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Week of March 29 to April 3

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New technologies are at the service of mankind but it is wise to prevent certain abuses. Data cards, for instance, could be used to violate the privacy of EEC citizens. The European Parliament has just proposed Community legislation designed to protect people against such abuses.

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The plight of baby seals has provoked an unprecedented wave of sympathy in Europe. The European Parliament has just called on the Ten to close their frontiers to seal skin imports. This has brought sharp criticism from the Canadians.

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The European Cultural Foundation was born on March 29. It is designed to encourage a better understanding between European people who share the same culture.

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Small and medium-sized businesses are helping to create jobs in Europe. They are being called upon to play an increasingly important role in the European economy. The Parliament has now suggested that their activities should be encouraged by a series of special measures.

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The EEC's "energy bus" continues to plough up and down the roads of Europe. Introduced several years ago, on the basis of a Commission initiative, the achievements of the "energy bus" seem encouraging. Its aim is to help European factories and firms save energy.

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The main theme of almost every speech at the celebration marking 25 years of the EEC was that Europe must regain its old drive and determination.

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Europe mourns one of the founding fathers of the European Community.

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TECHNOLOGY: Who's afraid of computers?

Technology can always be seen in a good or a bad light. For example, computerised information makes our daily life easier, at the office, in the home or at school. But information systems can also constitute a serious threat to the individual and our right to privacy. It has become clear that the increasing centralisation of personal information in computerised data banks could represent a major danger. The problem therefore arises of how to reconcile the need for such computerised information and the rights of the individual.

National legislation is often slow to keep pace with technological innovation and does not always guarantee the rights of every European citizen against an abuse of stored information. In several European Community member countries there exists no specific legislation protecting the citizen from abuses in the storage or utilisation of such data. This is the case in Italy, Greece and Ireland. Elsewhere in Europe national legislation varies as does protection. Inside the European Community there is no over-all law. But the European Parliament has just taken a step to change the situation. It says that the existing international convention and codes developed by organisations such as the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development are inadequate, and it has called for legislation to establish uniform minimum protection throughout the member countries.

Any future Community legislation should act as a suit of armour against abuse from both inside the country and outside. This is because transmission of data across borders in certain industries, such as banks, insurance, airline reservations and many others, has undergone a revolution. Most large international companies now transfer data from one office to another across national boundaries.

The European Parliament would like the use of such data to be subject to prior authorisation and says that protection of data should be identical in both the private and public sector. Any future Community directive should also require that the individual concerned be informed about data stored about him and his access to the data should be guaranteed.

If such legislation is adopted, the average citizen could be more confident in future that his rights in society have kept pace with new technology.

ENVIRONMENT: The plight of baby seals

For several years international campaigns have been aimed against the massacre of baby seals for their pelts and a large current of public opinion has been harnessed to help the animals. A large number of people have tried to intervene between the hunters and their victims, including the European Parliament, and a major debate recently took place in Strasbourg on a report prepared last year by Mrs. Johanna Maij-Weggen (see Eurofocus no. 42/81).

The Parliamentarians almost unanimously condemned the "industrial" hunting used to meet the need for "luxury" goods which allow a few interests to make "immense profits". By a crushing majority the members of the Parliament voted for a resolution asking the member countries of the European Community to close their frontiers to imports of baby seal fur and products made from them. But will the 10 countries follow the recommendation and prohibit imports? It is doubtful, as it is not just the style-conscious few who are interested in killing the animals. Enormous financial interests are also at stake. The European Parliament vote was not well received in Canada, especially in the Atlantic coast regions receiving substantial revenues from the seal trade. Reaction was sharp. Describing the Parliament's decision as "unacceptable", the Prime Minister of Newfoundland said that he was to ask the Canadian Government to ban European ships from fishing cod in Canadian national waters. The Canadian Federal Fishing Minister also raised the possibility of using the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) to set against European fishermen. The retaliation measures envisaged would have important consequences for European fishermen whose annual catches in Canadian waters amount to about 90,000 tonnes. The Canadian authorities demonstrated the seriousness with which they regard the subject when, on March 12, they arrested three ecologists belonging to the Green Peace Movement who had sprayed paint on some 150 seals to ruin their fur and make it unusable for commercial purposes. The last word has probably not yet been heard about the baby seal debate. It is still too early to tell whether concern for wildlife or commercial interests will triumph.

CULTURE: A new voice for European integration

When most references are made to European integration, thoughts almost automatically turn to agriculture, customs unions or perhaps monetary policy. But what is probably the oldest and most natural form of European unity has been largely overlooked up to now in the setting up of institutions charged with developing European-scale activities and programmes. After some seven years of delay and deliberation, part of that oversight has now been corrected. Acting on a recommendation dating back to 1975, the European Community countries have signed an agreement establishing a foundation for the promotion of regional cultural activities.

The act was signed at ceremonies in Brussels on March 29, coinciding with both the 25th anniversary of the signing of the EEC and Euratom Treaties and the summit meeting of EEC heads of state and government.

The European Foundation they created will be a first, small step toward strengthening the common cultural heritage of Europe, which in fact has existed for centuries through acknowledged ties in music, art, literature and thought. But since the modern process of European integration was set in motion by statesmen and politicians rather than artists or men of letters, it is not surprising that little emphasis was placed on the more abstract elements of life.

This will be the role of the new European Foundation which is to be located in Paris. The new institution will have a small staff, initially financed by the European Community budget, but which also will seek donations and contributions from other sources. Its function will be to complement and cooperate with, but not to duplicate, the work of other existing national or European institutions interested in things cultural. It will try to generate additional efforts at a European level to make the citizens of Europe aware of their common cultural, historic, social and technological heritage.

Among its activities will be the promotion of professional exchanges between different EEC countries, particularly among young people. It will also try to develop programmes, conferences, exhibits and other projects to demonstrate in an attractive and popular way the European Community's sense of identity and the cooperation between its peoples.

The idea of a foundation was first raised in 1975 in a report on the prospects for European political unification prepared by the then Belgian Prime Minister Leo Tindemans. While political unity is still some way off, this new effort aimed at encouraging unity of a different kind, may be another way of promoting the same objective in what is, perhaps, a more pleasant and attractive way.

ECONOMY; Promoting small and medium-sized businesses

Small and medium-sized businesses have a major role to play in the European economic life. They provide employment for an increasingly significant percentage of the Community's active population, and, because of their special structure, can contribute to the reinforcement of a democratic and free society.

Their importance to the EEC's economic future has been recognised by the European Parliament. In a resolution adopted recently, the Parliament recommended that 1983 should be proclaimed "the year of crafts and small and medium-sized businesses".

The year is expected to be marked by information campaigns and the organisation of special fairs and seminars. A special meeting of EEC ministers dealing with the problems of small and medium-sized businesses will also take place.

The resolution calls for the creation of a European centre for small and medium-sized businesses and for Community-wide action designed to develop and promote all small and medium-sized firms and enterprises. The need for such action is particularly urgent because the majority of new jobs are currently being created by small businesses in Europe.

The Community programme for small firms should, according to the European Parliament, include a special chapter on financial promotion. Appropriate action designed to help firms gain access to capital markets should be taken by the EEC and the creation and maintenance of small and medium-sized firms should be encouraged through loans by the European Investment Bank, says the resolution. Small firms should be able to obtain commercial loans at terms similar to those given bigger businesses.

The need to train managers and workers of small and medium-sized businesses is also stressed by the Parliament. This is necessary if the smaller firms are to become efficient and competitive in the years ahead.

The elimination of technical barriers to trade, the simplification of frontier formalities and any progress in attaining a full-fledged customs union would also help the activities of Europe's small businessmen.

The resolution also calls for changes in the tax regime applied to small and medium-sized firms.

ENERGY: "Energy bus" keeps on rolling

The "energy bus", introduced by the European Commission some years ago, is still travelling around Europe, showing factories the best and most efficient way of conserving energy.

One telephone call is enough to bring engineers and technicians to your doorstep. They explain, especially to small businesses, the most appropriate ways of using energy resources. Equipped with the latest and most sophisticated measuring instruments, computers and tape recorders, the energy bus has all the tools necessary to demonstrate energy conservation techniques to those willing to learn.

Before receiving a visit by the energy bus, the firm in question must provide certain information concerning its consumption of energy, and the technical equipment it uses. The bus is linked to a common research centre: Ispra in Italy, whose computers record all data and send back their conclusions. These results appear on the screen of the energy bus, and are put on to special cards.

Energy consumption can clearly be cut down substantially by improved planning methods, more efficient use of electrical equipment, household apparatus and office equipment, but above all by the insulation and modernisation of heating systems.

As more than half of the energy consumed in Europe is used in offices, shops and homes, more and more people are coming to realize that the work done by the energy bus is really very useful. A quarter of energy consumed can be saved by modernising heating systems, and as much as a half by better insulation.

The energy bus is also particularly useful because it draws up an energy conservation programme which is really made to measure and adapted to the particular problems facing each firm and factory. Following the positive results obtained in the Federal Republic of Germany, there are currently six buses in circulation in Italy, two in Belgium, two in the Netherlands, and Ireland will shortly receive one.

Particularly promising results have been obtained in Italy where examples of an energy consumption reduction of 10 to 15% have been obtained. Even competitive firms, whose energy consumption levels are already quite low, can reduce their energy consumption by 2 to 3%.

25th ANNIVERSARY: Call for a "new Messina"

It was in Messina in Sicily in 1955 that the Foreign Ministers of six European nations undertook to build a united Europe, starting a chain of events which eventually led to the signing of the Rome Treaties two years later. On Monday 29th March 1982, at an impressive ceremony at the Palais des Academies in Brussels, 160 European statesmen gathered to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the signing of the Treaties.

King Baudouin of Belgium, who hosted the meeting, spoke of a mixture of "pride and dissatisfaction" felt by Europeans after twenty-five years of European integration. He called for a decisive reinforcing of the things that unite us "to face up to the serious problems which confront us" in this day and age.

New European Parliament Minister Piet Dankert claimed that a "new political initiative" was needed, and Gaston Thorn, the President of the European Commission, proposed another "Messina-type" conference before 1984, to "relaunch" the Community.

OBITUARY: Europe mourns Walter Hallstein

Professor Walter Hallstein, one of the founding fathers of the European Community and the first President of the European Commission, has died at his home in Stuttgart, aged 80.

As Secretary of State at the German Foreign Ministry he was Adenauer's chief delegate at the negotiations leading up to the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community. In 1958 he became the first President of the Commission of the European Economic Community, a position he held for nearly ten years.

A brilliant Christian Democrat academic lawyer, he saw the Commission as the driving force behind the European movement, and gave his name to West Germany's policy of integration with the West and insulation from the East, in the immediate post-war years.

He repeatedly clashed with General de Gaulle over the aims of the EEC, the role of its institutions and its need for an independent budget. He also strongly supported British entry, despite France's veto, and in this, as in most other matters, his views eventually prevailed, to make him one of the most influential figures of his generation.

Because of the Easter holidays, Eurofocus will miss one week of publication. Our next issue will appear on April 19th. A Happy Easter to all our readers!