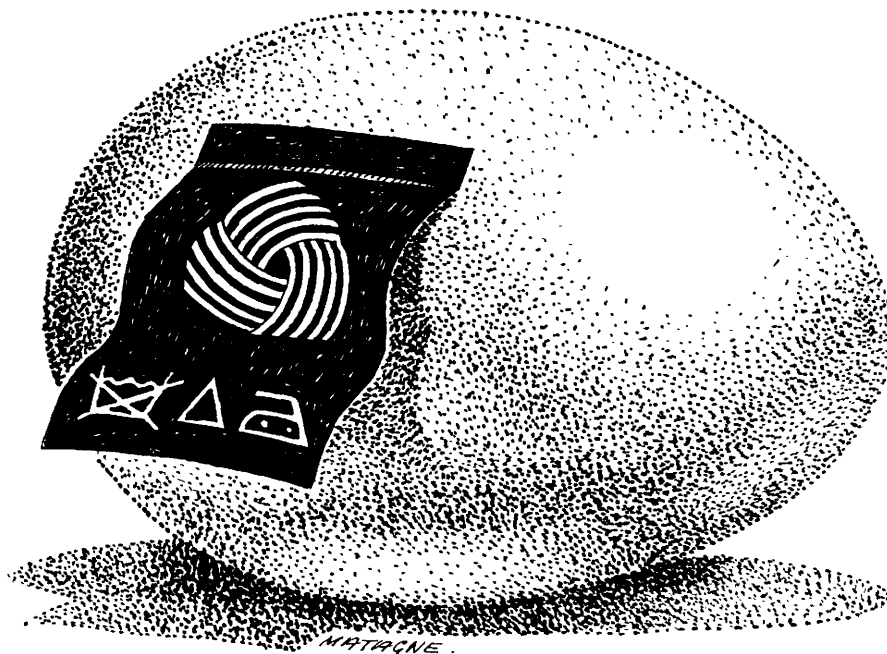


euroforum

europa day by day

Brussels, 22 November 1977

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The consumer is still frequently bedazzled by all the information he receives (see page 3, annexes 1 and 4)

X/641/77

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IN THIS ISSUE

- ++ Consumer information (p. 3)
- ++ At the European Parliament (p. 3)
- ++ European Foundation makes progress (p. 3)
- ++ The irresistible rise of the consumer (p. 3)
- ++ Qualitative jump to economic union (p. 3)
- ++ Trade unions and nuclear energy (p. 4)
- ++ Economic outlook for 1980 (p. 5)
- ++ European Sun (p. 6)
- ++ Commission and consumers cooperate (p. 6)
- ++ Bottoms up (p. 6)
- ++ Less transport formalities (p. 7)

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++ CONSUMER INFORMATION

A seminar on consumer information is being organised by the European Commission in cooperation with the University of Louvain, November 23 - 25th.

In Annex 1 : Euroforum presents some of the views expressed in the reports prepared for the seminar.

++ AT THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

The economic situation, special rights of European citizens, political cooperation, and the fight against terrorism were all discussed in a heavy programme at the recent session of the European Parliament.

Euroforum presents in Annex 2 some of the highlights of the debates.

++ EUROPEAN FOUNDATION MAKES PROGRESS

In his report on European Union, Mr Leo Tindemans proposed the creation of a European Foundation.

Euroforum explains in Annex 3 how the European Commission sees the activities of such a foundation.

++ THE IRRESISTIBLE RISE OF THE CONSUMER

The consumer is a new political entity. Twenty years ago he was hardly recognised at all.

Euroforum shows in Annex 4 the new power and role of the consumer in European society today.

++ QUALITATIVE JUMP TO ECONOMIC UNION

A report calling for a debate on the long term outlook and demanding the immediate implementation of a plan of concrete measures to lead progressively to the economic and monetary union of the European Community has been drawn up by the European Commission. The report has been forwarded to the leaders of the Nine and will be discussed December 5th and 6th coming, in Brussels.

The crisis is common to all Community countries. It has also increased the disparities between the economies of the nine Member States, who are at the same time even more interdependent since almost 50% of their trade is with third countries. Economic and Monetary Union of the Community is in such a situation more necessary than ever to ensure that Member States do not simply export their economic difficulties, particularly regarding unemployment and inflation. The five year action plan which the Commission has just

proposed demands a new political will to strive for progress in the three following areas :

- improving the convergence of the economies of the Community by using both short term economic and monetary policies;

- better operation of the Common Market both through fiscal harmonisation of the Nine and through the liberalisation of capital movements within the Community :

- implementation of a more ambitious structural and social policy, both in the crisis stricken industrial sectors (textiles, steel, shipyards) in the growth sectors (energy, telecommunications, data processing, aerospace, electronics). The social objective is to guarantee Europeans a minimum level of social protection which corresponds to the level of development of European society, and to remedy the problems currently being experienced by young people and women.

++ TRADE UNIONS AND NUCLEAR ENERGY

A positive 'yes' to nuclear energy as long as certain fundamental conditions are respected, is the verdict of the Energy group of the European Trade Union Confederation which they gave in a resolution at a colloquium in Copenhagen, November 10, 1977, organised in cooperation with the European Commission.

The resolution which was adopted and which will now be submitted to the executive committee of the ETUC states that :

- accepting recourse to nuclear energy does not signify that this new source should be given a monopoly position in energy supply. Energy policy and particularly that of the European Community, should aim for a technical and geographical diversification of its resources.....

- nuclear energy should therefore be integrated into the whole of future energy supply. It is necessary to cater for future demand without risk of shortage. Given the many problems which are associated with recourse to nuclear energy, it should be organised with the double intention of limiting its use to the minimum indispensable, and to realise this minimum in the most acceptable conditions.

The factors which demand recourse to nuclear energy are, according to the ETUC's Energy Group :

that amongst the energy sources which the European Community currently has at its disposal, nuclear energy has a role to play in combination with other traditional and new sources of energy, as long as a certain number of fundamental conditions are satisfied;

- the extent of this role should be democratically determined ;
- that an active policy should be implemented in the Community immediately, in order to encourage energy saving by reducing wastage and improving yields ;
- that the development of these nuclear activities in all their forms, and the construction and operation of these installations should always be directed at obtaining maximum economic prosperity and social progress in Europe. In consequence, they should be put under the direct responsibility of public authorities at the local, national and European levels.
- that the use of nuclear energy should be governed by a body of regulations and codes which would ensure maximum safety for both workers and the general public.
- that this programme is for the benefit of all and should develop through extensive European cooperation both with regard to the construction of the installations and their financing, and the research necessary to "Europeanise" the technology employed; these various aspects should also be covered by a development programme at Community level ;
- that the Community should pursue an extensive research policy both technical and socio-economic with the double objective of :
 - + reducing the uncertainties and resolving the problems involved with the use of nuclear fission
 - + promoting the development of alternative sources and technology.

++ ECONOMIC OUTLOOK FOR 1980

The medium term solution for the Community's unemployment problem is sustained growth. This is the conclusion of a report drawn up in the first half of 1977 by the Study Group on Medium Term Economic Assessments, which was established by the European Commission in 1964. The study group has come to a number of conclusions:

- Given the possible growth of productive potential and the degree of capacity utilisation in the base year 1975, when the economic situation was particularly depressed, a medium-term growth rate of over 5% p.a. up to 1980 would be possible for the Community.
- In order to reduce unemployment, a growth rate of more than 4.5% p.a. would be required. (Productivity per man year grows at about 4% p.a., the working population grows at nearly 1/2 % p.a.).

- At present, because of a number of impediments to the growth of demand, it is to be feared that a medium-term growth rate of only 3 1/2% p.a. will be achieved unless additional measures are taken.

These developments mean that future growth of output could be lower than the growth of productivity, so that unemployment would continue on a rising trend.

++ EUROPEAN SUN

Within a few years a small town of 5 000 people will be supplied with electricity from a solar power station built under contract by the European Commission. To be practical, the solar power stations will be built in the south of Italy rather than northern Scotland, and will be linked to Italy's national grid (ENEL).

The power station will be the "tower" type version, where mirrors will be placed on the ground to reflect the sun's rays to a central collector mounted on top of a tower. Water passing through the collector will be transformed into steam, which will then be used to turn a turbine linked to an electricity generator. The electrical energy thereby produced will be put into the existing electricity network.

The surface area of the mirrors will be around 7 000 square meters and the height of the tower 50 m.

The power station will be the first of its kind built in Europe and though it will be producing electricity at a competitive price compared to conventional power stations it is considered as the first major step to establishing solar energy as a viable energy source.

The power station will cost around 7 million units of account (1 u.a. = 1.2 US \$ approx.). 50% of the finance will be provided by the European Commission and the remainder shared between the participant countries : Italy, France and Germany.

++ COMMISSION AND CONSUMERS COOPERATE

Some twenty representatives from specialist magazines produced by associations belonging to the European Bureau of Consumer Unions (BEUC) took part in a meeting with members of the European Commission's information service. This meeting managed to identify ways of establishing closer cooperation between all concerned.

++ BOTTOMS UP

In 1976 the biggest alcohol drinkers in the European Community were the Luxembourgois. The biggest beer drinkers were the Germans, closely followed by the Belgians with the UK in fourth place.

The consumption of distilled alcohol (at 100%) per inhabitant in 1976 for each Community country is presented below :

Luxembourg	4.1 litres
Germany	2.83
France	2.5
Netherlands	2.49
Italy	+ 2
Ireland	- 1.98
Belgium	1.95
Denmark	1.90
U.K.	1.66

Greatest beer consumption is in Germany :

Germany	150.9 litres
Belgium	145
Luxembourg	130
Ireland	123
U.K.	118.9
Denmark	118.68
Netherlands	83.80
France	48.66
Italy	13.9

++ LESS TRANSPORT FORMALITIES

Less administrative formalities for intra-Community transport have been proposed by the European Commission to the Community's Council of Ministers. The aim is to simplify the issuing of authorisations applicable to bus and coach companies who besides travelling from one country to another, offer their travellers accomodation with or without meals. Simplification of formalities also applies to the cross-frontier movements of workers, school-children and tourists, and not just to the professional transport industry.

The Commission is concerned not only about the administrative formalities but also about the speed of giving authorisations in emergency situations. In the case of flooding, it is sometimes necessary to open up new regular bus routes through different areas. It is to meet situations such as these that the Commission has proposed issuing provisional authorisations.

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CONSUMER INFORMATION

"Cheapest apples in town".... such a slogan on a shop window in the UK or Switzerland would not astonish anyone. In France and Belgium however a greengrocer doing the same would be in for trouble. In Germany such slogans are permitted but the greengrocer on the other side of the road could, if he wanted to, cover his windows with slogans denouncing the claims of his competitor - such are the extreme differences in the laws governing consumer information throughout the European Community.

To try and bring a little more clarity to the situation, the European Commission is organising in collaboration with the Catholic University of Louvain (Belgium), a seminar devoted to consumer information which will be held in Brussels, November 23 - 25. The aim of the seminar is to identify what is being done and work out what has to be done in the future.

Small scale problems

The law frequently does, in fact, protect the consumer. If a jar of jam has gone bad, the purchaser can in most cases obtain compensation. If a person is deceived by his landlord in his rental contract, he can take his landlord to court, more often than not with the aid of a lawyer.

Most often, however, the bad deals which consumers suffer are not worth an expensive court case. For example if a 500 gramme tin of peas only contains 100 grammes of vegetable and the rest water, few people would bother to take the manufacturer to court. Similarly if the washing machine does not work satisfactorily the problem may be so technical as to require paying a technician to fix it but few people would try to claim the money back from the manufacturer. Other problems arise with fashion clothes which may be advertised as low-priced top fashion without mentioning the fact that they cannot be dry cleaned.

These small intrusions into the quality of our daily life, and intrusions into our pockets, are outside the scope of most lawyers. They have tended to concentrate their efforts on major scandals and battles between producers, and have left the job of informing the consumer up to the manufacturers and traders.

Consumers come of age

Consumers, however, are no longer content to do their shopping in silence. They have woken up and taken the initiative to set up consumer associations. In certain countries these consumer organisations have been consulted and listened to by governments, who now realise that consumers have to be informed as well as protected.

The campaign against misleading advertising paved the way. Today, balding people may no longer be promised that lotion X can return their golden locks. In Germany, it has happened that persons misled by certain publicity have been able to demand public rectification of the misleading statements, but, as has been pointed out by a Belgian expert Mr. B. Francq, it is predominantly the manufacturers who use these laws to attack their competitors.

The consumer is often faced by more subtle deceptions. For example, a tired housewife might be misled as to the usefulness of a stainless steel saucepan by the relaxed smile of the photographic model presenting it; a lonely person may be led to believe he can make his dreams come true by buying a certain type of mattress, etc.

Consumer Information Seminar

More than 200 people are expected to attend the seminar on consumer information organised jointly by the European Commission and the Catholic University of Louvain which will take place in Brussels (Manhattan Centre) November 23-25 1977.

Mr Richard Burke, European Commissioner responsible for consumer affairs will open the proceedings by outlining the Commission's role in the consumer information field. Belgium's Minister for Economic affairs Mr Willi Claes will then take the rostrum followed by Ms Scrivener, France's State Secretary for Consumers, and Mr Roy Hattersly, Britain's State Secretary dealing with prices and consumer protection.

Conclusions from the debates will be drawn by Mr. Carpentier the head of the European Commission's Environment and Consumer Protection Service, and Mr Cracco of the University of Louvain.

The aim of the seminar is to bring together representatives from all parties concerned : consumers, public bodies, industry, mass media, researchers, etc., to analyse, together, the general problems of consumer information, and draw up recommendations to improve the content, nature and channels of information.

This confrontation of differing viewpoints will take place within four committees, two dealing with consumer information from industry, one on information given by consumer associations, and one covering the role of public authorities in the consumer information field.

When advertisements actually make comparisons between products, there is less deception. But comparative advertising is still a well protected field. French, Italian and Belgian manufacturers have the statutory right to stop one of their competitors mentioning them in their adverts even if they are telling the truth. In Britain and Holland by contrast, competitors' products are frequently cited and this is permitted as long as they do not "needlessly harm" the products mentioned. This approach is favoured by European experts. Facts, figures, weights, prices and photos placed side by side tell the consumer a lot more, in their opinion, than pictures of smiling families.

When is milk really milk?

Also important for shoppers are labelling and packaging. Both are open to much abuse but today controls are becoming more strict. In certain countries the packaging has to display the weight, unit price, last date of sale, details of composition. No longer can any white liquid vaguely appertaining to the milk family, be called milk. Quite frequently the quality of the information on the label depends on the goodwill of the manufacturer. Certain importers do not even bother to translate into the local language the method of cooking the packet soups which they distribute.

Rather than compel manufacturers to change their behaviour, some governments have invited them to meet with consumer representatives and work out together, what should be contained on labels to make them usefully informative. They should provide basic information and always present the same sort of information in such a way that colours, layout etc., become familiar to consumers. Sweden, the Netherlands and Denmark have even put these ideas to the test, points out Professor Overeem of the Erasmus University of Rotterdam, and then they have abandoned their schemes.

Date of manufacture : 007 XAJ2

How do we account for this setback? Such labelling is expensive for manufacturers. They had to change their packaging, improve manufacturing quality control. In exchange they do not even sell any more. Consumers basically did not fully understand, or misused, the information given on the labels.

Sometimes, labels are very technical, point out Ms Drayton and Ms Wallace of the University of Strathclyde. The date of manufacture given on certain preserves is sometimes coded in letters and figures that are only comprehensible to the initiated. And few consumers are interested in the quantity of calcium, glucose and protein contained in their carton of yogurt. They are more concerned with the price and whether their children will like the taste.

Indifferent consumers and overburdened manufacturers eventually agreed to scrap the system. Only one country, France, has kept the system with perhaps interesting results. A French expert Claude Trehin cited the case of housing publicity, where all details of flats and houses to let have to be provided. This enables the consumer to make a proper comparison of, for example, the type of heating, the degree of humidity, number of water points and thereby find the home that actually suits him not one that is simply billed as the best available.

Jams to cosmetics

Testing goods instead of describing them is another possible approach and virtually all consumer magazines are now doing this reports Mr L. Ballon of the Catholic University of Louvain with satisfaction. Ten brands of jams are taken and fully tested : price, taste, content of fruit, sugar, colourants etc. - nothing forgotten.

These comparative tests have not met with the approval of all. Usually it is only the main brand names which are put to the test whilst the corner-shop grocer has a completely different range. Another criticism is that the tests are sometimes undertaken on less useful products. Too many magazines review items such as knives for use with frozen foods, beauty masques, electric tooth-brushes, at great cost and with the same sort of conclusion : "If you really need one, buy the cheapest."

The tests often, however, reveal hidden defects and often indicate the best purchase for a fair price, but they provide no answer to the principal question raised by both manufacturers and consumers - what should in fact be produced?

Such product tests are without doubt an improvement on straight advertising as a source of consumer information. They widen the choice open to consumers and compensate for advertising mirages.

Can we go further in this direction? Professor Ghidine of the University of Modene asks whether the labels are of use to the poorest category of people - the less educated. These are the ones who are most in need of information. Perhaps we are not supplying the appropriate information to the consumer who is most in need. These people need information and in a form which they can readily understand.

Reluctant press

The newspapers, radio and TV are certainly offer contact with the world but a study undertaken by Mr J. Rijke of the University of Gent, shows that even the most well intentioned of Belgium's newspapers are only interested in sensational information. They talk about milk when the price goes up, about tinned food when there's a case of poisoning, and it is very likely that this situation is not simply restricted to the

Belgian press.

Editors of weekly newspapers tend to think more about educating consumers and tend to give advice on subjects such as buying furniture, vegetables etc. etc. Several radio and TV networks have consumer programmes but is that enough?

The press is sometimes hamstrung by the law, and runs certain risks if it criticises a manufacturer's product. It is not difficult for a manufacturer to find a dubious word or slightly misinformed statement with which to launch a court case or a threat of one. In addition many newspapers are reluctant to offend manufacturers who bring them sizeable advertising revenues. Today such income is indispensable for the financial survival of the press.

Price of independence

A slightly different problem confronts consumer magazines. They are independent at a cost of avoiding advertising. This also means they are relatively poor, and their distribution is relatively restricted. Subscriptions are the main source of income. They do however, have other expenses besides printing costs. They have to buy the products they wish to test ; install sometimes expensive testing equipment ; carry out tests over long periods to get accurate results and they are sometimes involved in long and costly court cases.

The problem of court cases merits particular attention. Justice virtually excludes the average consumer who wishes to raise a complaint. In all European countries, the courts are too expensive and too slow. And more important, the consumer associations have not yet obtained the right everywhere to institute a civil action, and the groups representing consumers need to be able to obtain precise objectives : reimbursement for bad purchases, prevention or rectification of unfair advertising, modification of dishonest contracts etc.

Educated people

The law is not enough. People should be informed before the injury occurs. Certain experts believe in the effectiveness of meetings between manufacturers, consumers and public authorities to discuss, as educated people, the general as well as precise problems of information.

The attitude of the public authorities towards consumers is sometimes ambiguous, notes Mr van den Bergh of Antwerp University. If consumers are consulted about the problems of prices and about certain precise topics, the real economic decision which is important, circumvents them.

The futurists are still with us and Professor Thorelli of Indiana University envisages data banks being set up where anyone can obtain a customised answer to his problem whether

it be the size of a car suitable for a 3 child family with a dog, the disadvantages of a deferred payments book club or whether their goods are in fact too cheap to be honest etc.

Rise of the consumer

United, consumers and their associations will have more power. Mr Box of Delft University envisages strikes and boycotts by consumers to give a few sleepless nights to the less scrupulous manufacturers. This should result in, among other things, an improved flow of information to consumers.

Would another economic and social system offer less problems? Mr Koulytchisky of University Institute of Bordeaux has been looking at the situation in the socialist countries. Consumers and state manufacturers have frequent opportunities to work together and the co-management system offers great portent. Comparisons have to be made with great caution however, since the economic systems are so different.

Finally, to inform the consumer is to explain in a precise way, and not simply to protect consumers by treating them like children. They should be assured adult freedom according to Mr J. Borgers of the Free University of Brussels.

Over-informing

The problem of over-information also has to be mentioned. In some fields manufacturers provide more information than consumers actually require and confusion is the net result. A fair equilibrium has to be found.

Today each party has its own responsibilities. The public authorities, if they really wish to improve consumer information, have to provide consumer education from infancy. It is not enough simply to teach people to read, people have to be taught to read labels and read contracts. Manufacturers who really wish to respect the rules of economic liberalism should provide honest and complete information to their clients. If the consumer associations wish to pursue their explanatory work they need to remain critical of themselves and constantly review their role and function in a continuously changing society.

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AT THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

The economic situation in the European Community was a lengthy topic for debate at the recent session of the European Parliament. Lord Ardwick (British, Labour) stressed the similarity of views between the European Commission and the Parliament : priority to investment and the strengthening of the Community's industrial policy. It is necessary, according to the parliamentarians, to make access to the capital market easier for small and medium sized companies, and to encourage the creation of new companies.

The debate on the economic situation was also an opportunity for parliamentarians to express their disappointment at the results of the last Tripartite Conference of representatives of employers, trade unions and public authorities in Luxembourg. Mr. Durieux (French, Liberal) reproached the European Commission for not having, up until now, demonstrated any long term vision. It has contented itself with applying a public aid and credit policy which is in reality, inflationist and contributing to unemployment.

"It is like trying to put out a fire with a flame-thrower" Mr Durieux commented. Mr Santer was a little more optimistic and, returning to the Tripartite Conference, he took the view that there had been an absence of overall conception and an absence of goodwill on the part of governments and the social partners, to apply, in a coordinated manner, the necessary radical structural measures.

In his reply Mr Francois-Xavier Ortoli, Vice-President of the European Commission, stressed the complementary nature of the campaign against unemployment and inflation. He refuted the allegation that the European Commission itself did not believe in its own guidelines. In the key growth sectors we still have a good future, he affirmed. What is required is not to reduce working hours but to create jobs instead.

Following a report drawn up by Italian Christian Democrat Mr Mario Scelba, the European Parliament also tackled the question of special rights for European citizens. Mr Scelba underlined the importance of extending these rights for the development of the European Community, particularly with direct elections scheduled for 1978.

These special rights are the fundamental rights which protect the exercise of fundamental liberties (constitutional rights, human rights etc.), civil rights i.e. those rights a citizen has with regard to the State (civil code for example) and finally political rights i.e. those which guarantee participation in the functioning of State institutions (right and eligibility to vote etc.) Mr Cornelis Berckhouwer (Dutch Liberal) entered the debate with an impassioned plea for European citizenship :

"It is necessary to make all Community nationals into European citizens, just as in the year 212, Emperor Caracalla conferred citizenship on all inhabitants of the empire."

Without pursuing the allusion to Emperor Caracella, Mr. Masullo (Italian, Communist) saw in the text put before the Parliament a "salutary provocation" which responds to a real need and represents a first step towards creating a truly European citizen.

In presenting the annual report on political cooperation, Mr Henri Simonet, Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs and acting President of the Council of Ministers, stressed the continually deepening character of this cooperation. The Belgrade conference demonstrated once again, as in Helsinki and Geneva, the close cooperation between the Nine in the preparation of the meeting.

Many of the world's current hot points - Middle East, South Africa, etc. were discussed by the parliamentarians. Dutch socialist Mr Broeks called for a stronger stance towards South Africa including an oil boycott and an economic boycott as well as aid to the black and white associations which are fighting apartheid. Mr Jensen (Danish Progressive European Democrats) took a different line from the other speakers and did not want the Community to get involved in the domestic affairs of South Africa.

The European Parliament displayed strong misgivings about the proliferation of acts of terrorism in the Community and condemned them outright. According to Mr Holst (Danish Socialist), the Nine should adopt a united stance towards terrorism, without falling into the trap laid by the terrorists of fighting terror with terror. He cited the German President Walter Scheel: "without criticism, society cannot improve.". Mr Holst stressed the need to analyse the basic causes of this type of terrorism.

With regard to the election of the European Parliament, Mr Simonet stressed that if, by any misfortune, the Community had to deviate from the election date envisaged (May/June 1978) it would be a severe blow. And Mr Georges Spenale (French, Socialist) made a fervent appeal to his British colleagues stating that "Great Britain has become an excuse for others".

Europe, Mr Spenale concluded, should get out of its "dilatatory ways"

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EUROPEAN FOUNDATION MAKES PROGRESS

When Belgium's Prime Minister, Leo Tindermans, presented his report on European Union to Europe's leaders in December 1975, one passage particularly caught the attention of observers: Mr Tindemans envisaged the creation of a European Foundation.

The sceptics all questioned the utility of such a Foundation.

"The objective of the Foundation should be to promote either directly or with the help of existing bodies, all things that can lead to better understanding between our peoples, by putting the accent on human contact: youth activities, university exchanges, debates and scientific seminars, meetings of professional social workers, cultural and information activities". Mr Tindemans stated.

Mr Tindemans sees the Foundation as an instrument which can help in the construction of European Union, though it is still a long way off. "By virtue of its nature, this Foundation will often be able to act in a more flexible and effective manner than national or European authorities."

Mr Tindemans does not want the Foundation simply to remain the preserve of the upper political circles. He hopes that the ordinary citizen will take interest in it aswell, since it will present the opportunity for the innumerable supporters of European unification to make a personal contribution by helping the Foundation. The creation of European Union should involve everyone.

Commission report

In March 1977 the leaders of the Nine requested the European Commission to draw up a report on the nature and the financing of the Foundation. This report has just been completed and will be discussed at the next Summit, December 5th and 6th.

The Commission thinks that a European Foundation would be particularly useful to deal with some of today's more urgent needs. It is necessary to understand the work of the Community and for it to be given more support, and at the same time improve understanding between the peoples of Europe. Finally we need to project the Community towards the rest of the world. With this in mind the activities of the Foundation could be numerous:

- a) Youth work : particular accent on activities to help young people in schools and universities, but more particularly young adults, and the encouragement of apprentice and student exchanges.
- b) With regard to debates scientific seminars and research activities the Foundation could usefully help remove the partitions between national initiatives, and begin to coordinate research projects concerning European integration.

c) With regard to professional social workers, the Foundation could promote better reciprocal knowledge between these people, so as to improve knowledge and understanding of the realities of each other's country.

d) In the cultural and information field, the Foundation should promote a better knowledge of the Community's heritage whilst at the same time avoiding élitist initiatives. It should also encourage contacts between the activities working the socio-cultural sphere. With regard to information, the Foundation should concentrate on training the information officers in collaboration with press organisations, the mass media and European organisations and movements. Special attention has to be given to mass media and the Foundation should concentrate on encouraging the discussion of the realities of everyday life in other countries, and encourage exchange programmes for journalists.

e) Outside the Community, the Foundation could usefully help the external projection of a United Europe, particularly in the countries applying for Community membership, and in those developing countries with special agreements with the Nine. An important way of uniting the image of the Community would be to encourage collaboration between the foreign cultural institutions of Member Countries and produce European projects and initiatives.

To bring such a programme to fruition, the Foundation should clearly work hand in hand with other public and private bodies.

To guarantee autonomy for the Foundation as well as maintain its Community nature and the active participation of Member States, the Commission proposes that the governing board of the Foundation be nominated partly by mutual agreement of Member States, and partly by the European Institutions. A few members should be coopted.

The European Commission insists that the financial resources of the Foundation be diversified : a Community subsidy, national subsidies and private contributions. The Community support is essentially to guarantee the execution of its programmes in the early years. As regards private contributions, the regulations setting up the Foundation should establish the procedure for accepting donations and subscriptions from firms and individuals, specifying the regulations governing the legal and fiscal aspects of these payments.

On December 6th, we will know how the Nine's leaders will have received these proposals from the European Commission. The same day is also St Nicholas Day, on which Belgian children receive their Xmas presents but what will Mr. Tindemans be receiving for his work as a good European?

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THE IRRESISTIBLE RISE OF THE CONSUMER

In 1975 the European citizen was still of course a consumer, but was hardly recognised as such. He was even scarcely mentioned in the Treaty of Rome which was the basis of the European Community to come. Apart from the basic principle that the Community was created for the constant improvement in the living and employment conditions of the peoples involved, the consumer had only two small mentions.

Since then, great progress has been made. Individual consumers have formed themselves into consumer associations which in some cases have had the power to compel the public authorities to develop a fully fledged consumer policy.

Balance of economic forces

The reasons for this change in consumer consciousness are varied. In the first annual report on the Community consumer information and protection policy, Mr Richard Burke, European Commissioner responsible for consumer affairs, stressed that the current economic structure of our society makes it necessary to bring about a balance between the economic power of the buyers and consumers of goods on the one hand, and the manufacturers on the other.

That's the problem in a nutshell, but putting it into practice requires a wealth of complex measures which have to be taken.

"From now on the consumer will no longer be considered as a buyer and user of goods and services for personal, family or collective use, but as a person concerned by the different aspects of social life which could affect him directly or indirectly as a consumer" he stated.

Twin objectives

The need to act at the Community level is twofold: by bringing about a confrontation between their own interests, European countries stimulate each other to take actions which ultimately benefit the consumer ; on the other hand, the harmonisation of measures which they take are essential if we wish to safeguard the essential aims of the Community and prosperous trade. And of course the anarchic development of strictly national policies, as happened until a few years ago, tends to make consumer protection a weapon of industrial protectionism.

Consumer rights

Five fundamental consumer rights were presented in the Community's preliminary consumer protection programme in 1975. In one year the programme made a certain amount of progress :

- the right to effective protection of health and safety : all countries are now aware of the necessity of bringing into force or updating protective measures. The numerous Community directives for the harmonisation of legislation or encouraging new legislation are a proof of this.
- the protection of economic interests : two of the priorities of the Community's programme have received a great deal of attention from Member States. On the one hand the consumer should be protected from abuses of power by sellers. This has become particularly relevant with the recent growth of credit facilities. Whereas in the old days there was little to stop companies engaging in unfair advertising, the principle is now probably accepted that misleading advertising is not permitted.
- the right to advice, assistance and redress : various systems have been employed from the ombudsman in Denmark to various arbitration systems developed in other countries, to help the consumer get support for problems he faces.
- consumer information and education : most of Member States' efforts have been concentrated on energy saving and on price increases.
- consumer consultation and representation : in addition to what each country is doing, the activity of the Community's Consumer Consultative Committee (CCC) should be mentioned. All activities of the European Commission likely to be of interest to consumers are transmitted to the CCC for their opinion. The CCC may also intervene on its own initiative. Consumers are also represented on various advisory committees set up by the Commission in a variety of fields (foodstuffs, customs questions, veterinary goods, agricultural committees etc.)

Irreversible dynamic

It is already clear that the dynamism already created by Community initiatives in the field of consumer information is making itself felt. Most people agree that a voluntary consumer policy can not only bring an improvement in the quality of life of the individual and can encourage a more prudent use of resources - particularly welcome in a period of crisis - but also a factor strengthening the competition between manufacturers and distributors, which requires cooperation at the Community level.

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