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INFORMATION MEMO

300th meeting of the EEC Commission

On January 6 the EEC Commission held its 300th meeting.

The Commission met for the first time on January 16, 1958 in the Château de Val Duchesse, on the outskirts of Brussels, where the Treaties of Rome were negotiated. The Commission then began setting up its organization and some month later moved into No. 23, avenue de la Joyeuse Entrée, which is still the official address of the provisional headquarters in spite of the growth of the Commission's departments.

The Commission is made up of nine members appointed for four years by unanimous agreement of the Member Governments. Throughout their term of office, the members of the Commission act in complete independence of the Governments and of the Council of Ministers. The Council has no power to dismiss the Commission; it can only be unseated by a motion of censure passed by the European Parliament.

At present the Commission employs 2 192 officials, excluding non-established staff and local employees. It has nine Directorates-General: External Relations, Economic and Financial Affairs, Internal Market, Competition, Social Affairs, Agriculture, Transport, Overseas Development and Administration. In addition, there are the Secretariat and the Spokesman's Group. The Commission also shares three Joint Services with the other two European Executives (the Euratom Commission and the ECSC High Authority): the Legal Service, the Statistical Office and the Joint Information Service.

The Commission has many duties: it is the watchdog of the Treaty, it is the Community's executive organ, it initiates Community policy and it gives expression to the Community interest.

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Watchdog of the Treaty

The Commission sees that the Treaty and the decisions of the Institutions are properly enforced. The Commission makes inquiries (sometimes after complaints by private individuals), comes to an impartial decision and, where appropriate, prescribes what measures the Member States must take to regularize the situation. The Treaty lays down strict procedure for dealing with infringements.

Between January 1 and December 31, 1964, twenty-four cases of infringement were dealt with. In five cases the file was closed after the Member State concerned had submitted its comments, having immediately put the matter right. In eight cases, comments by the Member State are awaited by the Commission or are being studied by its staff. In seven cases, the Commission has issued reasoned opinions. In one of these seven cases the file was closed when the Member State concerned accepted the Commission's view; in the other six cases the Commission is waiting for the Member State to do so. Four cases have been referred to the Court of Justice: one of them was withdrawn when the Member State concerned regularized the situation, in two cases the Court ruled in favour of the Commission, and the fourth is pending.

The Community's executive organ

The Treaty and the regulations made in pursuance thereof confer wide executive powers on the Commission. It is the Commission that makes regulations under the Treaty or under Council enactments (on agriculture, for instance).

During 1964, quite apart from day-to-day management of the agricultural markets (basic prices to be taken into consideration in trade in farm products coming under market organizations), the Commission adopted 124 regulations and one directive.

Most of the decisions addressed to Governments or private individuals are also taken by the Commission.

Decisions addressed to Governments may authorize safeguard measures under various articles of the Treaty, adjust or prohibit state aids, grant or refuse tariff quotas, and so on.

Among the decisions addressed to individuals or firms, the best known are those relating to restrictive practices. The Commission has sole powers to exempt any agreement from the general ban laid down by the Treaty, where the agreement meets certain conditions.

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The Commission also exercises powers of superintendence and control, by which it is able to motivate its decisions or to check whether Community legislation is being put into effect. This is the case as regards restrictive practices and also freight rates, where the Commission may make on-the-spot inquiries or checks in transport undertakings themselves or may take sample surveys.

Apart from tariff quotas the Commission made 205 decisions in 1964. It also addressed to the Member States 25 recommendations and 40 formal opinions.

Lastly, the Commission administers the funds provided for in the Treaty or set up since the Treaty came into force. The 1964 budget of the European Social Fund totalled 23 197 860 units of account. The Agricultural Fund (EAGGF) will total several hundred million units of account. And the European Development Fund (for overseas countries) has at its disposal over a five-year period 800 million units of account, 730 million of which are administered by the Commission alone (grants and loans) and the rest by the European Investment Bank (loans).

The Commission initiates Community policy and gives expression to the Community interest

The Commission initiates Community decisions. The Treaty, chiefly in its provisions concerning economic union, leaves a wide margin for the formulation of common policies within the guide lines it lays down. It is the Commission's task to draft and put to the Council for discussion proposals for Community legislation.

The Commission plays this role of initiator - and motive force - of Community policy both by working out comprehensive policies and by preparing texts relating to specific problems.

To quote only one topical instance, the essence of the common agricultural policy was contained in the Commission's memorandum to the Council of December 11, 1959, the main lines of which were approved by the Council on December 20, 1960. Since then, all the agricultural decisions up to the recent one on the common cereal price have been taken on the Commission's initiative within the framework of the 1959 memorandum.

In taking the initiative and putting forward proposals, the Commission is assisted by a number of high-level committees set up under the Treaty or by Council decision - such as the Monetary Committee, the Short-term and Medium-term Economic Policy Committees, the Advisory Committee on Transport and others.

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The extent of the Commission's role can be judged by the number of documents put before the Council in the course of 1964: 156 proposals and 96 other communications (reports, drafts, etc.).

The Council, for its part, adopted 80 regulations, 14 directives and 55 decisions on proposals by the Commission in the same year, as well as an important recommendation to combat inflation.

The Commission has the same part of initiator to play in external relations too, with the additional weight deriving from its position as negotiator for the Community. Thus the Commission, acting under Council directives, represents the Community in the GATT trade negotiations (the Kennedy Round) in Geneva. The Commission negotiated the association agreements with Greece and Turkey on behalf of the Community and the Member States. Employing a relatively new technique, the Commission held exploratory talks with a number of countries seeking trade agreements or association agreements; this enables the parties to assess the situation without entering into any formal obligation, after which the Council, in possession of the facts, can decide on the opening of negotiations proper and give the Commission appropriate instructions.

Finally, the Commission has one role that cannot be assessed mathematically, the role of "honest broker" and mediator in the Council, where it facilitates or even compels decisions. Anyone who follows the daily activity of the Community knows what results the Commission has obtained, sometimes at a critical juncture, by throwing the whole weight of its political authority into the scales.

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