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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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EUROPE: Why complicate matters unnecessarily?

European Commission tidies up European "laws".

No housewife smashes up the furniture when doing her spring cleaning. This sound domestic principle applies also to the task of tidying up "European laws", a task undertaken by the European Commission, in order to guarantee both the usefulness of all such texts and their accessibility. The Commission has explained this piece of housework in a report adopted at the end of November and intended for the heads of state or government of the 12-nation European Union.

The Treaty of Maastricht, in force since November 1, introduces a principle already implicit in the European Community: subsidiarity. This somewhat uncouth term signifies that, except as regards those areas in which it alone has competence in the 12-nation Europe, the European Union will legislate only when it is clear that the European dimension represents an improvement in relation to national or regional actions. Subsidiarity also implies that "European laws" must not be too detailed but must limit themselves to what is needed to reach their ends.

In the light of this principle the Commission has gone through numerous "laws" with a fine-toothed comb. It has concluded that there is a lot of work involved in rationalizing and simplifying them. Besides, a good deal of work has already been done in some sectors, including customs and medicine.

Broadly speaking, the Commission has identified three types of "European laws", which require tidying up. First of all some of them can be modernized and restored to working order with a view to providing citizens a clear and intelligible presentation. This is the case as regards the new Community customs code; adopted recently, it reproduces the useful contents of several hundreds of texts adopted since 1968. The Commission envisages recasting in the same way the texts dealing with the right of residence and pharmaceutical products, for example.

In the second category are the "laws" which can be simplified. These are texts which are unnecessarily detailed or contain details best left to national or regional regulations. The Commission intends simplifications of this kind in a number of fields, particularly company law, VAT, social policy, consumer pro-

tection, the quality of water and air and animal protection. The Commission nevertheless has made it clear that simplifying existing legislation does not mean lowering standards or levels of protection set by "European laws".

The third category of "laws" which the Commission wants tidied up includes those which it considers quite unnecessary, either because they have been overtaken by technical developments or because they are to be sorted out anyway. The task of preparing the new customs code, for example, resulted in the disappearance of more than 100 "laws".

But the Commission has warned the Twelve that tidying up Community directives and regulations does not mean withdrawing those which are unwelcome to a particular government or pressure group. At the same time it is asking the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament to stand up to government departments in the 12 EU countries, which are calling for very detailed "laws" because they do not have the necessary confidence in their opposite numbers from other Member States, as otherwise the dust would probably start gathering again

ECONOMY: Industrial production declines further this summer

The sectors hardest hit: cars, steel and textiles.

The recession continued to bite this summer in the 12-nation European Union. Industrial production declined by 2.3% in August in relation to August 1992, according to the figures published by Eurostat, the EU's statistical office, at the end of November. The production of capital goods, which sets the tone for the economy as a whole, even fell by 5.5%.

During the three months from June to August production declined by 0.4%, as compared to the previous three months. The sectors hardest hit were cars, steel and textiles. Belgium recorded the sharpest fall (3.6%), followed by Ireland (2.3%) and Italy (1.2%). Production fell slightly in Germany and France, stagnated in the Netherlands and rose in the other EU countries.

TRANSPORT: A databank for road safety

Computers will hold detailed information on all serious accidents occurring in the EU.

The Council of European Union decided at the end of November to create a databank which will hold detailed information on all serious accidents which have occurred in the 12-nation European Union. Thanks to this databank, named CARE, it will be possible to analyze systematically the causes of road accidents which result in death or injury. This should lead to greater road safety.

In setting up the new databank the Twelve have undertaken to forward, once a year, to Eurostat, the EU's statistical office, their computerized files on serious accidents. A common mechanism will allow experts to examine the phenomenon in its European dimension. The situation demands as much: each year more than 50,000 people are killed in road accidents in the 12-nation EU and some 1.5 million are injured, while roughly ECU 70 billion are wasted.

The databank CARE is part of an action programme for road safety presented by the European Commission and adopted in the form of guidelines by the Council at the end of November. In setting out their conclusions EU ministers stressed that in future it will be necessary to pay greater attention to road safety in the preparation and implementation of technical standards for vehicles and the design of major road equipment, particularly road signs, traffic lights, etc.

According to the Council, CARE should make it possible to determine the causes of the most severe accidents and the categories of people most frequently involved. For the Twelve it is necessary to encourage a more relaxed driving style; in fact they envisage publicity campaigns aimed at alerting new drivers and motorcyclists.

SPORT: A European code of ethics

European Commission and Council of Europe jointly launch a campaign to promote this code.

The European Commission, together with the Council of Europe, is launching a campaign to promote a "European code of ethics in sport". The campaign is aimed in the first instance at children between the ages of 12 and 16, and its main tool is a series of 10 stickers, each bearing a message in the form of a slogan. Children will be encouraged to obtain the entire collection, which is accompanied by a comic strip.

The aim of this campaign is to set out, in a light-hearted way, the 10 most important precepts of the European code of sporting ethics:

1. Change one's life for the better by taking more exercise.
2. Comply strictly with the rules of the sports one takes part in.
3. Play according to the rules, calmly and on an equal basis with one's adversaries.
4. Avoid all physical or verbal violence.
5. Teach children to play fairly and according to the rules.
6. Behave with dignity as a spectator.
7. Make friends through sports.
8. Refrain from using drugs.
9. Put sports before money.
10. Keep sports and alcohol separate.

The slogans on the stickers have been translated into the nine official languages of the European Union, in such a way as to reflect the cultural sensitivities and sense of humour of each member country.

The stickers can be distributed at the national level through those sporting federations and Olympic committees wanting to take part in this activity, as well as through sporting and educational establishments.

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This campaign on fair play in sport provides both the European Commission and the Council of Europe a good opportunity to work together for a common goal. The campaign's main aim is to encourage the collaboration and development of a "European spirit" among young people, as full citizens of Europe, on whom rests the future of Europe.

HEALTH: Cigarette prices in the European Union

Not high enough on average to fight smoking effectively.

The same packet of 20 cigarettes costs ECU 3.5* in Denmark and barely ECU 1.6 in Spain. And the difference is even greater if you take into account cheaper brands. Here the Danish price dips fractionally to ECU 3.45, while it plummets in Spain to ECU 0.27.

But Spaniards are not alone in being offered the possibility of committing suicide at bargain basement prices, even if they do have the dubious privilege of being able to choose between several brands which sell for less than an ECU. Greece, too, offers smokers 20 coffin nails for just ECU 0.98. Prices are somewhat higher in France (ECU 1.27) and Portugal (ECU 1.28). This is a disturbing situation, given that even where prices are higher, they are far from high enough to discourage smoking.

And despite a favourable public opinion, governments often need a lot of persuading before raising prices as promised. The French tobacco industry, for example, has not implemented the 30% price rise announced by the government, although 71% of French people favour a price increase of roughly ECU 1.20 for a packet of 20.

* 1 ECU = UK£0.76 or IR£0.80.

CONSUMERS: The truth in English, mistakes in French? ...

... or is it the other way round?

Is it possible that the same paint takes 14 hours to dry in France, and in the southern French-speaking part of Belgium, and 24 hours in the Netherlands and the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium? Can a toy be safely entrusted to 3-year olds if they speak French or Dutch but not until they are five years old if they are English-speaking? One would come to these absurd conclusions if one literally followed the instructions for use which accompany everyday consumer items and are written in the official languages of the European Union. These edifying examples are to be found in a report on requirements for the use of language in the EU, drawn up by the European Consumers Organization (BEUC) on behalf of the European Commission.

To continue: A consumer in the U.K. can buy a packet of pasta giving cooking instructions in Danish. A Fleming who buys a television set bearing a Dutch brand name may discover that the instruction manual is written in German. Shopkeepers in the three Benelux countries sell, among other items, boxes of cereals labelled in the language of Shakespeare; unhappily those unfamiliar with this language cannot take advantage of the prizes offered by the manufacturers, as the advertising campaign is aimed at consumers living in the U.K. and Ireland.

The report makes clear that in the single European market consumers do not always find the information they need in their own language. BEUC points to a lack of coherence between the various "European laws" dealing with consumer protection, as well as between the national legislation in force in the 12 EU countries. It wants information provided in several languages to be identical in content. It also wants consumers to have recourse against manufacturers in the event that linguistic errors cause damages or even accidents.

SPORT: The third European forum

The ideal place for information flows between the Community authorities and the world of sport.

Since its creation in 1991 the European sports forum has established itself as an ideal place for contacts and dialogue between the European Commission and the sporting organizations of the 12 EU countries.

The forum held its third meeting on November 23, in Brussels, when Commissioner Pinheiro, who has responsibility for communication and sport, pronounced the inaugural speech.

Those taking part included representatives of official and non-governmental bodies, Olympic committees and various sporting confederations. Also present, as observers, were members of the European Parliament, the Council of Europe and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA); of the Committee for the Development of Sport (CDS) and the Association of National Olympic Committees of Europe (ANOCE).

One of the main points on the agenda dealt with a study carried out at the demand of the European Commission. The study analyzed the impact of EU activities on 10 major sporting disciplines, including football, athletics, swimming, tennis, basketball, riding, cycling, motor racing, sailing and skiing.

It is clear from the study that sporting federations have only a poor knowledge of the EU's activities and objectives in the field of sport. This is partly because sporting organizations differ according to the country and types of sport. The result is a range of representativeness, indeed differences of opinion, between national and international federations, which makes information difficult, indeed precarious. The forum represents a ideal place for an exchange of information between Community authorities and the world of sport.

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The study's general conclusions were adopted and confirmed by Mrs. C. Flesch, Director-General with responsibility for sport. She hoped for increased cooperation with the sporting world, in view of a total transparency in their mutual relations.

Judging by the success of the forum, it would appear that the two sides are ready to make a genuine effort to establish an effective dialogue, thus favouring the future of sport in the European Union. Working groups will be set up to implement the cooperation that is likely to follow these discussions.

On November 24 the Commission held an extra meeting - and this for the first time - with representatives of the main international and European sporting federations, in order to inform them of the conclusions of the report and to pave the way to closer collaboration. The next forum will take place in Brussels on 22 November 1994.

REGIONAL AID: ECU 16.5 million for seven cities

European funds for restoring their old, run-down parts.

The most diverse cities have their problem areas, regardless of whether or not they are located in the disadvantaged regions of the European Union. Since 1989 the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) can help these run-down or even abandoned areas to recover. In mid-November the European Commission adopted projects covering seven cities: Cork (Ireland), Antwerp and Liège (Belgium), Dresden (Germany), Bilbao and Valladolid (Spain) and Porto (Portugal).

These projects will receive ECU 16.5 million in all from the ERDF. This sum will cover between 45% to 60% of costs, depending on the project.

The ERDF will have contributed some ECU 100 million in all to 32 urban renewal projects, scattered across the face of the European Union, during the period 1989 - 1993.

* 1 ECU = UK£0.76 or IRE£0.80.