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Win a car in an open photo competition for the best shots of your twinned town.

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MONEY: European Commission criticises lack of investment

Hardly anyone has money to throw around these days, but governments and economists agree that much more investment is needed to get Europe's stagnant economies moving again. According to the European Commission, an estimated 5 million new jobs could be created by spending about £55 billion on new investment. That would absorb about half Europe's record number of unemployed. But nowhere near that amount of money is available in public or industrial coffers and even if it was, it might fuel a disastrous spiral of runaway inflation.

EEC leaders at a recent summit meeting in Brussels asked the Commission to examine the problems facing investment in recent years and to suggest possible improvements at Community level.

The first thing the resulting study noted was that in most of the Community countries, with the exception of the Federal Republic of Germany and Ireland, investment has declined as a proportion of GNP since the 1974-75 economic recession. Forecasts for 1982 suggest only slight improvements in Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg and the United Kingdom. Levels were slightly better than in the United States, but significantly below the impressive standards set by Europe's other major industrial competitor, Japan.

Among the main problems noted in the survey were low profit margins, high production costs, inflation, currency exchange rate fluctuations and high interest rates. The study also looked at the role played by public authorities in investment, including policies to control inflation, interest rates, taxation, regulation, public spending and deficits, and the expenditures of public enterprises and official financial institutions. It showed that government regulations to protect consumers and the environment can often have direct consequences on industrial investment decisions.

Another aspect of interest to both the recent EEC summit and the Commission study was, how the activities of the Community could be used to stimulate investment. The Community has direct and indirect ways of influencing investment. This involves direct funding and loans from the Regional and Social Funds, for research, development and other programmes and £1.95 billion proposed from the New Community Instrument. The opening up of the entire 10-nation EEC market for investors and producers will also be used to its fullest to promote economic recovery.

EDUCATION: Taking information technology to the classroom

A number of sophisticated pieces of equipment, such as micro-computers and word-processors and others, have already made an appearance in our daily lives. These new technologies often mystify us, sometimes disturb us and generally upset our everyday habits. Many even feel they will become the victims of the changes taking place as a result of the new instruments. But the introduction of new technology should be the result of a general social consensus to avoid misunderstandings and defensive attitudes because without it Europe will be unable to face up to the numerous challenges of modern times.

Professional training is an important information area and the European Commission has just selected a number of specific high-priority initiatives in the field, which are of universal interest to EEC member states. Both large and small businesses are affected by the introduction of new information technologies. Large firms in the service sector are progressively introducing automated administrative techniques and their personnel have to respond to new demands. Small and medium-sized firms can also modernise their production processes by applying new technologies and their more human scale often allows the work force to acclimatize better to the change .

For the individual, EEC initiatives include education and adult training, indispensable to the flexibility and adaptability necessary for the work force. New information technologies will be applied in connection with education, especially for young unqualified unemployed persons. But the young will not be the only ones concerned by this training operation which will also benefit older skilled workers, especially those affected by industrial decline. The Commission also proposes to encourage the transfer of knowledge and innovation at all levels between member states. It has suggested that a large-scale information policy should be established to familiarize the public with the potential of new technologies, in conjunction with the mass media, in order that the changes in European society should take place with the support of Europe's citizens and not over their heads.

AGRICULTURE: The price of drinking too little ...

Less than 10 years ago, Europeans were consuming an annual average of 51 litres a head of wine. Now they drink less than 46 litres and it's a trend which is hard for wine producers to swallow. But it is also costly for the European Agricultural Orientation and Guarantee Fund, which has to make up the difference between supply and demand by financing the surplus. At the moment the decline in wine production cannot keep pace with the constant reduction in consumption.

Nevertheless the land area devoted to the European Community's wine production has been significantly reduced. Since the 1976-77 season, when a number of measures such as a stop to new planting and financial aid for withdrawing some areas from production were introduced, the amount of land devoted to the cultivation of grapes dropped from 2,555,000 hectares in 1976-77 to less than 2,438,000 hectares in 1979-80. The reduction in wine-growing has been the most noticeable in France, followed by Italy and the Federal Republic of Germany. However, this reduction has mainly affected areas concentrating on the production of ordinary table wines, while the land devoted to the so-called "VQPRD" (quality wines produced in specific regions) has increased slightly. On the other hand, production per hectare has increased steadily as a result of agricultural advances in fields such as research into new species and the fight against parasites.

The resultant production gap is the reason for the massive recourse to intervention measures such as long-term storage contracts, exceptional distillation and so on. Two years of exceptional harvests and a resulting drop in prices has not helped intervention costs borne by the European Agricultural Orientation and Guarantee Fund which reached more than £150.2 million in 1980 and more than £238 million in 1981.

It is also likely that the public campaigns to combat alcoholism have played a role in the reduction of wine consumption. But wine producers are hoping to reverse this trend by advertising the idea that wine, when consumed in moderation, is the "best and healthiest of drinks".

TECHNOLOGY: Finland joins Euronet

The link-up between the European Community's data-processing network, EURONET, and the comparable Finnish network has just been approved by the European Commission. Euronet was built as the result of an EEC initiative and came into operation on February 13, 1980. It gives users rapid, easy, efficient and economical access to scientific and technical information from a variety of sources. The Finnish link is only the latest example of Euronet's expansion outside the Community borders. Similar agreements were signed with Switzerland and Sweden, in 1979 and 1981. Finland will contribute retroactively to the Community's investment in the system and will stick to the principles laid down in the Treaty of Rome. Expansions of Euronet will benefit all the users who will gain access to a greater number of data bases.

SEX: MEP attacks sperm imports

An American firm which sells frozen human sperm by mail order to doctors practicing artificial insemination is planning to expand into the European market. At least that's what had been reported in the British press, prompting Thomas Megahy, a British Socialist member of the European Parliament, to ask the European Commission what measures it is going to take to prevent frozen sperm imports.

Replying on behalf of the EEC Commission, the Social and Employment Affairs Commissioner Ivor Richard, reminded Megahy that artificial insemination is today a well-established practice. The responsibility for choosing sperm lies ultimately with the doctor, subject to whatever national regulations exist on the issue.

Since sperm is not considered a product quite like most others, the European Commission feels that member states could deviate from the general Community principle of the free movement of goods. "In this case, the reasons might involve the protection of health and public order, mentioned in Article 36 of the EEC Treaty", said officials, obliquely!

VIOLENCE: Suicides increase with unemployment

Following a British report claiming that unemployed men are "more than twice as likely" to kill themselves as people in work, figures have been released showing that suicides in Europe have risen by a massive 12% over the past 10 years.

EEC statistics show that in Denmark, which has the highest suicide rate in the European Community at about 1580 suicides in 1980 have increased by more than a third since 1970. France, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands also recorded substantial increases, but in Germany, where about 12,500 people committed suicide in 1980 and which has the second-highest rate in Europe, there are slightly fewer people killing themselves now than there were 10 years ago. British figures have also remained steady and relatively low, at about a third of the German figure.

In Italy and Ireland, where the influence of the Catholic Church remains a major factor, suicide rates remain low, although in Ireland the figure has nearly tripled in a decade. Greece records fewer suicides than anywhere else in Europe, at less than a quarter of the EEC average.

LAW: Court opens way for "foreign" civil servants

Italian policemen in London, Greek civil servants in Paris and Germans driving Dutch trains may be on the horizon.

In a test case brought by the European Commission against the city of Brussels and the Belgian railways, the European Court has largely condemned their practice of only offering jobs to Belgian nationals.

Out of thirty-one job categories listed, the Euro-judges ruled that only half a dozen could justifiably be reserved for Belgians, on the strength of the fact that they were senior posts requiring access to restricted government papers on urban planning and public administration.

France, the United Kingdom and Germany all participated in the debate, opposing what they saw as a possible eventual influx of "foreigners" into their own public administrations. Imagine Belgians and Danes being able to apply for jobs as postmen and teachers in France and Italy!

CRIME: Italy and France defy Court

Italy and France are the most undisciplined countries of the European Community. That was the message given by the EEC Commission in reply to a question by John Purvis, a British Conservative member of the European Parliament. The question dealt with delays in implementing the rulings of the European Court of Justice.

Under European law, according to Article 169 of the EEC Treaty, Community member states are required to comply with judgments handed down by the Court of Justice as soon as possible.

Italy has proved to be the most rebellious member of the EEC, delaying application of Community Directives 11 times, on issues as varied as measuring instruments, detergents and fertilizers. Depending on the subject, delays ranged from three months to two years. France ranks second among the "refuseniks", followed by Belgium and Ireland. Other members of the European Community do not figure on this list, which tends to show that they generally comply with the Court rulings.

The EEC Commission, which closely follows member states' application of Community law, is not too happy about delays in the implementation of rulings, but it recognizes that not every issue can be judged by the same criteria. It acknowledges that the time necessary for implementation varies depending on whether the measure is administrative or legislative, and whether it needs to be applied by central or regional authorities.

PRIZES ... PRIZES ...

Do you own a camera? If so, this information may be of interest to you. EUROPHOT, the European Association of Professional Photographers, is organising a major contest based on the theme "photograph the city twinned with your own to know it better". The aim is to portray Europeans at their work, during their leisure time and in other activities.

The contest is open to both professional and amateur photographers and will enable people not only to gain a better understanding of Europe, but also to win a number of prizes, including a car.

For additional information, write to: EUROPHOT, European Association of Professional Photographers, Postal Box 366, B-2000 Antwerp, Belgium, or telephone 031/30 03 68.