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THE WEEK IN EUROPE

National Briefing in London. About 1,000 representatives from UK industry, the City, commerce, local government, trades unions and academia attended the Commission's "National Briefing" on Friday, 31 March which was held at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre in Westminster. The morning plenary session was presided over by former Commission President Lord Jenkins of Hillhead and the opening address was given by Commission Vice-President Frans Andriessen. He was followed by four more distinguished speakers - Don Pedro Solbes, Spanish Minister for the EEC (representing the Spanish Presidency), Kaspar Cassani, President of IBM World Trading Corporation, Sir Robert Scholey, Chairman British Steel PLC, and the Hon Francis Maude MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs, Department of Trade and Industry.

After luncheon, the audience divided into five separate working groups on Industry and Commerce, Finance and the City, The Regional Dimension, The Professions, and the Social Dimension. Among the speakers were Commission Vice-President Sir Leon Brittan, Commissioner Bruce Millan, Stanislas Yassukovich of Merrill Lynch, Geoffrey Mulcahy of Kingfisher PLC (formerly Woolworth Holdings), Geoffrey Fitchew, Director-General for Financial Institutions and Company Law at the Commission, Roger Taylor, Chief Executive Birmingham City Council, Jock Worsley, President of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales and David Lea, Assistant General Secretary of the TUC. The five groups also had distinguished Chairmen - Sir Michael Butler, former UK permanent Representative to the European Communities, Don Hanson, Managing Partner, Arthur Andersen & Co, Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, Sir Max Williams, past President of the Law Society and David Williamson, Secretary General of the Commission. The Commission's London office is preparing a journalistic account of the proceedings which will be available shortly in booklet form.

Brittan on merger controls. Commission Vice-President Sir Leon Brittan, in charge of Competition Policy, has tabled some new ideas in an effort to help achieve a consensus on a European Mergers Regulation. Sir Leon's merger suggestions are: firstly, to increase from 1,000m ecus (£650m) to 2,000m ecus (£1,300m) the threshold at which the combined aggregate worldwide turnover of the firms involved in a merger would bring them into the Community's ambit. Secondly, to introduce a transitional period, to the end of 1992, during which that threshold would be set at 5,000m ecus (£3,250m). The 2,000m ecus limit would operate from 1 January 1993. Thirdly, to make an adjustment in the so-called single Member State criterion - from three quarters to two thirds - whereby a merger falls outside the Regulation if a certain proportion of the companies' turnover is made in one and the same Member State. Fourthly, to make clear the dividing line between Community and national jurisdiction and to explain how Rome Treaty Articles 85 and 86 are implemented by the Regulation. Finally, the Commission will take all necessary steps to operate the Regulation efficiently.

Funding for UK job training. The UK will get just over 18% or 640m ecus (£426m) of the EC's 3.5bn ecus (£2.3bn) funding, from the Community's Social Fund, for job training in high unemployment areas this year.

Tougher car exhaust pollution limits proposed. The Commission yesterday (Wednesday) proposed tougher limits on car exhaust pollution from 1 January

1993. It called for the present voluntary controls on exhaust emissions for all new cars to be made compulsory by January 1991 with mandatory tougher standards two years later.

Draft agreement to end frontier controls. After months of disagreement, France, FRG, Belgium, Luxembourg and Holland have drafted a document setting out the basis for introducing a border-free zone in 1990. If it is ratified, this so-called Schengen agreement is almost certain to be presented as a prototype for the EC agreement, now being drafted, under which the Commission has proposed that border checks between all Member States be abolished by 1992.

From farm policy to rural policy. Speaking in London this week, Graham Avery, Director in the Commission, said agriculture in the economy and society of Western Europe had undergone a quiet revolution. "The percentage of Europe's manpower employed in agriculture fell from 15% in 1965 to 7% in 1985." Present policy, he said, was concentrating not just on farming, but also the physical and economic environment of our rural areas. "That is why Europe must give a new emphasis to rural development and situate agricultural policy decisions more and more in that wide framework." Avery's analysis of a new approach to agriculture was echoed in a speech on the same day by Ray MacSharry, Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development. On the question of harmonization he said it was unthinkable, in the context of the Single Market, that there should still be barriers to intra-Community trade based upon differences in national legislation concerning, for example, veterinary or sanitary matters. He said the emphasis in rural policy will be on integrated schemes rather than separate action on a sector by sector basis.

Progress on Health and Safety Directives. Meeting in Luxembourg yesterday (Wednesday) the Social Affairs Council has adopted a common position on three directives on the health and safety of workers in the workplace. If passed by the European Parliament and the Council they will be applied from the end of 1992. They concern health and safety in the workplace, the utilisation of work tools, and the utilisation of individual protective equipment.

Europe-wide telephone paging in 1992. By January 1992 at the latest a harmonised system of European telephone paging should be a reality. Named ERMES (European Radio Messaging System) the system will be available for use on cheap portable sets if the present Commission proposal is adopted by the 12 Member States of the EC. The UK is in the vanguard of the development.

Debt write-off for BR Engineering approved. The Commission has approved a £64m write-off associated with the privatisation of BREL (1988) Ltd, the railway equipment design, manufacturer and repair subsidiary of the British Railway Board (BRB).

More aid to Africa. In the past two weeks the Commission has approved three aid packages to Africa - 3m ecus (£2m) for Sudan; 650,000 ecus (£446,000) to combat an epidemic of meningitis in Ethiopia, and 1m ecus (£666,000) to help finance the repatriation of refugees to Namibia.

Diary and Conference Dates

Commission and UK Health and Safety Executive Conference for information specialists on occupational health, safety and hygiene in Luxembourg on 26-28 June. Details : 0742 752539.

Centre for Economic Policy Research meeting on "1992 and the restructuring of European Retail Banking". Address by Prof Damien Neven on 10 April at John Power Hall, 10 St James's Square, London SW1. Details : 01-930 2963.

Session of European Parliament	10-14 April	Strasbourg
Internal Market Council	13 April	Luxembourg
Informal Political Co-operation	15-16 April	Granada
Agriculture Council	17-18 April	Luxembourg
Eco-Soc Committee Plenary Session	25-27 April	Brussels

Our next briefing will take place on Thursday, 13 April at 11.30 am.