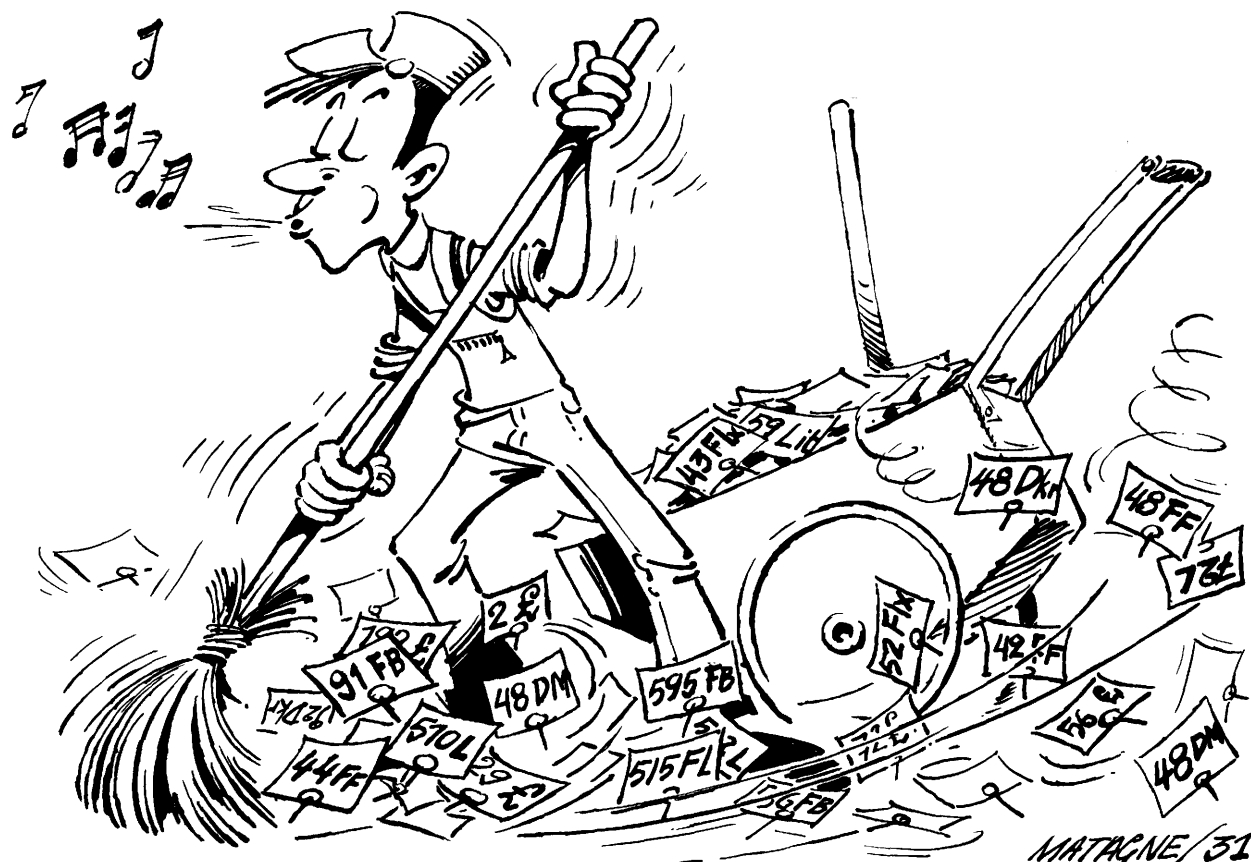


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Autumn 1975: The Statistical Office of the European Communities has compiled a comparative list of consumer prices in the nine capital cities of the Community.

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IN THIS ISSUE:

- * Where to spend your money - The cost of living in Europe (p. 3)
- * The European Community and the workers (p. 3)
- * Consumers and the farmers - a common struggle (p. 3)
- * Bankruptcies in the European Community (p. 3)
- * The potato crisis (p. 4)
- * Competition policy and consumer protection (p. 4)
- * The water crisis (p. 5)
- * Non-tariff barriers on the agenda (p. 5)
- * Customs classification of cranberries (p. 5)
- * Europe's midwives (p. 5)
- * Chemical pollution of the Rhine (p. 6)
- * Europe in ruins (p. 6)
- * Everyman's guide to social security (Contd.) (p. 6)

**** WHERE TO SPEND YOUR MONEY - THE COST OF LIVING IN EUROPE**

There is a well-known saying that to get the best value for your money you should eat in Paris, buy your clothes in Bonn, live in Rome and go to the theatre in London. It was not just to test the truth of this, however, that the Statistical Office of the European Communities, in autumn 1975, carried out a large-scale survey of consumer prices in the nine capital cities of the Communities.

ANNEX 1 contains some surprising figures taken from this survey, which has never been carried out on such a large scale before.

**** THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY AND THE WORKERS**

In the present crisis, when millions of people are directly affected by redundancies, closures and unemployment, the European Community is reshaping its social policy.

ANNEX 2 explains what the European Community is doing to increase the protection of workers' rights and extend worker participation in the running of firms.

**** CONSUMERS AND THE FARMERS - A COMMON STRUGGLE**

Farmers' and consumers' representatives met in Brussels in a frank and friendly atmosphere. Sir Henry Plumb, President of COPA (Committee of Agricultural Organizations), Mr van Hulle, President of the COGECA (General Committee for Agricultural Cooperation) and Mr Dumont, President of the CCC (Consumers' Consultative Committee) all said, in their own way, that producers and consumers had interests in common.

For the consumers, Mr Dumont stressed that what they were disputing was not the principle of a common agricultural policy, but some of its consequences - excessive margins between producer and consumer prices, profits enjoyed mainly by large agricultural holdings, surpluses, etc.

Sir Henry Plumb stressed the advantages of the common agricultural policy for the European consumer. He also stated that he was strongly in favour of discussions with consumers.

Mr van Hulle (COGECA) hoped for greater efficiency on the part of consumers' associations to facilitate cooperation with the agricultural cooperatives.

It was decided that the discussion be continued by a liaison group composed of representatives of COPA-COGECA and the CCC. These organizations could also exchange information.

**** BANKRUPTCIES IN THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY**

The number of bankruptcies in the European Community serves to underline the economic crisis of recent years. The table below gives the information available to the European Commission on the number of bankruptcy proceedings, "Règlements judiciaires" and liquidations in the nine Member States over the past three years.

	<u>1973</u>	<u>1974</u>	<u>1975</u>
Belgium ¹	1 810	1 883	2 242
Denmark ¹	327	313	n.a. ²
France	12 709	15 467	17 224
Germany	5 515	7 722	9 195 ⁴
Ireland	91	118	161
Italy	4 578	3 883	3 196 ³
¹ Luxembourg	5 068	4 692	3 280 ³
Netherlands	20	16	29
United Kingdom	2 545	3 155	3 394
	3 363	5 191	6 676

¹Number of proceedings concluded.

²Data not yet available.

³January-October 1975: For comparison, the January-October 1974 figures were 3 006 proceedings started and 3 589 concluded.

⁴Including bankruptcy proceedings not started owing to lack of assets.

The national laws on bankruptcy vary appreciably from one Member State to another. Any comparison would therefore be risky.

** THE POTATO CRISIS

According to currently available estimates, the 1976 potato harvest in the Community will be around 30 million metric tons, which represents a drop of 10% over the 1975 harvest. For comparison, a normal harvest is in the region of 40 million metric tons, the level reached in 1973 and 1974.

The 1976 harvest will probably not result in such high prices as those recorded at the beginning of the year. Producers will no doubt reserve smaller quantities for animal fodder or starch production and the high prices will lead to further falls in human consumption. Finally, imports will be made easier in the autumn and winter as a result of past experience. Sweden recently exported 1 000 metric tons of potatoes from its new harvest to the Community.

While on imports, it should be noted that the harvest in Poland is normal this year (46 million metric tons), double the previous year's figure in Sweden and good in the United States and Canada and that the acreage under potatoes is 4% up on last year.

These factors together should bring prices down to more reasonable levels.

** COMPETITION POLICY AND CONSUMER PROTECTION

The European Parliament is disappointed: its Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs is astounded to find no mention of consumer protection in the European Commission's report on competition policy. The House feels that every effort should be made to find out why the prices of identical products vary from one Community country to another, since this, after all, could be one proof that the competition rules have been infringed. The European Commission has already acknowledged the part that competition policy can play in the fight against inflation, but it has also stated that "measures to halt the abuse of dominant positions cannot be converted into systematic monitoring of prices".

In the debate during the last part-session of the European Parliament, Mr Vouel, Mr Borschette's successor in the European Commission, rebutted the charge of neglecting the consumer. He stated categorically that protection of consumers' interests had consistently been a guiding principle in Commission policy. He added: "For my part, I feel that consumer protection must remain one of the main objectives of competition policy. The Commission will not hesitate to invoke, as it did in the Chiquita bananas case, the rules of the Treaty of Rome whenever, as a result of agreements or abuse of dominant positions, undertakings charge widely differing prices for identical products in different parts of the common market".

**** THE WATER CRISIS**

The European Commission has just set up a working party consisting of four of its Members who are particularly concerned with problems relating to water. Mr Lardinois (Agriculture), Mr Scarascia Mugnozza (Environment), Mr Brunner (Research) and Mr Guazzaroni (Industry) will together investigate what should be done to form reserves of water, assist irrigation, control tree-planting or reafforestation, promote the recovery of waste water, etc.

**** NON-TARIFF BARRIERS ON THE AGENDA**

Now that 18 Community Directives have speeded up the elimination of non-tariff barriers to trade (see Euroforum No 30/76), growing interest is being taken in the European Commission's work in this area. Over the next few months three events will take place, designed to brief the industrial circles concerned, in which the appropriate departments of the European Commission will be taking part, in company with Mr Schloesser, Director for the free movement of goods.

On 13 October 1976, a "Standardization Day" will be held in The Hague, organized by the Netherlands Institute of Standardization (NNI), during which Mr Schloesser will give an address in Dutch on "The European Communities and International Standardization".

On 25 and 26 October, the Gottlieb Duttweiler Institute (GDI) in Rüschlikon (Zürich) is arranging a special seminar on the "Harmonization of technical rules and standards within the EEC", conducted in German.

On 23 November, ORGALIME (Liaison Committee for European Engineering and Metalworking Industries) is organizing a Conference on the removal of technical barriers to trade in the Community (in French and English).

**** CUSTOMS CLASSIFICATION OF CRANBERRIES**

Cranberries imported from Finland may be exempt from customs duty if as "fresh berries" they come under heading 08.08 B of the Common Customs Tariff. German customs officers found one consignment of cranberries to be a very hard, icy and crystallized mass. Their verdict was ruthless: these were deep-frozen cranberries, falling under heading 08.10 B and therefore liable for 20% tax.

The importer put up a good show: the cranberries had been deep-frozen only to keep them from deteriorating en route and not to hold up their release to the market. Besides, they were not travelling in refrigerator cars, and if the customs official had checked a bit later, he would have found thawed-out fruit.

The Court of Justice of the Communities examined the case. The Advocate-General noted in passing that, once unfrozen, imported cranberries were not offered for sale as "fresh", but went into jams and jellies. He concluded: "If a consumer is able to tell fresh cranberries from thawed-out ones, we have to assume that a customs official would not find it difficult either". So the deep-frozen Finnish cranberries will not be benefiting from heading 08.08 B of the CCT, after all.

**** EUROPE'S MIDWIVES**

To ensure an equally high level of training for midwives in the Community, the European Commission has just proposed to the Council of Ministers that an advisory committee on midwifery training should be formed, similar to those which already exist to harmonize medical and nursing training.

When formed, the new committee will start its activity with a comprehensive exchange of information on training methods and the substance, standards and structure of education in theory and practice as imparted to future midwives in the Community countries. The committee will carry out consultations in order to reach a common conception of the standards to be attained in midwifery training and, if need be, of the structure and content of training. Lastly, the committee will consider changes in training to adapt it to new advances in midwifery practice, medical and social science and teaching methods.

**** CHEMICAL POLLUTION OF THE RHINE**

The Convention for the Protection of the Rhine against Chemical Pollution could be signed around 15 October. The signatories will be France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Switzerland. The European Economic Community will no doubt also sign the Convention, as the Commission has just proposed to the Council of Ministers.

The text of the Convention closely follows the Community Directive adopted in December 1975 concerning the reduction of pollution caused by certain dangerous substances dumped into the aquatic environment of the European Communities. During the negotiations, it became clear that provision must be made for Community participation in the administrative body of the Convention, namely the International Rhine Commission.

**** EUROPE IN RUINS**

THE EUROPEAN DEMOLITION ASSOCIATION (EDA) has just been formed in The Hague by three national associations of demolition contractors: the Deutscher Abbruchverband, the National Federation of Demolition Contractors, and Babex of the Netherlands. The aim of this new European Association is to promote the interests of the demolition industry in the European Community. The EDA is open to membership by sister associations in the other Community countries. Babex (44, Benoordenhoutsweg, The Hague) is acting as the Secretariat.

**** EVERYMAN'S GUIDE TO SOCIAL SECURITY (Contd.)**

What should a French worker do if he is struck down with raging toothache in Gibraltar? What are the pension rights of an Italian technician working in Karlsruhe? The answers to these and many other questions will be found in "Guide No 1: Social security for Migrant Workers", recently published by the European Commission. This first guide is available in nine different editions, and can be obtained, free of charge, from the social security offices in the nine countries of the European Community, and not from the Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, as wrongly stated in Euroforum 30/76.

Guide No 2 on temporary residence in a Community country is now being printed. Three further Guides will be published over the next few months: No 3 for workers who are sent by their employer to another Community country for a limited period, as well as for international transport workers and other workers who, like commercial travellers, are regularly employed in more than one Member State; No 4 for pensioners and pension claimants; and No 5 for members of a migrant worker's family who reside in a different Member State.

WHERE TO SPEND YOUR MONEY: THE COST OF LIVING IN EUROPE

To get the best value for your money you have to eat in Paris, buy your clothes in Bonn, live in Rome and go to the theatre in London. The joke is a bit stale now, so it wasn't to see if it was true that the Statistical Office of the European Communities in autumn of last year carried out a wide-ranging survey of consumer prices in the nine Community capitals, and then spent long weeks using their data to calculate consumer purchasing power equivalents.

This kind of survey is an essential tool in getting a better idea of people's real income, conducting a coherent purchasing power policy, achieving European monetary union and applying the competition policy on which the European Economic Community is based. For all these reasons, and because no such survey has ever before taken place on such a vast scale it is important to know just how it was carried out.

705 Articles

Between 15 September and 29 November 1975, investigators from the national statistical offices of Community countries and officials from the Statistical Office of the European Communities "did their shopping" with pencils in their hands. What they brought back in their shopping baskets were the prices paid for 705 articles, of the following kinds:

food, beverages, tobacco:	198
clothing and footwear:	60
accommodation, heating and lighting:	48
furniture, household equipment, ordinary household expenditure:	154
transport and communications:	93
entertainment, leisure, educational and cultural activities:	91
other goods and services:	61

The list can be divided into two groups. Firstly we have certain articles, such as transport, cost of public services, rents, etc. and some items with brands strictly defined, and reference numbers; their prices were the subject of a national survey carried out by the National Statistical Institutes. Secondly there are the other ordinary articles of current consumption available in shops, but which, as defined, cover various different brands and reference numbers. To avoid the danger of built-in distortion, the price surveys were made by multi-national teams consisting of one member from the host country, accompanied by members from two other countries. The Statistical Office of the European Communities coordinated the work.

The minimum number of price quotations collected, generally varied with the type of article: ten outlets were covered for fish, fruit and fresh vegetables, seven for other foods, and five for other articles. Some items with fixed prices, rates or scales needed one quotation only.

Exchange rates in October 1975

The table below shows the current exchange rates when the survey was carried out.

	Germany (DM)	France (FF)	Italy (Lit)	Nether- lands (Fl)	Belgium Luxembourg (Bfrs/Lfrs)	United Kingdom Ireland (£)	Denmark (Dkr)
DM 100 =	100	170.80	26 270.39	102.91	1 508.43	18.84	233.31
FF 100 =	58.55	100	15 380.79	60.25	883.15	11.03	136.60
Lit 100 =	0.3807	0.6502	100	0.3917	5.7419	0.0717	0.8881
Fl 100 =	97.17	165.97	25 527.74	100	1 465.78	18.31	226.72
Bfrs/Lfrs 100	6.63	11.32	1 741.58	6.82	100	1.25	15.47
£100 =	530.70	906.44	139 417.80	546.14	8 005.26	100	1 238.20
Dkr 100 =	42.86	73.21	11 259.73	44.11	646.52	8.08	100

Some surprising figures

Some of the six thousand odd prices are quite astonishing.

Nobody will be surprised of course to hear that a man's winter coat in pure new wool is very reasonable in London (£46) but distinctly less so in Paris (FF 721.75). But it is less easy to understand why a boy's pullover in 100% acrylic should cost in Luxembourg Lfrs 246.7 and in Belgium Bfrs 344.50, when the two currencies are of exactly the same value.

When it comes to food it is the Italians who are the most surprising. In every country in the Community, 500 gr of long-grain rice in a plastic bag costs less than the same amount in a carton: Bfrs 18.50 as against Bfrs 32.41 in Brussels, DM 1.39 as against DM 2.36 in Bonn, and Dkr 3.23 as against Dkr 6.00 in Copenhagen. But the Italians, without batting an eyelid it seems pay out 631 lire for the plastic bag as against 385 lire for the carton. Another cause for wonder is why the 500 gr carton should cost so much in Brussels and Copenhagen, when it costs only Fl 1.52 in Amsterdam and FF 2.22 in Paris.

Is it the law of supply and demand that makes the price of a kilo of mackerel vary so much? Bonn it is DM 4, in Paris FF 6.61, but in Rome it shoots up to Lire 1 817. You are better off buying it in Amsterdam (Fl 2.57) or Brussels (Bfrs 60.29). More surprising is the big difference between London (60.2 pence) and Dublin (34.5 pence). In Copenhagen (Dkr 9.57) and Luxembourg (Lfrs 65.64) prices are about the same.

Guaranteed Emmenthal cheese also raises odd questions. Why on earth should 100 gr of this delightful item cost Bfrs 21.52 in Brussels and only Lfrs 18.49 in Luxembourg? Or 29.4 pence in Dublin and only 19.5 pence in London?

Ever meticulous, our statisticians wanted to know how much it cost to break the heel of your shoe in different parts of Europe. Try to do it in London, ladies; it costs less there (60 pence) than in Copenhagen (Dkr 17.19), Rome (860 lire) or Paris (FF 11.33).

Washing 5 kilos of white linen in a self-service launderette costs Lfrs 91.67 in Luxembourg, not exactly cheap, and nearly as expensive as in Bonn (DM 6.40). You are better off in Brussels (Bfrs 69) or, if you really want a bargain, London: 25 pence. Who can better that?

In the good old days when no drought had been heard of, washing your car in an automatic carwash cost DM 4.90 in Bonn, FF 6 in Paris, 720 lire in Rome, Fl 5.68 in Amsterdam and Bfrs 95 in Brussels; but only Dkr 12.37 in Copenhagen, 23.4 pence in London and 30 pence in Dublin.

Do-it-yourself enthusiasts will be pleasantly surprised to learn that they can snap up bargains if they spend their holidays in Great Britain or Denmark: a two-speed drill costs only £14.73 or Dkr 154.85 there, as against DM 139 in Bonn, FF 209.38 in Paris, Lit 27 560 in Rome, Fl 121.13 in Amsterdam and Bfrs 1 688.50 in Brussels.

Now that Christmas nears, better start thinking of the children: a doll in Bonn costs DM 9.95, but in Paris it will set you back FF 24.25. In London, only 96.3 pence. An electric train (the same model from the same manufacturer) in Luxembourg costs Lfrs 1 230, in Brussels Bfrs 1 650, in Bonn DM 82 but in Paris FF 258!

We can finish this tour where maybe we should have started: how much for a birth certificate? In Bonn DM 3 and in Amsterdam Fl 2.50, but in Rome only 40 lire; in Brussels Bfrs 135 and in Luxembourg Lfrs 40; in London £2.25 and in Dublin 30 pence. Now you know where to go when you're born next.

Purchasing power

The consumer prices gathered in autumn 1975 by the statisticians served as the raw material for calculating "consumer purchasing power parities" (CPPP). Basically, this is the average price ratio for any given article. So there are as many basic parities as articles, ratios being drawn up for each pair of countries.

It is not enough just to calculate CPPP from the exchange rates: CPPP is a method of calculation obtained by comparing the internal market prices of consumer goods and services, whereas the exchange rates result from a balance worked out on the basis of foreign trade, and commercial and monetary transactions.

The figures show for example that, in Bonn, a sum of DM .487 was required to buy the same amount of identical goods and services as could be bought with 100 lire in Rome; this means that 100 Italian lire which, at the rate of exchange current in October 1975 corresponded to DM .3807, were worth DM .487 when expressed in CPPP, Bonn prices being on average around 28% higher than those of Rome.

Subject to all the usual reservations, it can be stated as a general conclusion that CPPPs as between Copenhagen, Bonn and Paris, and the six other capitals, are consistently lower than the corresponding exchange rates; as between Rome, London and Dublin and the six other cities on the other hand CPPP is generally higher than the exchange rates; finally, as between the Benelux capitals and those of the other countries, CPPPs fall somewhere in between these extremes.

In other words, in Copenhagen, Bonn and Paris price levels are relatively high; in Dublin, London and Rome, prices are distinctly lower, the Benelux capitals coming in between.

A careful study of the CPPP is more revealing still, in that even when purchasing power in two countries practically coincides with the exchange rates, considerable differences can be noted between one sector and another. In Bonn and Paris for instance, the ratio is very close to the market rate of exchange, but fruit in Paris is relatively cheap as compared with Bonn, whereas the opposite is the case for clothing and footwear, and entertainment, recreation and cultural services.

Eating in Paris, buying clothes in London, living in Rome and going to the theatre in London would suit only some mythical ideal average European. What Bruxellois wants to go 300 km to Paris to find the same prices (if not the same cooking) as at home? You can dress for just about the same price in Bonn as you can in Copenhagen. It is very cheap to get somewhere to stay in Rome, but what Dane is going to move to save 5%? But it's time you were off to the theatre in London: the shows are good and the prices are irresistible ...

The documents "Consumer prices in autumn 1975" and "Survey of retail prices and consumer purchasing power parities - 1975" can be obtained from the Statistical Office of the European Communities, European Centre, Luxembourg-Kirchberg.

THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY AND THE WORKER

These are hard times: firms are going out of business, factories are laying off workers and many young people are experiencing difficulty in finding a first job. With millions of people directly affected by economic uncertainty the European Community is adopting a new approach to social policy.

The European Community refuses to confine itself to handing out subsidies and adopting regulations. It believes that all its policies should be inspired by social objectives. It is campaigning for greater worker participation, within the firm and within the Community. Indeed the dialogue between government and workers' representatives at national level is already being duplicated at Community level.

The European Community will obviously continue to protect workers' rights but it is now insisting on the importance of coordinated action by management and labour.

1. WORKERS' RIGHTS

Sex discrimination

February 1976 was a good month for European women.

Firstly, the principle of equal pay for equal work, recognized by the Council of Ministers a year earlier, became directly applicable in the nine Community countries.

Secondly, a new Community law was adopted to guarantee female workers the same treatment as their male colleagues in the matter of access to employment, training, advancement and working conditions. It will also protect them against dismissal or loss of status if they take legal action to secure their rights.

Free movement

Now that the principle of free movement is recognized throughout the Community, steps must be taken to ensure that it is fully applied under the best possible conditions.

This is the basic aim of an action programme for migrant workers and their families adopted early in 1976. It proposes measures, which take account of the rights and specific needs of migrant workers, to improve their situation and hasten the integration process. One of the first concrete steps to be taken under this programme was to extend trade union rights to migrant workers and guarantee them access to posts of responsibility.

Other measures will be debated when the Community's Social Affairs Ministers next meet in the Council. The Commission has, for instance, proposed standardized arrangements for paying family benefits to Community workers whose families reside in a Community country other than the one in which they are employed.

An example of what is happening at present will explain why: an Italian working in Germany qualifies for German family allowances for children still living in Italy. But an Italian working in France qualifies for family allowances payable under Italian legislation.

Discrepancies of this kind show that a uniform, Europe-wide payment system is the only way of guaranteeing migrant workers equal treatment in the matter of earnings.

Safety at work

The European Community has set up an Advisory Committee on Safety, Hygiene and Health Protection to encourage the Nine to improve working conditions and take steps to reduce the risk of industrial accidents.

Radiation protection standards have already been defined and the Council is expected to approve them before the end of the year.

Other proposals in the pipeline will protect workers in the chemical industry from health hazards such as vinyl chloride.

Then there is the Mines Safety and Health Commission, which is campaigning against fire-damp and dust explosions and working on standards for electrical equipment for use in gassy mines.

Job protection

On this problem the European Community's social policy endeavours to promote cooperation, offering a meeting ground for consultation and joint discussions.

The European Social Fund supplements this by providing financial backing for public and private vocational training schemes and specific schemes to retrain workers in particularly hard-hit industries - textiles and agriculture for instance - or less-favoured regions. Since August 1975 the Fund has been able to extend a helping hand to under-25s looking for a first job: subsidies amounting to 40 million units of account¹ have already been approved (1 u.a. = £0.42, Bfrs 50, FF 5.55, Fl 3.62, Lit 625, DM 3.66, Dkr 7.5).

The European Social Fund's total budget for vocational training and resettlement grants in 1976 is 440 million units of account¹.

The Fund foots part of the bill presented for settlement by Member States: if the scheme is a public one, it refunds 50% of the cost; if the scheme is private it matches the contribution made by the national authorities. The Netherlands, for instance, will receive retraining grants for 4 500 persons leaving agriculture. In Northern Ireland 126 workers will be trained for new jobs created by a civil engineering firm and 1 500 others will be familiarized with new techniques in the textile industry. In Italy training will be given to 450 unemployed or underemployed workers in areas like Sardinia, Sicily and Calabria who plan to emigrate. Jobs will be found for them in other Community countries but they will be helped to return to Italy once the economic climate improves.

2. WORKER PARTICIPATION

The European Community is very much in favour of greater participation by workers in the life of the firm that employs them. It maintains, for instance, that workers have a right to prior consultation.

In a Green Paper published in 1975 it proposed that workers be represented on the Supervisory Board. This would allow them to make their views known and to monitor all decisions, business decisions included, taken by the company. It is hoped that this Green Paper will provoke a constructive debate.

As international mergers become more and more common a new Community law will protect workers' rights. The new employer will be required to recognize advantages already enjoyed by workers (bonuses, allowances, periods of notice, holiday entitlement ...) in new contracts of employment.

In the event of a merger both employers - the old and the new - will be required to refrain from laying-off staff, to notify workers' representatives of the reasons for the merger and to outline the legal, economic and social consequences for workers on their payroll.

Similarly employers contemplating redundancies are now bound by a Community law to notify workers' representatives in advance so that discussions can be held in an attempt to prevent lay-offs. Employers must also notify the authorities to give them a chance of intervening.

Discussions to promote the signing of a collective agreement at European level are also under way. Progress here is bound to be slow but an agreement of this kind might solve some of the problems posed by multinationals.

The European Community would like to ensure that the management-labour dialogue at European level reflects power ratios at national level. It advocates the creation of a European Trade Union Institute and is prepared to help the trade unions to set one up in the interests of a trade union leadership which is well informed on Community issues.

Workers' representatives were directly involved in Community discussions on economic recovery at the Tripartite Conference held on 24 June last.

The move towards increased participation may not have been particularly well timed but, despite the crisis, the need for concerted action by all concerned is now generally recognized.

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