ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

BULLETIN

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I 203rd PLENARY SESSION

The 203rd Plenary Session of the Economic and Social Committee was held at the Committee's headquarters in Brussels, on 15 and 16 December 1982. The Chairman, Mr François Ceyrac, presided.

ADOPTION OF OPINIONS

1. ANNUAL ECONOMIC REPORT 1982-1983

"The Economic Relations 1982-1983 in the Community"

Gist of the Commission's Annual Economic Report

The Commission notes that there has been no recovery in 1982. On the contrary, the forecasts for the coming year have had to be revised downwards. There will continue to be serious imbalances. Unemployment seems to be the most alarming factor. The Commission states that even if success were achieved in bringing about an economic recovery in the coming year, this would not provide the beginning of a solution to the problem of high unemployment. It points in this connection to the importance of greater moderation and greater flexibility of real labour costs. If this leads to deflation, counter-measures should be taken in the monetary and budgetary spheres. The consequences of unemployment must be limited, particularly for the least well-off sections of society.

There is a fundamental pessimism. This is linked with deep-rooted structural weaknesses, as reflected inter alia in the very poor propensity to invest. The Commission accordingly calls for radical adjustments in the sphere of incomes and public finances. Government policy and social partner consultation have an essential role to play here.

The Commission states that coordination of economic policy is necessary in addition to the efforts of the individual Member States.

In the monetary sphere, interest rates are showing a favourable trend. The countries with international reserve currencies have a special responsibility for preventing excessive fluctuations in interest rates and exchange rates.

As far as budget problems are concerned, the recession is continuing to give rise to imbalances; the situation is so bad in some countries that there is hardly any possibility of an anticyclical policy.

The Commission calls for systematic encouragement of investments through the removal of obstacles to the setting-up of new business and greater flexibility in the organization of working time. It considers that employment will ultimately benefit from this.

Gist of the Opinion(1)

The need to take measures to encourage economic recovery and the priority which must be given to employment are the key points in the Opinion on the economic situation in the Community which the ESC adopted by 82 votes to 21, with 27 abstentions. On the eve of the Council meeting the ESC gives voice to its concern over mounting unemployment and public-sector deficits. It endorses the coordination of national measures so that the objectives pursued by the Member States do not clash.

Employers, workers and the government must be involved in the implementation of such a policy.

In the budget sphere the Committee proposes that the pattern of spending be changed in favour of expenditure which promotes economic growth. In implementing such reforms, however, care must be taken to avoid a deflationary spiral.

On the subject of investment, priority must be given to new jobcreating investment in growth areas. For this reason the ESC calls for the incorporation of investment incentives in government programmes. Public-sector investment is not, however, sufficient by itself.

The Committee states explicitly that an incomes policy must cover all incomes. On this point it disagrees with the Commission.

On the other hand, the ESC accepts the idea of moderation in the rise in labour costs in the light of the need to create employment.

The Committee stresses that economic policy must be coordinated. This applies also to policy on the reorganization of working time and of course to subsidization policy, which must be in accordance with

⁽¹⁾ Doc CES 921/82

Articles 92 and 93 of the EEC Treaty. In addition it calls for further integration of the internal market. At international level every effort should be made, through multilateral negotiations, particularly within GATT, to combat trade barriers.

This Opinion was based on material prepared by the Section for Economic and Financial Questions under the chairmanship of Mr Marvier (France - Various Interests). The Rapporteur was Mr Goris (Netherlands-Various Interests).

2. SHIPBUILDING

"Proposal for a Council Directive amending Directive 81/363/EEC on aid to shipbuilding"

Gist of the Commission's proposal

The fifth Directive on aid to shipbuilding will expire on 31 December 1982. This Directive contains a Community code for state aids to the shipbuilding industry designed to help the industry out of its severe crisis and to assist its restructuring. Although there was a slight increase in output in 1981, the signs of livelier ordering discerned in the first six months of 1981 were short-lived and in 1982 orders have fallen off sharply. The crisis in the industry has been such that in order to support the efforts of Community yards to improve and consolidate their situation and, at the same time, limit the social and economic consequences and impact on jobs of structural adjustments, the Commission proposes that the fifth Directive be extended by three years to 31 December 1985.

Gist of the Opinion(1)

This Opinion was adopted unanimously.

Because of the continuing crisis in the shipbuilding industry and the fact that aid is being received by this industry in non-member countries, the Committee welcomes the Commission's proposal to extend the fifth Directive on aid to shipbuilding for three years. However, it regrets the limited approach taken by both the Commission and the Council to the huge problems facing this industry and urges the need for a more positive stand in helping shipbuilding adjust to current market trends.

This Opinion was based on material prepared by the Section for Industry, Commerce, Crafts and Services under the chairmanship of Mr de Wit (Netherlands - Employers). The Rapporteur was Mr Arena (Italy - Employers).

⁽¹⁾ Doc CLS 916/82

3. CRUDE OIL SAVING

"Proposal for a Council Directive on crude oil saving through the use of substitute fuel components in petrol"

Gist of the Commission proposal

As the Commission states in its introductory note to this Draft Directive, the promotion of oil substitution is one of the guiding principles in Commission document (COM(81) 540 final) of 2 October 1981 entitled "The Development of an Energy Strategy for the Community".

This present Draft Directive concerns the introduction of substitute fuel components to save petrol in spark-ignition internal combustion engines used in motor vehicles throughout the Community. The Directive is confined to fuel blends which can be used safely and with similar performance to current petrol by vehicles propelled by spark-ignition internal combustion engines currently in use or being offered for sale without requiring any modification.

The substitute fuel components considered are methanol and ethanol. Methanol can be produced from various fuels (hard coal lignite, gas, oil residues and biomass). Ethanol can be produced from agricultural products containing starch or sugar.

The purpose of this Draft Directive is threefold:

- to provide a Community-wide minimum framework for investment decisions by the oil and motor industries regarding the production and use of petrol blends containing substitute fuel components;
- to ensure that existing or future legislation in individual Member States regarding the blends covered by this Directive does not impede their production, sale, distribution and use;
- to provide safeguards for motorists in the Community against damage to their vehicles from unknowingly filling up with fuel blends on sale in another Member State to which their vehicles have not been specifically designed or adapted.

Gist of the Opinion(1)

The substitution of other fuel components in petrol would not only succeed in reducing crude oil usage but might possibly achieve a reduction in the lead content of the exhaust emissions from internal combustion engines.

⁽¹⁾ Doc. CES 915/82

That is one of the reasons why a draft Directive on crude oil saving through the use of substitute fuel is welcomed by the Economic and Social Committee of the European Communities in an Opinion adopted by a large majority with 5 abstentions.

The objectives of the draft Directive on this subject will however, only be realized, says the Committee, if methanol and other oxygenates can be obtained economically, and from origins where factors likely to cause disruption in supplies are minimal. The Committee supports the intention of the draft Directive to prevent national legislation or national administrative procedures within the Member States from hindering the development of a community market for substitute fuels. The proposed Directive is also seen by the Committee as an opportunity for the Community to promote greater use of raw materials which are not currently being fully exploited such as lignite or gas flared in crude oil production.

This Opinion was based on material prepared by the Section for Energy and Nuclear Questions under the chairmanship of Mr Romoli (Italy - Employers). The Rapporteur was Mr Mills (United Kingdom - Employers).

4. RATIONAL USE OF ENERGY

"Proposal for a Council Regulation (EEC) on the payment of financial incentives in support of categories of investment in the rational use of energy"

Gist of the proposal

The Commission is proposing that the Council enact a Regulation authorizing the payment out of the Community budget of financial incentives in favour of certain types of investment in the field of the rational use of energy.

The draft Regulation is based on a Communication (OJ No. 107 of 28 April 1982) with a similar title which the Commission passed to the Council earlier this year and on which the Economic and Social Committee gave an Opinion (OJ No. C 252 of 27 September 1982) at its June Plenary Session.

The Commission proposes that financial incentives be granted in 4 sectors in particular:

- 1. investment in heat generation for district-heating systems using industrial waste heat, solid fuels and waste materials;
- 2. investment in the conversion of industrial fuel-oil-fired plant to coal using innovatory high-yield technology;

- 3. investment in operations related to the preparation of coal for users other than power stations and coking plants;
- 4. investment in the generation of energy from urban, agricultural and industrial waste and from agricultural by-products.

Investment falling into one of these 4 categories, and already having been favoured with a loan from the European Investment Bank or from the New Community instrument, or under Article 54 of the ESC Treaty, would be eligible for specific incentives in the form of an interest subsidy. The rate of interest subsidy would be 3% a year over 10 years for category 1, and 3% per year for 5 years for categories 2 to 4.

The cost of these incentives to the Community budget is estimated at 12 million ECUs for the first year, and 35 millions ECUs for each subsequent year, up to 1987.

Gist of the Opinion(1)

In an Opinion, adopted unanimously, the Economic and Social Committee of the European Communities welcomed a draft Regulation on the payment of financial incentives in support of four categories of investment in the rational use of energy. The Committee believes that it should help lead to a reduced Community dependence on imported oil and to a more effective use of other energy sources. It recommends however that to the four categories of investment eligible for financial incentives a fifth be added, which would encourage investment in plants for the gasification of coal at ports of entry of imported coal and in centres of Community produced coal.

With regard to interest rebates as a financial incentive to investment in the rational use of energy, the Committee believes on the one hand that the Community needs to be prudent in offering incentives, lest it lead to distortion of market forces. On the other hand, however, it considers stimulation of the rational use of energy to be of such importance to the long-term interests of the Community that the proposed stimulation of particular kinds of investment as contained in the draft Regulation is justified.

The Committee points out that 50/60 million tonnes of oil per annum, or 7-9% of Community energy consumption, could be saved through the use of urban, industrial and agricultural waste as conventional fuel substitutes. The Committee recommends that the opportunity offered by these sources needs to be encouraged.

Finally, concerning priorities, the Committee proposes that given that an estimated 40% of the Community's gross energy consumption is

⁽¹⁾ Doc. CES 925/82

used for space heating and domestic hot water, the Committee proposes that priority be given to promoting investment in economic district heating schemes (space heating, and domestic hot water in high density housing and industrial estates).

This Opinion was based on material prepared by the Section for Energy and Nuclear Questions under the chairmanship of Mr Romoli (Italy - Employers). The Rapporteur was Mr Pearson (Ireland - Employers).

5. TECHNOLOGICAL AND INDUSTRIAL INNOVATION

"Proposal for a Council Decision concerning a plan for the transnational development of the supporting infrastructure for innovation and technology transfer (1983-1985)"

Gist of the Commission document

As early as November 1980, in a document on industrial innovation and development, the Commission drew the Council's attention to the need to improve industrial innovation. The Council felt that firms should try and develop activities of an innovatory nature in order to make it easier for them to adjust their industrial structure.

In the documents drawn up under the Mandate of 30 May, the Commission urged the adoption of a Community policy in the field of technology and innovation.

In the present document, the Commission seeks to:

- improve cohesion at European level between existing institutions, organizations and services already set up in the Member States to establish links between industry, research, financial organizations, etc..
- develop the resources to introduce a Community market perspective into their operations, and
- set up a means of consultation and optimization of national policies and measures taken in these fields.

Innovation is defined as the process which enables new technologies or inventions to be introduced on to the market in the form of new products, processes or services. Its role is double since it is essential both to act as motor for the economy and to renew industry. First and foremost, innovation requires entrepreneurs who are capable of managing technology, within a framework which is imposed, in part at least, by the general situation with regard to investment and by the level of acceptance and awareness of the public.

The Commission document contains the following proposals for action:

- European cohesion between existing innovation promotion organizations. The aim is to improve the effectiveness of services and organizations which already exist or are being developed by facilitating their operations on the Community market and their access to it. More particularly, the Commission proposes to support technology and management advisory services and personnel exchanges in this field. As regards venture finance operations, the Commission will give start-up support for an association of financial organizations specialized in the financing of innovation
- Consolidation of foundations: people, know-how, communication. The Commission's first proposal is that an effort should be made in the direction of training in the management of innovation and technology transfer by encouraging suitable European educational institutions and organizations to offer special courses in this field and by giving support for the development of teaching material and curricula on a European basis. Also recommended is support for the establishment of an information exchange on available expertise regarding technology, markets, finance and public aid for innovation throughout the Community;
- Access to patents and licensing markets. This poses the problem of industrial property protection, which is an indispensible aid to the creation of an environment which encourages innovators and thus promotes innovation. However, such an environment has to be constantly adapted to the ever-changing needs of technology, industry and society, and the Commission hopes that the situation will improve somewhat when all the Member States have ratified the Luxembourg Convention on the Community patent. The Community's efforts should be concentrated on protecting industrial property rights. This would be helped by stepping up consultations and contacts with interested parties, especially as regards the cost of patents, the use of information and the criteria for protecting industrial property. There is also a need to promote the creation of an effective market for the granting of licences in the field of technology. Finally, the Commission proposes that new channels of communication should be opened up to speed up the introduction of new products on the market.

Gist of the Opinion(1)

In an Opinion which was adopted unanimously (less one abstention) the Committee endorses the Commission's plan to take measures at

⁽¹⁾ Doc. CES 924/82

Community level to promote innovation and technology transfer through the development of a transitional structure.

However, it must be said that the Commission's proposal would have a greater chance of success if the objectives of the proposed measures were better formulated and backed up by more convincing arguments.

The Committee approves the special emphasis on the role of small and medium-sized businesses in innovation and technology transfer. It very much welcomes the fact that the Commission takes the market economy as its starting point and draws attention to the fact that in the last analysis it is industry which will have to be responsible for industrial and technological innovation.

It is, however, inclined to place a question-mark against the financing of the Commission's programme. While it is undoubtedly true that the programme could have a multiplier effect, the proposed appropriation seems insufficient to ensure that all the proposed measures are satisfactorily funded.

The Committee endorses the Commission's intentions in respect of the detailed proposals for action, viz. to supplement existing national measures, add a Community dimension to them and encourage mutual support. This delimitation of the Commission's activities and scope for action is fundamental.

It regards the funding of innovation and technological renewal as extremely important. It therefore welcomes the proposal to set up a Community association of organizations specialized in the financing of innovation. In this connection, it is considering returning in a separate document, at a later stage, to the financing of high-risk activities.

As regards access to patents and licensing markets, in the Committee's view special attention must be paid to the problem of costs and the intricacy of procedures. For small and medium-sized businesses in particular, these are almost insurmountable obstacles to patent protection. In general the costs are much too high (European patents especially) and it takes so long to obtain patents that it is usually not worth applying for them.

This Opinion was based on material prepared by the Section for Industry, Commerce, Crafts and Services under the chairmanship of Mr de Wit (Netherlands - Employers). The Rapporteur was Mr Goris (Netherlands - Various Interests).

6. HARMONIZATION OF TOBACCO TAXES

"Proposal for a Council Directive amending Directive 72/464/EEC on taxes other than turnover taxes which affect the consumption of manufactured tobacco"

Gist of the Draft Directive

Under the basic Council Directive of 19 December 1972 the structure of excise duties on cigarettes shall be harmonized in several stages and the transition from one stage of harmonization to the next shall be decided on by the Council on a proposal from the Commission, taking into account the effects produced during the stage in progress by the measures introduced by the Member States.

The first stage of harmonization began on 1 July 1973 and, after four extensions, it ended on 30 June 1978. The second stage of harmonization began on 1 July 1978 and ran originally until 31 December 1980. It was however extended three times and, under the Directive of 21 December 1981, it is due to expire on 31 December 1982.

As the European Parliament (EP) has yet to deliver its Opinion on the matter — the ESC Opinion was submitted on 25 February 1981 — the second stage will have to be further extended in order to give the EP sufficient time to consider the Commission's study on the effects of proceeding with harmonization, the Commission proposes that the current stage be extended until 31 December 1983.

Gist of the Opinion(1)

The Committee unanimously approves the proposed extension of the second stage to 31 December 1983. It draws attention to its Opinion issued in February 1981 in which it advocated an alternative to harmonizing the ratio between the ad valorem element and the specific element of the taxation. Furthermore, the Committee expresses regret that the Commission has not asked for its views on the study on the effects of proceeding with harmonization, despite the fact that the Committee also called for such a study to be carried out.

This Opinion was based on material prepared by the Section for Industry, Commerce, Crafts and Services under the chairmanship of Mr de Wit (Netherlands - Employers). The Rapporteur was Mr Miller (United Kingdom - Employers).

7. SPECIALIZATION AGREEMENTS

"Draft Commission Regulation on the application of Article 85(3) of the Treaty to categories of specialization agreements"

⁽¹⁾ Doc. CES 920/82

Gist of the draft Regulation

Commission Regulation No. 2779/72 concerning the application of Article 85(3) of the Treaty to certain categories of specialization agreements (it in fact exempts them from Treaty Article 85(1) prohibiting any agreement in restraint of competition) will cease to be valid as from 31 December next.

The Commission proposes to replace the aforementioned regulation by the new Draft Regulation which is primarily designed to encourage cooperation agreements between small and medium-sized companies. Specialization agreements between large companies will continue to be subject to the Commission's case-by-case vetting procedure.

Gist of the Opinion(1)

This Opinion was adopted unanimously.

The Committee endorses the aims and content of the Draft Commission Regulation.

The Draft Regulation covers joint manufacturing ventures and thus extends the scope of the existing exemption arrangements. The Committee points out however that, if allowance is made for inflation, the turnover ceiling of 300 million ECU no longer seems adequate.

The Committee nonetheless broadly approves the proposed definition although it wishes to point out the difficulties inherent in relying upon annual turnover, in times when the climate is inflationary and the rate of inflation differs from one Member State to another.

To conclude, the Committee endorses the Commission's policy of encouraging specialization agreements, which usually have beneficial effects in the sector concerned, not to mention a considerable "spin-off" impact.

This Opinion was based on material prepared by the Section for Industry, Commerce, Crafts and Services under the chairmanship of Mr de Wit (Netherlands - Employers). The Rapporteur was Mr Bagliano (Italy - Employers).

8. INWARD PROCESSING

"Proposal for a Council Directive concerning the implementation of Article 18 of Directive 69/73/EEC on the harmonization of provisions

⁽¹⁾ Doc. CES 917/82

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laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in respect of inward processing"

Gist of the Commission's proposal

Article 18 of Council Directive 69/73/EEC on Inward Processing provides that the Council shall prepare, on a proposal from the Commission, a list of compensating products and intermediate products which, when put on the market, shall be subject to customs duties, etc. appropriate to them and not to duties appropriate to imported goods.

This Article currently applies throughout the Community to scrap and waste from processing in accordance with Council Directive 73/82/EEC of 26 March 1973. As regards the other secondary compensating products, this form of taxation is not yet harmonized at Community level.

The object of the present Directive is to achieve harmonization within this field, as provided for in Article 18 of Directive 69/73/EEC, by establishing a list of the above-mentioned products which, when put on the market, are subject to the application of taxes appropriate to them. This list also incorporates scrap and waste which are the subject of Directive 73/82/EEC, which it is intended should be repeated.

Furthermore, the Commission is sending the present proposal to the Council, even though the Regulation concerning inward processing has not yet been adopted.

Gist of the Opinion(1)

In an Opinion, adopted unanimously, the Committee welcomes the Draft Directive, which aligns the Member States' application of the rules on inward processing. This will not only ensure that all persons carrying out processing in the Community compete on equal terms, but will also improve the economic conditions for the export of compensating products. The proposed new implementing Directive expands the list of scrap, waste and other secondary products which carry the more favourable rate of customs duty, etc. pertaining to them at the time of release into free circulation (such products generally remaining in the Community). Hence they will carry the same duty as if they had been imported directly from a non-Member country. This reduces the total costs of the processing operation.

⁽¹⁾ Doc. CES 923/82

In the Committee's view, however, the proposed Directive does not live up to its aim of establishing the most favourable conditions for the export of compensating products insofar as the persons carrying out the processing can choose between the rate of customs duty, etc. applicable on the day when the unprocessed goods were imported, and the rate applicable on the day of release into free circulation.

This Opinion was based on material prepared by the Section for Industry, Commerce, Crafts and Services under the chairmanship of Mr de Wit (Netherlands - Employers). The Rapporteur was Mr Broicher (Germany - Employers).

9. ASOR

"Proposal for a Council Regulation (EEC) on measures implementing the agreement on the international carriage of passengers by road by means of occasional coach and bus services (ASOR)"

Gist of the Commission proposal

Council Decision No. 82/505/EEC dated 15 July 1982, approved and concluded the Agreement on the International Carriage of Passengers by Road by Means of Occasional Coach and Bus Services (ASOR).

Article 13 of the ASOR stipulates that the Contracting Parties shall adopt the measures required to implement the Agreement. Under Article 14(2), the competent authorities are required to inform each other of infringements committed on their territory by a carrier established on the territory of another Contracting Party.

The Proposal is based on Article 75 of the Treaty and on the Agreement itself. It is designed to bring the ASOR into force in the Member States.

Gist of the Opinion(1)

In its Opinion, adopted unanimously, the Committee accepts the proposal subject to a number of suggestions for improving the Agreement's practical application.

This Opinion was based on material prepared by the Section for Transport and Communications under the chairmanship of Mrs Weber (Germany - Workers). The Rapporteur was Mr Morselli (Italy - Various Interests).

⁽¹⁾ Doc. CLS 918/82



II NEW CONSULTATIONS

EEC Commissioner, Mr Contogeorgis invited the Committee to deliver an Opinion on the

"Communication from the Commission to the Council on initial guidelines for a Community policy on tourism (COM(82) 385 final)"

Information from the Council indicates that it will probably be asking the Committee in the next few days to deliver an Opinion on the

"Proposal for a Council Decision adopting an experimental Community action to stimulate the efficacy of the European Economic Community's scientific and technical potential"

III

PROVISIONAL FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

JANUARY 1983 PLENARY SESSION

Opinions

- Vocational training and new information technologies
- 13th VAT Directive
- NCI loans for the promotion of investment
- Lomé II stocktaking
- Labelling of foodstuffs
- Lighting and light-signalling devices of motor vehicles
- Application of the ECU in the customs sphere
- Competition rules in air transport
- Competition rules in sea transport
- Scheduled air transport tariffs
- Foot and mouth disease
- Eradication of brucellosis

FEBRUARY 1983 PLENARY SESSION

Opinions

- 14th VAT Directive
- European Social Fund
- 2nd programme of action on safety and health at work
- vocational training policies for the '80s
- sewage sludge

ESC

- frontier checks on EEC nationals
- strengthening of the internal market
- simplification of customs formalities
- non-energy raw materials
- relaxation of border formalities and checks
- standardization of rules relating to the carriage of goods by road

Own-initiative

- 7th ERDF Annual Report

MARCH 1983 PLENARY SESSION

Opinions

- protection of workers against noise
- temporary work
- 2nd series of measures under the non-quota section of the ERDF
- exclusive distribution and purchasing agreements (suppl. Opinion)
- before and after sales distribution and service agreements for motor vehicles (suppl. Opinion)

Own-initiative

- education and teaching

SUBSEQUENT SESSIONS

Opinions

- formation of rates for transport
- potable spirits
- import duties on fish fillets from third countries
- intervention price for cheese

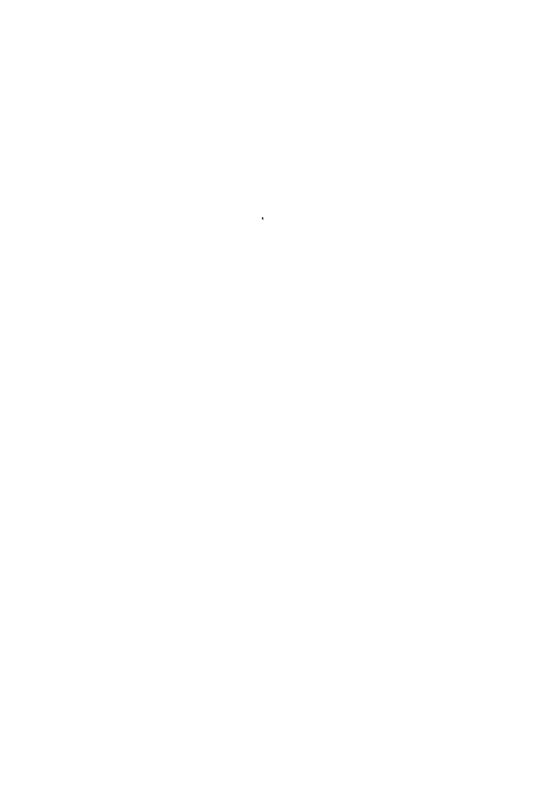
Own-initiative

- job-creating environmental measures
- EEC/USA relations

ESC

Information Report

- border regions in Ireland



IV CALENDAR OF PLENARY SESSIONS FOR 1983

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PUBLICATIONS OBTAINABLE FROM THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE

Periodical

- Bulletin (monthly publication)

General Documentation

- The Economic and Social Committee (leaflet) (January 1980)
- The Economic and Social Committee (December 1982) (A descriptive brochure)
- Annual Report (1981) 96 p. (Ex-33-81)

Opinions and Studies

- Guidelines for Mediterranean Agriculture (4 Opinions) September 1982, 64 p. (ESC 82-010)
- The Economic and Social Situation of the Community (2 Opinions) (July 1982) 57 p. (ESC 82-008)
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