



COMMISSION
OF THE EUROPEAN
COMMUNITIES

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THE WEEK IN EUROPE

Visegrad Summit. UK Prime Minister John Major and Jacques Delors, President of the European Commission, hosted a meeting of the Prime Ministers of Poland, Hungary and the Czech and Slovak republics, the so-called Visegrad group of countries, at a summit in Lancaster House, London, on Wednesday. In a joint statement afterwards, Major and Delors said they welcomed the meeting as a demonstration of European Community support for all the newly democratising countries of Eastern and Central Europe. The summit agreed to encourage intensified, practical cooperation between the Community and the Visegrad countries. To follow up the European Agreements which envisage eventual accession to the EC, four areas were marked out: more open and liberal markets, local and democratic links, training and education, and parliamentary links. Major and Delors welcomed the moves towards powerful Association Agreements linking the Visegrad Group with the EC. They also looked forward to the development of ever closer cooperation, although Major told a press conference later that there was no fixed timetable for full accession to the EC.

TACIS aid. The Commission yesterday unveiled plans for 450m ECUs (£360m) to fund its 1993 TACIS programme of technical assistance to the former Soviet republics. External Affairs Commissioner Frans Andriessen, announcing the Community's plans at a conference in Tokyo on the newly-independent states, said that TACIS aimed to provide the kind of training and know-how to get the states working for themselves as quickly and as effectively as possible with the minimum of bureaucratic control. Substantial funding will go to nuclear safety, but TACIS will support primarily agriculture, transport, telecommunications and business support programmes. TACIS is the world's largest programme to the newly independent states with a commitment of 850m ECUs (£680m) since its launch in 1991.

TEMPUS forges ahead. The EC's TEMPUS project to upgrade and restructure higher education in Central and Eastern Europe enters its third year with an increased budget and a record number of joint projects. Some 98.3m ECUs (£78.6m), a rise of 40% on last year, will fund the 6,378 TEMPUS projects underway in 1992/3. Recipient countries are also allocating more funds to education from their EC PHARE allocations, showing the importance they attach to education in economic and social reforms.

Sutherland report. Peter Sutherland, the former Competition Commissioner appointed to head an EC advisory group on the Internal Market, said this week that a "major effort" at clarification would be needed to ensure the market worked smoothly. The group's report published on Wednesday said that the Internal Market must "capture the imagination" of businesses, especially smaller firms, by convincing them that the rules for a frontier-free Europe would be applied fairly. While the report said there was no reason for the Internal Market to be viewed as remote and bureaucratic, it called for better legal procedures to deal with cross-border disputes with cooperation at Community, national, regional and local levels. Subsidiarity should not provide an excuse to fragment the Internal Market, it added.

World Cup tickets. The European Commission ruled this week that an agreement between organisers of the 1990 World Cup football held in Italy and an Italian tour operator had restricted competition in sales of package tours to the event. The World Cup organising committee had granted the operator, "90 Tour Italia", exclusive rights to sell entry tickets as part of a package tour, leaving travel agencies unable to "shop around" for cheaper deals to offer supporters. However, the Commission acknowledged that some selective distribution rights were necessary to guarantee safety at the matches. This is the first time the Commission has made a decision under competition law on ticket sales at sporting events. Although no fine will be imposed on this occasion, the Commission intends to ensure that distribution systems of major sporting events fully comply with EC competition laws in future.

Rail unions. Transport Commissioner Karel van Miert this week refuted the charge that Community policy was "hostile" to the railways. In an hour-long frank exchange of views with representatives of the European railway unions in Brussels on Monday, van Miert denied that the Commission was actively encouraging rail privatisation. The Commission remained neutral towards plans for privatisation, he said. It was for Member States to determine their own policies. However, the Commission wished to see a public service maintained on social and regional policy grounds.

Landing slots. Transport Ministers meeting in Brussels on Monday rejected a Commission proposal for take-off and landing slots to be redistributed to "new entrant" air carriers when other established

airlines fail to use their allocation. The Commission had requested that the proposal, based on EC competition rules and designed to promote a code of conduct on landing slots, contain a strict definition of the "use it, or lose it" principle under which smaller airlines would gain under-used routes.

Red tape and SMEs. In its second report on simplifying red tape for businesses, the Commission points out that small and medium-sized enterprises bear the brunt of administrative costs. The Commission hopes the report will raise awareness of the need to reduce burdens on business. It highlights the continuing need to launch initiatives for improvements to the general business environment, particularly for SMEs, and gives guidelines for future action by the Commission. The report will be made available to European and national business organisations and research institutes.

Intellectual property rights. The Commission set out its principles for a partnership between standard-making bodies and the owners of intellectual property rights in a Communication issued on Tuesday. The Community's policy is to protect private intellectual property and promote EC-wide standards to encourage the spread of new technologies, aims sometimes seen as irreconcilable. The Commission wishes to make EC standards available to both EC and third country companies.

Data protection. The Commission adopted this week the data protection proposal which seeks to remove obstacles to the free movement of data in the Single Market yet ensure a high level of protection for the individual's privacy, rights and freedoms. Member States have widely divergent laws: some have no data protection legislation at all. The Commission proposes a guideline Directive under which Member States will have autonomy to implement common principles in such areas as codes of conduct, privacy and Press, and marketing data.

BCCI report. Financial Services Commissioner Sir Leon Brittan announced on Friday that the Commission was studying in depth Lord Justice Bingham's report into the BCCI affair to see what lessons could be drawn for banking regulations at Community level. Sir Leon said it was clearly important that the Community's supervisory systems should be as secure as practicable to prevent a similar case in the future. Sir Leon has already noted Lord Bingham's suggestion that the EC's "single licence" regime should be strengthened to discourage banks from setting up in the Member State with the lightest supervisory regulations.

Tomorrow's regions. Regional Policy Commissioner Bruce Millan said last week that the Community's more prosperous regions, although net-payers in the European Union, would gain from the new commercial opportunities that go "hand in hand" with economic integration. Speaking in Edinburgh to delegates at a conference of enterprise bodies, the Commissioner said there was a genuine prospect of a "shared advantage". It would be possible for regions lagging behind to catch up, rather than "drop out".

Health & Safety week. To raise awareness of health and safety at work and the importance of reporting accidents in the workplace, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities is holding a "Scottish Workplace 'No Accident' Day" on 25 November. Details from Mr B. Kelly on 041 227 4301. **Seminar on Smoking Policies at work**, a one-day event organised by the East Berkshire Health Authority on 26 November. For details contact Ted Piker on 0753 832808.

The First Europeans. This new exhibition at the Natural History Museum, part of the UK's European Arts Festival, spans 700,000 years to trace the fortunes of Europe's earliest human inhabitants. It gives an up-to-date view of one of science's most hotly-debated issues, the origins of modern man. The exhibition, opened by the Rt. Hon. Sir Edward Heath last week, will tour 30 venues around Europe.

Conference & Diary Dates:

Camden Training Centre for the long-term unemployed launches on 6 November an "Opportunities for Women" project under the European Social Fund initiative which will pilot a new EC vocational qualification. For details contact Lynne Jones on 071 482 2103 or fax 071 485 7624.

UK Presidency events in the North. EC conference "Business in the Future Europe: problems and perspectives" on 1 December at Royal County Hotel, Durham. Speakers from the Bundesbank, IMF, and Bank of England. Contact Cityforum on 0225 466744 for details. **Advent for Europe**, 1 December in Durham Cathedral. Tickets £10 & £5 from Liz Levy at Signpost Europe on 091 232 5545.

European Arts Festival update. Contemporary dance Company Bagouet from France at Royalty Theatre, London, 30 Oct; Venetian Sartori group's Son et Lumière in Guildhall Piazza, Derry, N.Ireland, 31 Oct.

Eastern Germany and the Single Market. A one-day seminar organised by Relay Europe at Cisswood House, near Horsham, West Sussex on 19 November. Contact Chantelle Michaux on 0273 643657.

Council Meetings:

Consumer Affairs	3 November	Brussels
Trade	6-7 November	Brockett Hall
Internal Market	10 November	Brussels
Cultural Affairs	12 November	Brussels

Our next briefing will be on Thursday, 5 November at 11.30am.