on the labour market", according to Eurostat experts.

The fall is mainly due to the fact that many young people in Spain found a job in July, on finishing their studies. As a result, the level of unemployment fell to 21.3% (as compared to 21.8% in June). Even so, Spain has the highest unemployment rate in the EC.

Unemployment in the EC as a whole rose by 1.1% percentage points in the 12 months to July 1993, while it fell in the United States from 7.6% to 6.8%.

INFLATION: A slight rise in July for the EC as a whole

The situation varied from country to country, however.

For the first time since August 1992, there was a rise in the annual rate of inflation for the European Community as a whole: in the 12 months to July 1993 prices rose by 3.5%, as against 3.3% in June. Even so, this compared favourably with the 3.9% recorded in July 1992, according to Eurostat, the EC's statistical office.

The annual rate of inflation varies greatly from one EC country to another, ranging as it does from Ireland's 0.9% to Greece's 15.7%, with Luxembourg sticking to the Community average of 3.5%.

Prices rose by 0.2% in the EC as a whole in July. However, they rose by 0.7% in Belgium, the Netherlands and Portugal and 0.4% in Spain, Italy and Luxembourg. But the rise was limited to 0.2% in Germany (West) and to 0.1% in France. Prices even fell by 0.2% in Britain and Denmark, and by as much as 1.9% in Greece.