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EUROPE NEEDS GOVERNMENT - THORN CLAIM

"The inaction and the inability to make decisions cannot go on. We feel that a new stalemate at the European Council would plunge the European Community into a process of self-destruction, which could undo all that has been achieved over the past twenty-five years," said European Commission President Gaston Thorn.

Addressing the European Parliament in Strasbourg, he criticised "the fatal nature of decline" and appealed for a concerted effort to overcome the crisis. "The Community needs to be governed - that is the key issue," he said.

Today Europe's main problem was its "inability to take decisions." The Commission proposes legislation, Parliament backs it and nothing gets done. Over the past three years meetings of European leaders have devoted more time to discussing budget contributions than to the problems of relaunching Europe, rationalizing industry and creating jobs, he claimed.

Europe's second handicap has been its inability to adapt to the needs of the hour. "Years have been wasted by member states trying to promote their national interests, increasing European rivalries, instead of exploiting Europe's complementarities to increase its international competitiveness", he said.

But despite the recession Europe has managed to hold its ground. It has resisted protectionist tendencies, assisted the restructuring of industrial sectors in decline and created a relatively stable monetary area. In some sectors, such as fisheries, it has actually progressed. But prospects for the future are not good if the Community does not adapt to change and face the new challenges that confront it, he argued.

According to Mr. Thorn a genuine relaunch of Europe would require a complete overhaul of agricultural spending and the adoption of a new system of finance, including budget contributions and future Community funding. Decisions would have to be taken before the next Summit, which is due to take place in Brussels on March 19 - 20, he said.

"With their history, culture, learning and institutions, Europeans are still perfectly capable of meeting the challenges of the crisis, outside competition and an uncertain world. But they need to tap their intrinsic vitality, to pool their efforts and to create institutions that match their aspirations," he claimed.

IMMIGRANT CHILDREN DISADVANTAGED SAYS EC REPORT

"Immigrant children, given their social status and the linguistic and cultural problems that they face, run a much greater risk of educational failure and consequent unemployment than children of indigenous parents," according to EC Social Affairs Commissioner Ivor Richard.

Speaking in Brussels after the publication of a report on the impact of the 1981 EC directive designed to help immigrant children, he said that there were now about 2.5 million of them in EC schools.

All of them were entitled to the same advantages as children from indigenous families. "The right to an education is fundamental for a child," he said.

The EC directive has three main objectives: to teach children from immigrant families the language of the host country, to train teachers to cater for the special needs of immigrant children, and to promote the teaching of the language and culture of the child's country of origin.

The Commission report on the impact of the directive outlines the measures taken by the member states to adapt their education systems to comply with the European legislation.

France, with 1.2 million, has the largest number of registered school-age immigrant children, followed by the Federal Republic of Germany with 738,000, Belgium with 255,000, the Netherlands with 100,900, Luxembourg with 18,500, Greece with 5539 and Ireland with 645.

Neither the United Kingdom nor Italy could provide figures, as no similar school survey has been undertaken in either country.

Amongst the measures taken by member states have been efforts to provide intensive language tuition in schools and special classes for slow learners. Courses are provided in about thirty different languages to allow children to keep in touch with their original cultures.

Despite some progress since the adoption of the directive, the situation still varies widely between different member states. Not all immigrant children yet enjoy opportunities equal to those of indigenous children. Much remains to be done, particularly in terms of the initial integration of the child and in teacher training.

After studying questionnaires completed by the governments of the Ten, the Commission plans to exert pressure on any member state dragging its feet over transforming the principles embodied in the directive into its national education system.

FRG CONDEMNED IN BUTTER BATTLE

The European Court of Justice has condemned the Federal Republic of Germany for a second time over the now notorious "butter boats" affair.

The boats, which offer mini-cruises in the North Sea and the Baltic to allow passengers to buy VAT and excise-free goods are still breaking EC law, say the Euro-judges.

After a first Court ruling condemning the ships, the German government reintroduced levies and customs duties on non-EC goods, but allowed goods sold on board to be exempt from VAT and excise duty. This meant that the boats could remain an attractive proposition for the shoppers.

The long-standing battle over the ships was started by the German supermarket chain Rewe, which first won a ruling against them at the European Court in July 1981.

CLEAN LIVING ?

The European Commission is to investigate claims by an Italian Communist MEP that foreigners getting married in the German Land of Hesse have to prove their virility.

Vera Squarzialupi says that the regional authorities require proof from immigrants marrying Germans that they are "free from mental and venereal diseases, TB and epilepsy and are sexually potent."

SHIPBUILDING "NOT COMPETITIVE" SAYS COMMISSION

The shipbuilding industry in Europe is on the rocks. In 1983 orders fell by 32%. Cutting capacity, restoring competitiveness and restructuring the industry will be tough and the EC plans to impose strict controls on state aids from 1987 onwards.

Despite a 51 % cut in production and a 43% cut in the workforce between 1978-1982, the situation is deteriorating in most major shipyards in Europe. The main reasons behind the decline of the European industry are growing competition from Asia and uncompetitive pricing.

The Community's competitiveness problem is best illustrated by the difference in prices charged by the world's most competitive yards and those of the Community. The gap is often in the region of 35% to 50%.

Replying to a written question from an MEP, European Industry Commissioner Etienne Davignon said that hourly wage rates for shipyard workers were far higher in Europe than in South Korea.

According to a German publication, wages in the Federal Republic are about six times those paid in South Korea. A Korean shipyard worker earns on average DM4.42 an hour, compared to DM27.55 an hour in Germany, DM26 in the Netherlands and DM24 in France. In Britain workers get about DM18 an hour, which is roughly comparable to wages in Japan.

The differences in wage rates have a considerable impact on overall wage costs. South Korean wage costs are about 16% of those in the Federal Republic of Germany. But Vice-President Davignon admits that available statistics do not tell the whole story, because they do not take all the factors involved into account. These include not only wages, but also working conditions and state aids.

POEMS FOR WORLD PEACE

Children all over the world have been asked to write a poem on the theme of "Let's build a world without fear", to celebrate March 21st - World Poetry-Childhood Day.

The annual event is organised by the International Biennials of Poetry of Knokke in Belgium and in past years has had support from, among others, Pope John-Paul II, former UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim, Senegalese poet and President Leopold Sedar Senghor, and the European Community.

The organisers say that the object of the day is to make children under the age of thirteen "aware of their common origins and fate and their common need for peace and friendship throughout the world".

Why poetry? Well, "it calls on imagination and sensitivity, it has an impact on the mind and memory, ideas and feelings", says Biennials President Moussia Haulot.

"The main thing is that the children themselves are the main protagonists. In a single space of 24 hours on one and the same day, hundreds of thousands-even millions of children will feel the living bond between them, linking them all together from village to village, town to town, country to country, continent to continent, in the same creative act," she says.

Schools will also play a key role in the World Poetry-Childhood Day. Suggestions include the setting up of a poets' wall, where children can either pin their own poem or one which they have especially chosen. Miming, acting out or dancing the poems are other alternatives.

Local poets should be invited to schools and the media should be encouraged to increase its coverage of poetry and poets. Newspapers should also be encouraged to publish poems written by children, say the organisers.

Schools are also invited to send their best poems to World Poetry-Childhood Day, Avenue des Ortolans 95, B-1170 Brussels, Belgium, to take part in a touring exhibition. Entries should arrive by June 1st. (Belgium - March 8th).

ENERGY CONSUMPTION TO RISE IN 1984

Energy consumption in the European Community could increase slightly this year for the first time in five years, according to a European Commission report.

The forecast, which was published in February, is based on expected economic growth rates of 1.7%. Demand for oil, which accounts for nearly half of the total, will remain unchanged, but the production of nuclear power will increase by about 12%, it claims.

Last year Europeans were using about 11% less energy than in 1979. Oil consumption was 27% lower than a decade before and energy imports continued to fall.

Coal imports also fell as Europe continued to become increasingly self-sufficient in energy. Last year oil imports only provided Europe with 32% of her energy requirements, compared to 62% in 1973.

Nuclear energy has played a key role in cutting imports. Since 1979 it has replaced the equivalent of 30 million tonnes of oil or 16 % of the total reduction in oil and gas imports over the period. EC oil and gas production has also risen and a wide variety of energy-saving measures have been introduced.

EC TO CUT NOISE POLLUTION

Woken up on a Saturday morning by the pneumatic drills and persistent hammering from the building site next door? Stay calm - help is at hand.

The European Community is about to introduce legislation aimed at controlling the amount of noise made by pneumatic concrete-breakers and jack hammers in Europe.

Ministerial agreement on a European directive to fix limits has been on the cards since October but problems such as the certification of machines imported from non-EC countries have delayed a final decision.

THORN BACKS YOUTH ACTION

The under-25s in Europe have a rough deal. 4.8million of them are unemployed and many others are the victims of social,sexual or racial discrimination.

European Commission President Gaston Thorn says that the EC's contribution to the United Nations International Year of Youth in 1985 should be to help them actively and not just to organise artistic,sporting or cultural events.

EC efforts should focus on increasing links with young people, he says. Amongst the concrete proposals already adopted, he lists the EC programme for the exchange of young workers, the joint study programmes in higher education and vocational training schemes.

New proposals include plans for European voluntary service and special schemes to train youngsters in the use of new technologies.

WALKING THROUGH PLATE GLASS...

Plate glass doors and windows have always been good Hollywood slapstick material. But in fact large numbers of people are injured every year by walking into poor-quality glass doors and windows that shatter on impact.

British European Democrat MEP Winston Griffiths has been pressing for the introduction of safety measures including quality controls on the glass used in doors and indicators to stop people walking into them.

The European Commission has taken up the issue and in December, following discussions with plate glass producers, it published a report on the use of glass in buildings.

Safety measures already exist in most EC member states, but European legislation could make for safer products,energy saving and increased consumer protection,it says.

RHINE POLLUTION CONTINUES

The Federal Republic of Germany is the only signatory of the 1979 Rhine Chemical Convention to have submitted a concrete national programme for cleaning up the river, according to EC Environment Commissioner Karl-Heinz Narjes.

France and the Netherlands, the other signatory governments, have yet to present plans on how to reduce chromium, zinc, copper, nickel and lead pollution.

Programmes were due to be submitted to the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine against Chemical Pollution by the end of 1983, according to Dutch Independent MEP Doeke Eisma.

HIGHER COMPENSATION FOR OIL SLICK VICTIMS?

A French study has raised the issue of higher compensation for the victims of oil slick disasters.

The study, which was compiled by researchers at the Ecole Nationale des Ponts et Chaussées in Paris, shows that the cost of full compensation for damage caused by oil slicks is less than 1/10,000 of the value of the oil carried in tankers.

An increase in shipowners liability from US \$15 million to US\$50 million would entail an increase in costs of between two and three cents for every tonne of oil carried - a negligible amount given the current fluctuations in oil prices, says the report.

LIGHT BULB BONANZA

A British Euro-MP has complained that cheap light bulbs from South Korean, Rumania and Yugoslavia are flooding into Europe because of a one-way preferential tariff deal.

European Democrat MEP Michael Welsh says that the three countries all have free access to EC markets whilst limiting imports of bulbs from Europe.

But EC External Affairs Commissioner Wilhelm Haferkamp has rejected the figures he quotes as "alarmist". The EC's General System of Preferences (GSP) is there to help developing countries and is not about reciprocity, he says.