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FUTURE OF EUROPE PICTORIAL

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INTRODUCTION

1. The weekly newsreel, Europe Pictorial, has now been in production for 3 years. In 1979 an outside consultant was commissioned to prepare a report on past experience and recommendations for future development. That report was presented in March 1980, but clearly does not take account of the new budgetary situation following the Council's proposed reduction of the Europe Pictorial budget.

The present note summarises the views of the Commission's services in the light of their experience over 3 years, the consultant's report and the current budget situation.

BACKGROUND

2. The Commission decided on 22 June 1977 to create a weekly newsreel magazine (Europe Pictorial) for distribution to cinemas and television stations in third world countries. After a 6 month trial period, it decided, on 9 November 1978, to continue the operation on a permanent basis. The operation had the active support of all the Member States, which undertook regularly to supply material for the magazine, and the Council provided funds under a special budget line (2722) which is separate from and additional to the normal information budget line (2720). Europe Pictorial is then a unique example of a cooperative operation between the Commission and Council in the information field.

3. Europe Pictorial has appeared every week since 1 July 1977. The magazine normally contains 3 items, with a total time of around 7 minutes; 7 numbers have, however, been "specials", devoted to a single important theme and lasting around 10 minutes. Roughly one-third of all items included have been produced by the Radio-TV-Film Division on "Community subjects"; the remaining two-thirds are provided by the Member States, mainly on "national subjects". Final editorial responsibility lies with the Head of the Radio-TV-Film Division, in consultation with an editorial committee involving the other interested services of the Spokesman's Group and Directorate-General for Information. Production is carried out by a professional news-film producer employed full-time under contract and working closely with the staff of the Radio-TV-Film Division.

4. The magazine is produced in 3 language versions: English, French and Arabic. Currently 170 copies are produced each week, for distribution in 69 countries (compared with 46 in 1977). 120 copies are used for cinema distribution and 50 for television.

5. In 1979 the Commission contracted with an outside consultant, Dr. D. Lange, to prepare a report on the content and effectiveness of Europe Pictorial, and to make recommendations for its future development. An interim report was presented in September 1979, and a final report in March 1980 (Ref.PP/105/80). Both documents were sent to the Council's Information Group, which had a preliminary discussion of the report in June 1980.

CONSULTANT'S REPORT

6. The principal points of the report can be summarised as follows:

- Europe Pictorial's technical and editorial standards have improved since 1977;
- it is mainly used in cinemas, where it has achieved considerable success, but in its present form it is not well suited for television use;
- its distribution network could be easily and considerably widened;
- it should contain more "entertainment" items to keep the attention of the viewer;

- regionalised editions and additional language versions should be produced to suit the interests of viewers in different parts of the world;
- a second and separate "television" magazine should be produced, which would imply a considerable strengthening of the editorial team;
- content should be improved by regular and direct contact with and feed-back from users.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

7. In the light of 3 years of experience, of the consultant's report, and of the present budgetary situation, the Commission's services would make the following points concerning the future production, distribution and development of Europe Pictorial:

i) Europe Pictorial has met with a favourable response from cinema audiences. Its impact is, however, of a general nature. Only about one-third of the material included in it is directly related to Community affairs or reflects Commission information policy towards the developing countries. The bulk of the material contains a broad European flavour. This poses problems of coherence. There is also the risk of the Community appearing to export to its partners in the third world a "cultural model" appropriate to Western industrialised countries but not necessarily compatible with those being worked out by the developing countries themselves. Such a development would, among other things, run counter to the spirit of the Lome policy based as it is on the free choice by the LDCs themselves of their development model. Europe Pictorial, therefore, as at present organised, which derives more from programmes of cultural exchange, cannot be a central element in Commission information policy. It is a separate operation which overlaps to a limited extent with the Commission's main information effort. This is indeed reflected in the fact that it is financed under a separate budget line, quite independent from and additional to the Commission's general information budget.

ii) Of the Consultant's recommendations, most concern improvements to Europe Pictorial in its present form, aimed primarily at cinema audiences. The major recommendation, however, is for the development of a quite separate television magazine. The Commission takes the view that a major extension of Europe Pictorial in this direction is ruled out for the present and the foreseeable future on budgetary grounds. In any case it would be essential to undertake a thorough examination of the technical possibilities of producing such a magazine, the form it should take, television infrastructure in the countries where it might be shown, the likelihood of television stations using the magazine, the financial implications, and the cost-effectiveness in terms of potential audiences.

(iii) The Europe Pictorial budget for 1980 amounts to 892,000 EUA. The Commission proposed an increase to 1,190,000 EUA for 1981, to take account of inflation and permit a number of modest improvements; the Council has proposed reducing this figure to 692,000 EUA. This last figure implies a reduction of \pm 30% in real terms compared with this year. The Commission's services do not feel that it would be appropriate to devote resources from the

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Commission's information budget to make good, even in part, this reduction or to begin to implement any of the improvements recommended by the Consultant.

8. In the light of the above considerations the general conclusions of the Commission's services are as follows:

- (i) if the reduction to 692,000 EUA of the 1981 budget is maintained, it will be difficult to continue producing Europe Pictorial on an acceptable basis. There would be a substantial cut in the number of copies distributed each week and a reduction in the numbers of "Community items" included. This would make Europe Pictorial even less of a Community instrument than it is at present and would severely curtail its audience. In such circumstances the Commission's services would have serious doubts about the value of continuing to produce Europe Pictorial after 1981. It would be necessary for the Commission to re-examine its policy, in consultation with the Council, in advance of the submission of the 1982 Preliminary draft budget.
- (ii) if the Commission's proposed figure for the 1981 budget were reinstated, it would begin to be possible to implement some improvements to Europe Pictorial, including those necessary to ensure a better balance of subjects and an increase in the Community content of the magazine. However, the Commission's services believe that there is now need for a thorough review of all the options including cinema, television and radio for projecting the Community to audiences in the developing world. Such a review should examine how far the same level of credits could be used to better effect for the production of material specially for television and radio rather than for the continuation and further development of a cinema newsreel magazine beyond 1981.
- (iii) The Commission's services will produce a first report in the spring of 1981 as a basis for further discussion.