

Week of September 20 to 25

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INDUSTRY: 10th anniversary of Airbus

In October, ten years ago, the first Airbus took off for its maiden flight and became the pioneer of what became one of the most successful examples of European industrial and technological cooperation in history.

In ten years the huge European joint venture has taken orders for more than 500 aircraft. It is now on the verge of launching its third model, proving that Europe can challenge the U.S. in the highly sophisticated and competitive field of aircraft production. Such joint undertakings have long been advocated by the European Community in a number of promising sectors, such as bio-engineering, communications, electronics and aviation. Joint ventures offer an effective means of overcoming the risks of a growing dependence by Europe on imported high-technology.

The seeds of the Airbus success were sown in the mid-sixties when the state-owned French company Aerospatiale joined forces with the firms from the Federal Republic of Germany, Messerschmitt-Bölkow-Blohm and Vereinigte Flugtechnische Werke, and a small Spanish company to form Airbus Industrie. The consortium was certain that there was a gap in the market for medium to long-range, wide-bodied aircraft capable of carrying 250-270 passengers. None of the U.S. manufacturers, then supplying about 95 percent of the world aircraft market between them, were planning to build such a plane. The first A-300 Airbus was designed for quietness, fuel-efficiency, easy maintenance and quick turnaround time at airports. Parts of the A-300 were made in firms all over Europe, with Britain's Hawker-Siddeley making the wings. The A-300 was assembled at Aerospatiale's production line in Toulouse. Following that maiden flight in 1972, Air France put the first A-300 into service in 1974.

Although the aircraft was well-received, orders were slow for several years. But in the mid-seventies, when the world's airlines sought to combat rising fuel prices with more economical aircraft, airlines turned increasingly to the Airbus concept.

Airbus Industrie then spotted another gap in the market for a 200-seat short and medium-range wide-bodied plane with the same fuel efficiency and the A-310 was born. The first two A-310s have just completed their test flight programme and deliveries will begin in March 1983.

Active planning is also underway for another 150-seat Airbus model, the A-320. In the meantime, more British firms have joined the construction consortium and Airbus, with 506 orders from airlines all over the world, now ranks second in international sales.

FORESTS: Fires sweep Europe

Every year fires devastate about 11 million acres of forests in the Mediterranean regions of the European Community. The European Commission is considering an overall plan of action to combat the problem.

When heat, drought and wind combine, as was the case this summer, only a spark is needed for the forests to go up in flames. Since the beginning of 1982, persistent drought conditions in certain regions in southern Italy, France and Greece have led to hundreds of forest fires. In the French department of Var, about a million acres of forests were recently burnt by fire that lasted three days and during the months of August and September more than 400,000 acres of forests near Athens were destroyed.

Forest fires have major consequences both for the economies and the environment in Europe's southern regions. They directly affect the livelihood of farmers, particularly in Southern France, and aggravate the atmospheric pollution problems which afflict the Athens region.

In reply to a parliamentary question by French Socialist MEP Georges Sutra de Germa , who is also a wine-grower in the Southwest of France, the European Commission outlined what it is planning to do about the problem.

The Commission officials believe it is more important to prevent the fires, rather than to repair the damage afterwards. They want a campaign of better information made available to the public in order to reduce the numbers of fires caused by carelessness or irresponsible actions.

In addition to preventive measures aimed at users of forest areas, Community action will also include improved cooperation between forest fire-fighting services, either in terms of specialised training or in the establishment of joint, especially aerial, means of combating major fires.

Finally, to improve the efficiency of preventive and control measures, the Commission also suggests that member states introduce harsher penalties for arson, which currently causes about 15 percent of forest fires.

TRANSPORT: A European waterway network

Messing about on the river has always appealed to poets and daydreamers, but the European Parliament Committee on Transport has just released a report that says that the European Community needs a coherent and efficient system of major inland waterways as soon as possible.

Among the priority needs listed by the committee is the old idea of a canal from the North Sea to the Mediterranean and another from the Atlantic to the Black Sea.

The importance of inland waterways in the European Community varies according to geographic characteristics and national traditions in each member state. They are almost non-existent in Greece and there are very few in the United Kingdom and Italy. On the other hand, they are extremely important in the Netherlands, where about 40 percent of inland freight is carried by water. The Federal Republic of Germany also has a relatively dense network of waterways which carry some 250 million tonnes a year, or about 25 percent of the country's<sup>total</sup> freight traffic. France has the largest European network with 6500 kilometers of usable canals and rivers. But the deteriorating condition of some canals and competition from railways perhaps explain why only about 10 percent of its total freight traffic uses water as a means of transportation. In Belgium, water traffic has also always accounted for an important share of cargoes, amounting to about 90 million tonnes in 1981 and in recent years, to about 80 percent of transborder traffic.

In recent years, trade between members of the European Community countries has considerably increased, but national governments have only rarely taken international water traffic into consideration. The result has been a fragmentation of the European network.

The European Parliament Transport Committee feels that now is the time to take the needs of the entire Community into consideration and to give the inland waterway system a European dimension. In its report, it suggests that the European Community provide financial support to national projects designed to benefit transfrontier traffic, in particular those that are aimed at improving trade and eliminating bottlenecks. The committee also emphasises the need for two major projects, the 3500 km Rhine-Main-Danube Canal and the Rhine-Rhone Canal from the North Sea to the Mediterranean. The original dream of Charlemagne and Napoleon may eventually be realized by the European Community.

INSTITUTIONS: The European Parliament is 30 years old

The European Parliament celebrated its thirtieth birthday with much aplomb and style in September of this year. The "European Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community", the precursor of the present Parliament, was, in fact, "born" on September 10, 1952. The beginnings of the Parliament were quite modest. It numbered 78 members nominated by the Parliaments of the six countries which were then members of the ECSC, which had been set up a few months earlier in Paris. The Parliament's prestige and political role grew with the creation of the European Economic Community in 1958, the enlargement of Europe to include 10 members and more than anything else, with the decision to elect the assembly directly in 1979. There are currently 434 European Parliamentarians, reflecting the colours of at least 57 political parties. Parliamentary debates cover the situation in Afghanistan, Poland, Lebanon and Central America, subjects on which the members have made their opinions known to the international community.

The most important development in the Parliament's history has without a doubt been the direct elections of June 1979. These elections provided an increase in legitimacy for the Parliament with public opinion. Participation in this election passed 60 percent. Strengthened by this success, the European Parliament has gained a certain confidence which it perhaps lacked before. One example was the way it increased its role in the discussion over the EEC budget. In 1980, the Parliament for the first time rejected the Community budget on the grounds that agricultural spending was too great compared to funds for other Community policies. The Parliament thus gained an increasing role in the determination of Community policies.

What will become of the Parliament in the coming years? Its President, Piet Dankert, addressed himself to the question during a recent interview during the anniversary celebration: looking back on the extremely positive record of the past 30 years, Piet Dankert said that the Parliament will have to be stronger in the future, and that can only happen with a stronger Community.

DEVELOPMENT: Milk floods India

"Operation Flood II", which has been described by aid specialists as "one of the most successful schemes ever implemented in the Third World", is aimed at developing India's infant dairy industry and increasing the country's self-sufficiency in food.

Based on massive aid from the European Community and the World Bank, the project is the largest comprehensive rural improvement scheme ever undertaken in the Third World. Covering almost 10 million <sup>milk</sup> producers' families living in 155 districts, it does more than just provide them with better facilities for producing and selling their milk. "Flood II" has gradually brought a large part of rural India into contact with the twentieth century.

"Operation Flood" was first launched by the Indian government in 1970. Its second phase began in 1978 and is expected to be completed by 1983. The European Community is committed to providing some 31,000 tonnes of milk powder and 12,700 tonnes of butteroil per year over a six-year period, at a total approximate cost of 270 million dollars. The Community contribution is expected to cover half of the total cost of the programme, the balance being met by the World Bank and by the Indian government itself.

The programme is therefore an ingenious mix of foreign and national aid. The food aid sent by the Community is processed into liquid milk by the Indian Dairy Corporation and sold in India's major cities at reasonable prices. The money earned from the sales is used by the corporation to finance its dairy development programme in the rural areas.

The programme pays for the organisation of dairy cooperatives and the introduction of efficient transport systems to collect milk from the villages, to convey it to the dairies for processing and to supply it to the cities. The setting up of storage systems where excess milk is converted into milk powder and butteroil to be stored for another season is also part of the plan. Veterinary services aimed at increasing the productivity of local dairy herds are also provided.

The European Community which is a key partner in the operation sees the programme as an essential part of its food aid and development programme. Food self-sufficiency schemes are one of European Commissioner Edgard Pisani's main hopes of making European Community aid better suited to Third World needs in developing rural areas.

LAW: MEP's attack visa requirements

Why does a European still have to obtain a visa to visit the United States while an American can enter the European Community without one? Two Members of the European Parliament have attacked the requirement and have asked the responsible authorities to do something about it.

British Conservative MEP Lord Bethell and Danish Socialist Eva Gredal have called for visa reciprocity between the United States and the Community. They especially feel that the move would contribute to better relations between the two sides of the Atlantic. The American authorities may already be heading in this direction as a pilot project to scrap visa obligations for eight countries is currently before the House of Representatives. If it is approved by President Reagan, the European Parliamentarians would like its rapid extension to the entire membership of the European Community.

COMMUNICATIONS: Cheaper phone calls?

Corsican Socialist MEP Yvonne Theobald-Paoli has called for a reduction of telephone rates on weekends, holidays and after eight in the evening for calls between European Community member states.

Because business activity virtually stops during these periods, the European telecommunications network is under-utilised. Some member states already apply lower rates outside peak hours for both internal and external calls. The Theobald-Paoli proposal requests member state governments to open negotiations to expand reduced rates throughout the European Community. She says that rates could be reduced by as much as one-third for calls between Community countries in off-peak periods.

This would obviously benefit the many Europeans who have friends or relatives in other Community countries.