

No. 7/1973

March 26, 1973

BACKGROUND NOTE

MAKING THE COMMUNITY A 'COMMON MARKET'

The European Community is not yet, in the strict sense, the common market which its popular name suggests. There are still some technical barriers to trade between the member states. Eliminating these obstacles is receiving high priority from Community institutions.

Most recently, the Council of Ministers adopted 12 directives to remove technical barriers to trade in industrial products. These directives apply to Community industries which represent a total turnover exceeding 10,000 units of account (1970 dollars). Adopted December 19, 1972, this legislation deals with electrical equipment, tractors, dangerous preparations, lifting equipment, weighing instruments, textile fiber mixtures, and detergents.

Directives Spell Harmonization

One directive sets uniform standards for low-voltage electrical equipment used in the enlarged Community's nine member states. A European Committee on Electrical Standards (CENELEC) was established for harmonizing standards as defined in the directive.

Three other directives mark the Community's first efforts toward standardizing tractor equipment. The standards apply to both agricultural and forestry tractors and are similar to those in effect for automobiles.

Two other directives concern so-called dangerous preparations, including pure substances and solvents. Mandatory specifications for packaging and labeling are established to prevent injury or death whether in transport, storage, or utilization.

The first Community directive for lifting equipment establishes labeling specifications for cables, chains, and hooks.

The Council also passed additional directives concerning textiles and measuring instruments. These set standards for non-automatic weighing instruments, for length measurement, and for methods of analysis of three-strand textile fiber mixtures.

The last two directives set the required rate of the biodegradability of detergents at an average 90 per cent throughout the Community. This rate is higher than the member states' respective national requirements and higher than any previous international rulings.

Consumers Benefit

With these recent Council actions, 36 directives to remove technical barriers to trade have been passed into law, and more are to come. As stated in the joint communiqué at the Paris "Summit" last October the nine member states have pledged themselves to eliminating technical barriers to trade as the first step toward a Community industrial policy. Until this policy takes effect, the Community is not a unified common market.

In the final analysis, the consumer benefits most from a single industrial base. Uniform standards mean safety. Community-wide standardization reduces production costs, makes marketing easier, and holds down prices. Standards such as those for detergents protect the consumer's environment.