

# Eurofocus

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DEVELOPMENT: European Parliament calls for more efficient food aid policies

For a number of Third World countries, food aid has become an essential element in their attempts to fight hunger and malnutrition. Unable to produce enough food to feed their growing populations, an increasing number of developing countries have come to rely on international organisations and bilateral aid donors for regular supplies of wheat, milk, butter and sugar. Properly distributed, food aid can play a vital role in helping the poorer nations cope with development problems. Food aid, does, however, have its drawbacks. Special controls are necessary to ensure that the food being shipped to Third World countries is of good quality. Unless the aid is properly integrated in overall national development or at least agricultural strategies, it can work to discourage local agricultural production and make people dependent on imported food. Finally, the aid must reach the really needy populations in the developing countries.

Recent reports, including a detailed study drawn up by the European Court of Auditors, the EEC's financial watchdog, indicate that European food aid falls short of a number of these criteria. The Court's arguments are now backed by the European Parliament which, in a report adopted in April this year, calls on the European Commission to streamline its food aid operations.

The Parliament makes it clear that except in special emergencies, the EEC should make a point of only sending food aid which is consistent with the eating habits of the beneficiary countries. Until recently, says the report, the EEC's food aid has been influenced by its agricultural surpluses rather than by Third World requirements.

An appeal for more stringent controls of the quality of products being sent as aid is also made by the Parliament. In addition the report criticizes the fact that the aid often arrives too late to be useful, leading to unexpected stock-piling expenses which are paid by the recipient nation.

Emphasis is also put on helping developing countries to become self-sufficient in food. Such an objective cannot be reached by food aid alone, but by making such aid an integral part of a "global development strategy" which is coordinated with each country's agricultural policies. But the study notes that the EEC should continue to give food aid, especially in emergency conditions created by natural disasters.

INSTITUTIONS: To move or not to move ...

For a number of years European circles have buzzed with complaints about the "temporary" character of the EEC institutions. This stems from the inability of the member states to agree on a permanent site for them.

Even though their locations are officially only provisional, it is highly unlikely that the European Commission and the Council of Ministers will leave Brussels. In addition, the Court of Justice and the Court of Auditors seem set in Luxembourg. But the European Parliament continues to pay the price of this indecision with its monthly plenary sessions in Strasbourg, its Committees in Brussels and its secretariat based in Luxembourg.

This situation, which requires its members and personnel to make continuous moves, leads to a considerable waste of time and detracts from the Parliament's efficiency. What's more, the expense of travelling, rents, equipment, maintenance, telephone communications and so on could be significantly reduced if all Parliamentary activities were concentrated in a single location.

The situation was acceptable in 1965, when the Parliament numbered only 142 members and 492 staff, but it is much less so today, with 434 members and nearly 3000 on the payroll.

In the absence of a decision as to a permanent location, up to now the EEC has rented the buildings they occupy instead of buying them or having them built. The total rental costs paid by the institutions have climbed to nearly £ 42 million, which represents an increase of 85% since 1978.

An inter-institutional group charged with property planning for the Community was created some two years ago. At the end of its first efforts, the group has recommended the purchase or construction of buildings rather than their rental. It also expressed surprise that the Community pays taxes in both Belgium and Luxembourg, although Community institutions are officially exempt from all national or local taxes.

The European Parliament's budgetary control committee recently published a report requesting the definition of a long-term Community policy on its headquarters for at least five years and suggested the sharing of certain facilities by several institutions in order to encourage economy.

BUSINESS: Working week reduced

40, 39, 38, 37 ... the gradual reduction in weekly working hours has a striking resemblance to a countdown. A cutback in working time is needed because there are not enough full time jobs for everybody. The solution may be to distribute available employment between the maximum number of people and consequently reduce the number of hours worked by the individual.

Despite resistance to the idea, the reduction of working hours is seen as one of the most effective ways of fighting rising unemployment. The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) has asked for a 10% reduction in working hours in Europe in the short term.

Such a reduction can be made by acting, separately or simultaneously, on several different fronts including reducing weekly working hours and overtime, increasing school-leaving age and lowering retirement age.

The European Trade Union Institute, a research and information body set up following an ETUC initiative<sup>in</sup> 1978, has just published its third annual report on collective bargaining in Europe. The conventions negotiated in 1981, says the report, reveal that substantial progress has been made in a number of countries, especially in such areas as longer holidays, a reduction of the working week and a lowering of the age of retirement.

Today, annual paid holidays generally cover five to six weeks (depending on the sector) in France, and the Federal Republic of Germany, and four to five weeks in Belgium and the Netherlands. The Greeks and the Irish are rather less well off and receive between 14 to 30 days of holidays and 25 days, respectively.

The working week is equal to or below 40 hours in all EEC member countries, except in Greece where it varies between 36 to 42 hours, depending on the sector. It varies between 36 and 39 hours in France and Belgium.

The report published by the Institute stresses that employers' attitudes to a reduction in working hours remains negative or even hostile. In the European Community the United Kingdom is opposed to a reduction, but the French, Italian, Irish and Danish governments have adopted more favourable positions. Since the resolution on a reorganisation of working time issued by European ministers in 1979, the European Commission has presented several proposals on the protection of part-time workers and the introduction of early retirement schemes.

TECHNOLOGY: Electronic revolution costs jobs

When electricity was first discovered more than two hundred years ago, it was hardly predictable that it would come to dominate society in the way it does today.

Even a few years ago the electronics sector was limited to mean equipment or systems using electric current such as radio, television, computers and most household appliances. But now it involves computers, microprocessors and systems composed of a variety of transistors and microprocessors. The sector is developing so rapidly that its growth is estimated at 15% annually and experts predict that in the future it will change the face of society.

A recent study in the United States indicated that whereas currently 20% of the labour force is required to produce all the manufactured goods in existence today, by the year 2000 only 2% of the work force will be needed. This will be the result of the introduction of more and more labour-saving technologies affecting almost every sector from banking to printing.

Another in a long series of studies on the subject has just been prepared by the European Parliament's Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs. The survey is devoted to the situation in the electronics market and its impact on the employment situation in the European Community. It also covers the general employment consequences of new technology and possible limitations on imports from Japan.

Among the problems studied by the Committee is the relatively small part of the manufacturing market for such equipment represented by European producers, despite the fact that Western Europe is perhaps the largest consumer and buyer of such equipment. The by-now familiar reason cited is the lag of Community industries behind their American and Japanese competitors. As has been cited so often previously, the reason is not only a lack of public or private investment in this field, but also the dispersed and duplicatory efforts undertaken in Europe because of fragmented national markets. The Committee report and resolution to be presented to the Parliament supports previous recommendations for better coordination and a joint European industrial and social strategy to improve the competitiveness of EEC industries. Part of the report also deals with possible ways of limiting competition from Japan and placing greater restraints on transnational companies to stop them dismissing workers made redundant by new technologies. The report also states that while in the short run jobs may be lost because of technological innovation, more jobs will be created in the longer term and there is no choice but to compete with the U.S. and Japan in order to avoid losing even more jobs.

SCIENCE: Computers rule the waves ...

In the days when the sailing clippers ruled the seas between the great ports of Western Europe, it was the wind and the weather which governed the sea-borne trade that brought us prosperity. But nowadays the elements are rapidly losing ground to computers.

The European Port Data Procession Association (EVHA) is a system of computer links between the nine European ports of Glasgow, Copenhagen, Hamburg, Bremen, Bremerhaven, Rotterdam, Antwerp, Le Havre and Genoa. Aimed at lowering costs, reducing the risk of pollution and increasing safety and efficiency, the scheme was started in 1979 and is jointly financed by the European Community and the ports themselves.

When a ship sails from any EVHA port, information, including its name, destination, draft, a summary of any dangerous substances that it may be carrying, its time of departure and estimated time of arrival is fed into the computer, which stores it until the port of destination makes an enquiry. The computer then scans the file for all ships destined for that particular port and passes on the data plus a detailed description of the ship concerned.

The scheme enables ports to prepare themselves for the arrival of ships in a way that has never before been possible on a large scale. Supplying the correct reception facilities can not only save time and money, but can also make the handling of dangerous cargoes much safer by advance warning of what they are and how they should be dealt with.

The EVHA has also undertaken a special "dangerous substances study" aimed at a pooling of existing data on the transport, loading and unloading of dangerous cargoes, with a view to reducing the threat of pollution and the risk to dock workers.

The European Commission initiative that led to the creation of the EVHA has met with remarkable success. Applications from Barcelona and Stockholm to join are pending and ports appear increasingly willing to split running costs by releasing personnel to operate the system.

The EVHA is just one of the data processing projects subsidized by the European Community aimed at improving European efficiency in an increasingly competitive international trading arena. Twenty-two others include a scheme to link up European Chambers of Commerce and projects in areas as diverse as shipping, the law and education.

SOCIAL: Equal opportunities for women plea

The long and difficult struggle for equal opportunities for women is being carried out by the European Community's three major institutions, but not all of them always agree.

The European Commission's detailed "new action programme" for women published earlier this year (see Eurofocus no. 1/82) has been criticized by the European Parliament in a number of areas. There are also indications that members of the Parliament's Committee for Women's Rights are getting ready for a fight with the EEC Council of Ministers, which, fears the committee, could be on the point of adopting an action programme which does not take the Parliament's recommendations into account.

The Parliament itself held a lively, and sometimes heated debate, on the best ways of improving the professional, educational and social status of women in the European Community at its session in Strasbourg from May 10 to 14.

The debate revolved around a number of proposals made by Mrs. Marie-Claude Vayssade, a French Socialist member of the Parliament. The resolution adopted at the end of the session stresses that the Commission's proposals for an action programme are only the "bare minimum" that the women are entitled to and that the plan should be completed rapidly by legal measures designed to ensure that the proposals are followed up by EEC member countries.

The Commission's programme focuses on a reinforcement of individual rights and the need to fight "indirect discrimination". A call to improve the situation as regards discriminatory taxes paid by women and the introduction of better working hours was also made by the Commission which also appealed for a better distribution of parental responsibilities.

The proposals are seen as inadequate by the Parliament. According to Mrs. Vayssade, they are little more than a "catalogue of pious wishes" which EEC countries are likely to ignore during the current crisis. Although Mrs. Vayssade recognised that the plan of action was in keeping with the needs of women in Europe, she said that there was no reference to health or education problems. She also emphasized, as did other parliamentarians, that too much was left to <sup>the</sup> goodwill of EEC countries, some of which were reluctant to introduce legislation in favour of equal opportunities for women.

The resolution adopted almost unanimously by the Parliament also called for more funds for the Commission to continue its struggle for equal rights and stressed that during the transitional period pending the introduction of a directive on equal opportunities, EEC countries should abstain from taking any action which would reinforce existing discrimination.