



COMMISSION
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COMMUNITIES

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THE WEEK IN EUROPE

UK isolated on Social Charter. After long negotiations in Brussels on Monday, the UK Government remained in sole opposition to the proposed European Social Charter which in an amended form will now be sent to the December 8/9 European Summit for discussion by Government heads. EC Social Affairs Ministers however changed the text in several areas including health and safety in the work place, equal conditions and free movement for workers. Employment Secretary Norman Fowler, however, maintained the UK's general reserve on the Charter. Commissioner Vasso Papandreou who presented the Charter for discussion said afterwards she was satisfied with what had been done. She would wish the Charter to be adopted unanimously at the Summit, but added that she would prefer an agreement by eleven members rather than see the Charter watered down to make it unanimous. She promised to present the accompanying Action Plan by the end of November. This would take account of German wishes concerning maternity and annual leave, sickness pay, youth protection, job quotas for the handicapped, worker health and safety, temporary work, mutual recognition of qualifications, part-time working.

Bangemann visits East Germany. On Tuesday, Commission Vice-President Martin Bangemann responsible for the Internal Market made an historic visit to East Germany where he met East Germany's leaders, including the new President Egon Krenz. The Commission described the visit as largely "a fact-finding mission", but it represents part of the EC's search for a new relationship into the countries of Eastern Europe in the light of the profound changes taking place there.

New shape to UK Government. Douglas Hurd's arrival as the new Foreign Secretary brings a professional as well as a political touch to the key post determining the UK's policies in the European Community. Hurd, once an adviser to Edward Heath in the early seventies, moved from the Home Office to head the Department he served as Minister of State in Margaret Thatcher's first administration. Before becoming an MP, Hurd served as a diplomat in Peking, New York and Rome. He will be occupying the UK chair in the General Affairs Council for the first time in Brussels on Monday.

New plans for sewage treatment proposed. On Tuesday Environment Commissioner Carlo Ripa di Meana unveiled ambitious plans to clean up the European Community's rivers, lakes and coastal waters through tough new standards for sewage treatment. The proposed Directive would ultimately classify areas of discharge in three different ways. In general terms the minimum requirement would be so-called secondary treatment which involved biological degradation as a means of water purification. In sensitive areas, additional treatment will be required to meet specific environmental needs such as reduction of nutrients. For discharges to coastal waters simple primary treatment can be given, provided that the hydrographic conditions are favorable and comprehensive studies indicate that such discharges can satisfy the relevant water quality Directives and other environmental requirements. One, rather more controversial, aspect of the Directive is its proposed ban on the dumping of sludge at sea. In addition to the UK, both Ireland and to a lesser extent Spain use this form of effluent disposal. The Directive also lays down requirements concerning direct industrial discharges of waste water of a nature similar to municipal waste water and the monitoring of discharges from municipal treatment plants and of receiving waters.