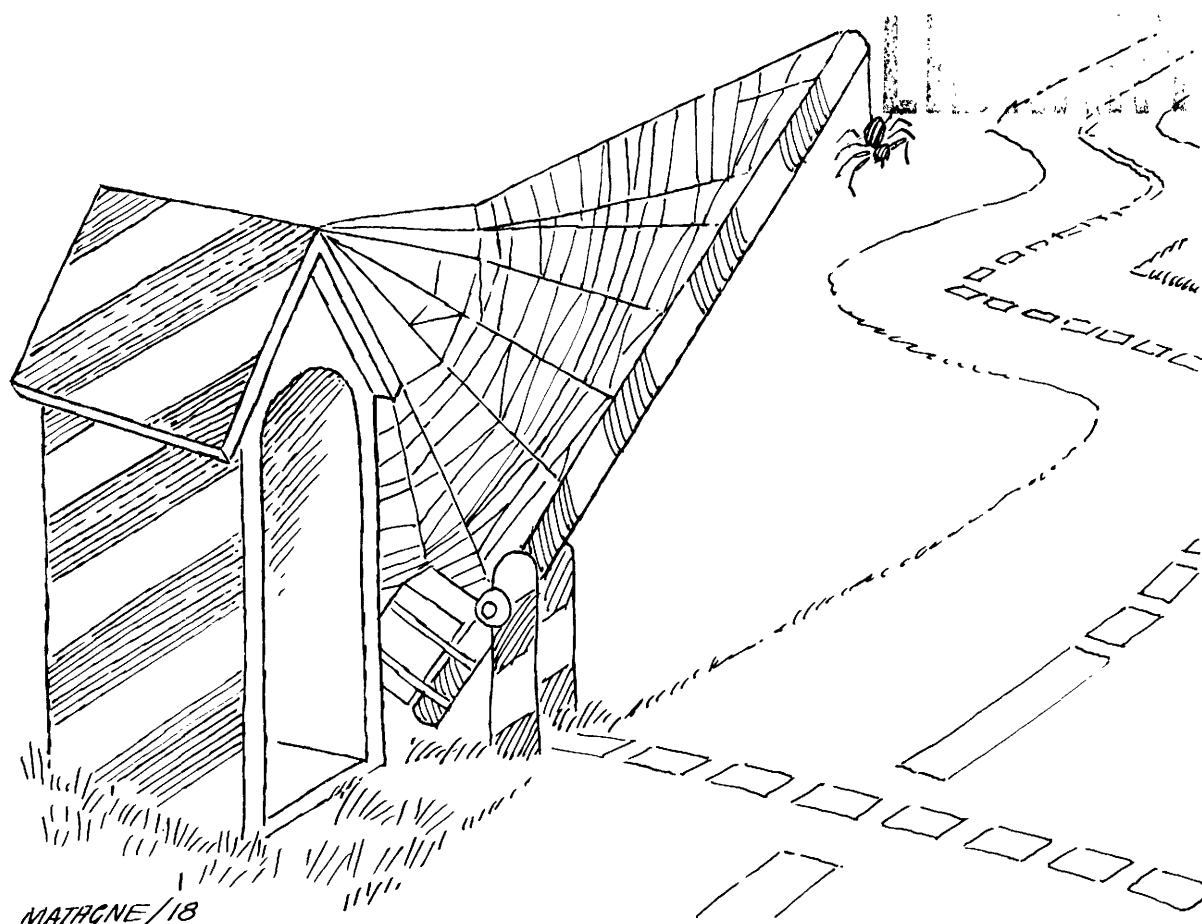


euroforum

europa day by day

Brussels, 29 November 1977

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If the customs barriers have gone why do we still have customs officers? (see page 3)

X/653/77-

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++ NUCLEAR ENERGY IN THE COMMUNITY

The European Commission has taken the initiative in organising public hearings on nuclear energy.

In Annex 1 Euroforum discusses the full democratic importance of initiating a debate which is beyond the level of slogans and generalisation.

++ PROTECTING SAVERS FROM INFLATION

Inflation has been eating away at the reserves of the small savers. The European Commission wishes to come to their help.

Euroforum presents in Annex 2 a report drawn up by the Commission for the European Parliament on the "protection of savings in times of inflation".

++ ANYTHING TO DECLARE?

Customs Union is a reality. The customs barriers have been lifted but the customs officers are still there, and the administrative annoyances as well.

In Annex 3, Euroforum explains what the Commission expects to emerge from a seminar it is organising on the Customs Union.

++ COMMUNITY UNEMPLOYMENT

The Community unemployment picture between September and October 1977 was virtually unchanged, with still almost 6 million out of work, though unemployment in the UK dropped substantially.

The proportion of registered unemployed in relation to the civil working population was 5.7% as against 5% in October 1976.

Due to different trends between countries, the level of unemployment in individual countries has changed slightly. In seven countries the number of jobless has increased :
+ 43,000 in Germany, + 28,000 in France, + 27,000 in Italy, + 9,600 in Denmark, + 700 in Belgium, + 120 in Luxembourg and + 100 in Ireland. By contrast, the number of registered unemployed in the UK dropped by 90,700 and in the Netherlands by 1,800.

In the Community as a whole, 744,000 more people were registered at employment bureaus in October 1977 than in October 1976, representing a 14% increase. There was a difference in trend between male and female unemployed. In the countries where total jobless decreased, the number of women out of work, in fact, increased. In other countries, (except France), female unemployment increased relative to male unemployment.

++ INFORMATION AND CHOICE

"The consumer is faced with an ever-widening range of alternatives, and a persistent lack of adequate information about each option. To cope adequately with this situation, he needs a range of information which must increase even faster than the range of choice". These are the terms used by Richard Burke, European Commissioner responsible for consumer affairs, to introduce the symposium on consumer information which has just been held in Brussels.

Mr. Burke took the opportunity to refute the criticism frequently levelled at the European Commission that Community action in the consumer field only complicates the lives of manufacturers and distributors without creating corresponding advantages for the consumer.

The harmonisation of legislation in a number of fields (labelling, food ingredients, technical standardisation of vehicles, etc.) effectively benefits consumers even though they occasionally cause problems for manufacturers and traders.

In addition, Mr. Burke noted that the changes which manufacturers are now required to make, also make sure that they will not find themselves too far behind to meet new consumer demands in the future. The sooner changes can be anticipated the less likely it is that manufacturers will have to change long established production techniques.

++ URANIUM IN GREENLAND

The results of tests taken between June and September this year indicate that the uranium reserves in Greenland are three times greater than initial estimates. This represents a major success for the Community which has been giving financial encouragement to the search for uranium under Community soil. According to latest analyses, the guaranteed reserves are between 5,800 and 15,700 tonnes and additional reserves stand at between 8,700 and 10,000 tonnes. The Commission bore 30% of the prospecting costs in Greenland at an expense of 272,000 units of account (1 u.a. = 1.12 US dollars approx.).

Last year the European Commission distributed 1 million units of account to seven prospecting programmes : 3 in Ireland, 1 in the Orkneys, 1 in Italy, 1 in Germany and 1 in Greenland. In March 1977, the Commission decided to intensify its financial effort and allocated 5 million units of account for uranium exploration programmes to be undertaken between now and 1979.

++ PROLONGED SAUSAGES

The colourants used in British sausages have been examined from the human health point of view by the Community's Scientific Committee for Food. When Britain joined the Community, the use of a number of colourants permitted under

national law was allowed to continue pending further scientific research. The provisions were due to terminate on December 31st 1977 but the Commission has decided to extend the authorisation for a further provisional period. This covers a number of additives, preservatives and colourants including that used in the good old British banger.

The formaldehyde used in Italy's "Grana Padano" cheese has also been deemed acceptable and its use can be extended to all Member States.

In the future it is planned that Community regulations will lay down the conditions in which generally authorised additives may be used in each foodstuff or category in which they are incorporated.

++ ENVIRONMENT COUNCIL

On December 12, the environment ministers of the European Community are scheduled to meet to deal with the points unsettled at their last meeting in June. A series of decisions could be made on proposals drawn up by the European Commission dealing with "red sludge" (titanium dioxide - see Euroforum NO 29/75), the quality of drinking water (see Euroforum N° 18/76, 37/76 and 23/77), disposal of toxic and dangerous wastes (see Euroforum N° 30/76 and 11/77) the protection of birds (see Euroforum N° 17/77) and sulphur dioxide in the urban atmosphere.

++ BEUC DIRECTOR RETIRES

Eirlys Roberts, director of the Bureau of European Consumer Organisations (BEUC) since its foundation in Brussels more than four years ago, is to give up the post at the end of the year. She will be greatly missed by all those who have had the opportunity to witness her devotion, dynamism and sincerity.

Finding a replacement will not be easy and BEUC (27 rue Royale, 1000 Brussels) is already looking for suitable candidates from the consumer protection field to take over this demanding function.

++ MOTOR SHOWS

The European Commission wishes to rationalise the operation of exhibitions and trade fairs which have been multiplying almost counter-productively in recent years. With this in mind the Commission has just given a favourable opinion on the regulation adopted by the Permanent International Bureau of Automobile Manufacturers (B P I C A) regarding motor shows. BPICA draws up every year the calendar of international shows where vehicles are permitted to be exhibited. It is not permitted for manufacturers or their representatives to display

at shows which are not on the calender.

The Commission did not approve of this practice. BPICA gave itself the right to decide in an arbitrary manner, the international nature of an exhibition. It has now decided, however, that the nature of an exhibition should be decided in an objective way by the competent authorities, and that BPICA can no longer have any say in the display of vehicles at national or regional shows.

++ THIRD WORLD IMPORTS

In 1978 the volume of imports from developing countries benefitting under the Community's system of generalised preferences, will amount to 6.4 billion units of account (1 u.a. = 1.2 US dollars approx.) - (see Euroforum N° 24/77). Out of this, the volume of semi-finished industrial goods will account for 5.1 billion u.a. and processed agricultural goods 1.3 billion u.a.

The Community's effort to help the development of the third world has been increased since the volume of possible preferential imports has risen from 3.68 billion u.a. in 1975 to 5.6 billion u.a. in 1976 and in 1977 it rose to 6.23 billion u.a.

++ CONSUMER EDUCATION AT SCHOOL

The numbers frequenting the Community's schools and universities amount to over 50 million. Would this educational environment not therefore be an ideal place to develop consumer awareness by teaching children when young and encouraging the development of fully informed, clear thinking consumers?

Through aid from the European Commission, several studies on consumer education have been drawn up by European and national consumer organisations.

To utilise these conclusions to the full, the European Commission is organising in London on December 19 and 20, a seminar on consumer education at school which will bring together the top specialists from all the Community countries. This seminar will be an excellent occasion to exchange ideas and experience, to make personal contacts and to instigate an open discussion on the possibilities and problems which exist in practice.

Representatives from consumer organisations, government, the teaching profession, researchers and professional information officers have also been invited to this meeting.

++ LABOUR UNREST IN FIGURES

A certain amount of consternation has been caused by an ambiguous presentation of the number of days lost in 1976 in the Community due to labour conflicts (strikes, lock-outs, etc.) (see Euroforum N° 36/77). The figures in their correct presentation are repeated below:

	<u>Total number of days lost (thousands)</u>	<u>Number of days per thousand workers</u>
D	534	26
F	5,011	298
I	16,236	1,192
B	897	288
UK	3,287	150
DEN	210	111

Netherlands and Ireland : figures not available.

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NUCLEAR ENERGY IN THE COMMUNITY

Is it really necessary to build more nuclear power stations in Europe?

This is the question many people are asking, though up until a few years ago the development of nuclear power seemed almost taken for granted. The progressive growth in the civil use of nuclear energy was accepted as a matter of course by industrialists and politicians, and the general public did not feel particularly concerned by a development which seemed to be a natural consequence of the general technological development of our societies.

Public awakening

The relatively recent emergence of environmental problems and, closer to home, the oil crisis and the energy crisis of 1973, have changed this situation. The increasing numbers of nuclear installations and the development of associated nuclear industries have brought a number of difficulties to the surface. Some power stations have had technical incidents; problems have arisen with the proliferation of atomic weapons; uncertainty still persists, particularly with regard to the reprocessing of irradiated fuel, the industrial development of fast breeder reactors and the long term storage of radioactive waste. It is difficult to isolate the effect of these various elements, but it is a fact that public opinion is nowadays pretty well aware of the problems of energy supply and the position of nuclear energy in the future.

Looking for economic prosperity and social progress, many scientists, industry chiefs, workers and politicians have taken a strong position in favour of recourse to nuclear energy to produce the growing quantities of energy which we will require in medium and long term future.

Looking to protect health and the environment and the long term survival of mankind, other scientists, industry chiefs, workers and politicians have adopted a stance vigorously opposed to nuclear expansion.

Both sets of opinion have the interests of the general public at heart, but the basis of their arguments are contradictory. With both sides being supported by experts of comparable stature and reputation, the general public may well begin to wonder what sort of judgement they themselves can make.

Arguments not slogans

In a democracy, it is evidently necessary that the public should be concerned with these problems which condition both their own future and that of future generations.

To enable the non-specialist individual to make a free and valid judgement of the issue, the facts have to be presented. Slogans, clichés and unsubstantiated generalisations are not enough. The public should be informed of all the options but these should be presented in a summary form, with all the valid arguments concerning each problem in plain language and in a form which is accessible to everyone.

Undisputed facts have of course to be presented with disputed facts, and where uncertainties exist, all the possible eventualities have to be clearly indicated.

Public debate

The European Commission has taken the initiative in organising public hearings on nuclear energy. The basic object of this is to clarify public opinion by bringing out all the principal questions involved, and the different possible choices open to resolve the Community's energy supply problems over the short, medium and long term.

In addition, the hearings are intended to involve the Community, as such, in the controversy surrounding the use of nuclear energy, both in Europe and in the world's other developed industrial regions.

By the end of the hearings, everyone should be in a better position to understand the reasons which have persuaded the Community's energy experts to select a particular energy "mix". And everyone should also understand and appreciate the arguments of those who oppose the wisdom of these choices.

These hearings are also designed to enlighten the European Commission on the preoccupations and preferences of representatives from various interested parties, i.e. the energy producers and consumers, environmental protection bodies, women's associations, professional and trade union organisations, universities, etc. The Commission should thereby be able to identify those areas where greater effort or even new initiatives are required.

Also present at the debates will be members of the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee, representatives of the Community's Member States and third countries, as well as numerous observers from international organisations and groups interested in the subject. The press, radio and TV will also be present.

Serious questions

The first session lasts from November 29 to December 1, and deals with energy supply and needs to the end of the century, as well as the role of nuclear energy.

The second session will be held January 24-26, 1978 and will be devoted to the supply of nuclear and other types of energy from the point of view of safety, health, ethics and environmental protection.

The basic question that will dominate the first session is to determine the role of nuclear energy in overall energy supply up to, for example, the year 2,000. The first problem to resolve is the trend and future energy demand. The level of demand closely depends on rate and nature of economic growth and is consequently the first point to be debated.

Many environmental protection groups and those who are concerned about conserving the earth's resources wish to see lower or even zero growth accompanied by a redirection of our industrial efforts towards activities which consume less energy and raw materials, to make the trend in energy demand more compatible with the earth's classical, non-polluting or renewable energy resources. Their view is that human behaviour has to be changed basically to improve the quality of life rather than to increase the quantity of goods and services available on the market. Such a development would dispense with the need for massive recourse to nuclear energy, and would thereby reduce the risks involved.

Many industrial and social leaders - company chiefs and trade unionists - hold the view that there will be a lower rate of growth in the future than we have experienced so far, but there will still be a lot to do both in Europe and the rest of the world to improve the quality of living and working conditions. They also maintain that the legitimate aspiration to improve the quality of life does not, as yet, involve any reduction in the quantity of goods and services which we should have at our disposal. They point out that an insufficient supply of energy would compromise economic development and possibly threaten our current level of social advancement.

Given the importance of the problem, it is indispensable that a deep-searching debate is undertaken on these two basic options and their numerous nuances.

There's energy and energy

The possible contribution of other sources of energy is another area of conflicting viewpoints. There are supporters of the "clean" renewable energies, such as solar energy, windpower and geothermal energy which are opposed by those who, whilst not denying the worth of these techniques further in the future, take the view that for the meantime at least, we have to look to fossil fuels and nuclear energy to fulfil our energy requirements. Even amongst this latter group, agreement is lacking between those who put their faith in hydrocarbons (oil and natural gas) - even if most is imported; those who wish to exploit Europe's coal resources, perhaps using new

techniques; and finally those who want to put the accent on the exploitation of new advanced technology such as nuclear energy.

Other principal arguments put forward are to reduce the Community's energy dependence on third countries and to reduce the consumption of primary energy by more rational and economic use of energy by reducing wastage without touching the energy usefully used by the final consumer.

Atomic question

The hearings will also deal with the question of recourse to nuclear energy, both from the point of view of quantity and the cost. Everyone admits that the development of nuclear energy requires considerable research and development, as well as a considerable industrial and financial effort. The opponents of nuclear energy take the view that this effort bears no relation to the net energy contribution that could be provided by nuclear reactors.

The opponents of nuclear power would wish to see a very positive contribution by nuclear power not only to energy supply but also to industrial activity in our countries, and a consequent reduction in unemployment.

For some, our supply of nuclear fuel is insufficient to secure the level of expansion envisaged, whilst other specialists see this lack of known reserves as the result of insufficient exploration in the past which itself was the result of unprofitability in this area of research in years gone by.

What cost?

The economic side of the arguments is also contested. The price competitiveness of the nuclear kWh, seen from the viewpoint of the electricity producers, is doubted by others, both regarding current nuclear plants and reactors to be brought into production in the future.

These latter aspects of the discussion revolve around a key question. In the hypothesis where recourse to nuclear energy is indispensable, can it really live up to its promises? Can we guarantee to master the technology, secure our fuel supply and develop it commercially?

With so many social, technological and economic factors involved in this serious debate, clear-cut answers are probably too much to expect. This public debate on energy - the first ever organised at the European Community level - should demonstrate what Europeans themselves expect from a future common energy policy.

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PROTECTING SAVERS FROM INFLATION

Inflation is not only an economic phenomenon, it also has extremely serious social consequences, especially when it hits the reserves of the small saver. According to a report from Germany's Bundesbank, during 1973 savers in Germany lost more than 40 billion marks of the money they had saved. This is even more dramatic since Germany was one of the Community countries least hit by inflation. "The small savers were impotent against the "pillage" of their economies, and can consider themselves badly treated in relation to those whose incomes were indexed", according to Norbert Hougardy of the European Parliament.

Two approaches

Should savings be indexed as rents, pensions, and civil servants pay are in certain Community countries? Opinions were divided in the Economic and Monetary Committee of the European Parliament. Those in favour of indexation argued that partial indexation (limited to medium and long term investment by individuals in 3 to 5 year negotiable bonds, or by life insurance companies) would not have inflationary consequences. On the other hand, it was said, such measures would direct savings towards productive investments instead of going into deposit accounts and gilt-edged securities. In addition, they insist that the indexation of savings could help reduce speculative behaviour which itself tends to feed inflation.

The opponents of indexation take the view that there is only one way to avoid the erosion of savings and that is to tackle inflation itself. If only the consequences and effects of inflation are tackled, then one is virtually abandoning a policy to combat inflation. Moreover, the countries which have tried this have eventually had to give up, since indexation-costs are too rigid.

Split between the two approaches, the European Parliament has put the ball in the European Commission's court, and requested them to give further consideration to the protection of savings. The European Commission shares the concern of the Parliament and wishes to see the nest eggs of even the smallest savers safeguarded.

Commission's ideas

The report drawn up by the European Commission stresses that a "veritable global savings policy has to be implemented". The end goal of this policy should be investment of savings in the productive sector in the form of assets which offer at least a minimum degree of security and yield. This would constitute an important tool in any anti-inflation policy.

A savings policy should, according to the European Commission, have two main aims : the protection and stimulation of saving in general; the conservation and formation of savings by the least well off groups.

Protecting and stimulating saving

To protect and stimulate all types of savings, the Commission thinks it necessary to allow market mechanisms the maximum amount of play possible, and to reduce the taxation of savings.

The markets should also be more transparent. The losses suffered by savers in periods of inflation are very often due to the latter's failure to recognise the best investment opportunities. Further work therefore needs to be done to provide savers with unbiased information on investment. The greatest possible freedom in laying down the conditions governing investment and the return on savings should, however, be safeguarded.

The Commission has made several suggestions regarding taxation policy. In the first place, the erosion of the value of money must be recognised, and an end put to the anomaly of taxing unreal incomes i.e. incomes which have been absorbed by inflation. In all fairness, only the share of interest corresponding to a real return should be taxed. The same applies to the taxation of capital gains which should not be imposed on purely nominal gains and should, in general, take losses into account.

It would be desirable to abolish or, at least, alleviate the discrimination which often occurs in the taxation of savings, e.g. the sometimes unequal tax treatment of income from shares and income from bonds to the detriment of the former.

One could also consider making the basis for assessing income tax a function of the level of savings, thus indirectly increasing the yield on these sums.

Another possibility would be to exempt this savings income from income tax - as is done in certain countries - and to set the amount of savings income exempted at a sufficiently high level.

Small savers

The European Commission wishes to actively protect the small savers. The fundamental idea is a social one. It has two aims : to protect the sums already saved and to permit the minimum amount of wealth to be accumulated.

This might well be the place for indexed savings schemes of the type recently introduced in some Community countries. The small saver should be offered a good means of protecting his wealth. The best methods of doing this should be examined. However, such provisions would probably not be sufficient and should, if anything, be used to supplement what would seem to be the principal instrument : a policy for the formation and preservation of wealth.

Apart from its contribution to the battle against inflation, this policy should enable each person, and most important of all the poorest, to build up and preserve the minimum amount of capital without which one has neither freedom nor responsibility. If necessary, this should include both help from his employer and State aid, and the ability to obtain any additional credit facilities needed. This aspect of asset choice is important because existing systems of this type are generally slanted towards the acquisition of a house or flat, under conditions which exclude people on more modest income. In the Commission's view they should be able to invest their savings in other real estate or in assets of a financial nature.

Better social balance

Many of the measures outlined by the European Commission should ultimately be financed by society as a whole, and this in itself entails the transfer and therefore the redistribution of income. This long-standing philosophy is already applied to many other economic and social sectors and it would seem right to apply it to the savings sector. The final cost would probably be very reasonable when set against the benefits (admittedly difficult to assess) and better social equilibrium.

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ANYTHING TO DECLARE?

Three years ago a Belgian citizen, a bachelor trained in nursing, found himself a job in Rotterdam, Holland. Near the hospital where he worked, he rented an apartment where he stayed four days every week. Each weekend he returned to his parents living in Belgium.

At first sight, this is a classic case of what is termed, the free movement of labour in the European Community, but appearances can be deceptive. Though our male nurse is free to move and find another job in another country, the same is not true for the possessions which accompany him, i.e. his car. For three years now he has been involved in a battle with the Dutch and Belgian authorities as to where his car should be registered. Both countries think it should be registered with them, and more importantly, all taxes paid there.

The obstinacy of the two administrations has proven victorious over our poor courageous citizen and now, not only does he have to pay taxes in both countries, but he has to change his number plate every time he crosses the Belgo-Dutch border!

Customs Union Seminar

Many examples of this sort will be cited at a seminar on "the Customs Union" which is to be held in Brussels at the beginning of December under the auspices of the European Commission. One of the central themes of the discussions will be the direct impact of the Customs Union of the nine countries of the common market, on the everyday life of the European citizen, both as a consumer of goods and as a cross-frontier traveller. It is hoped that ways of improving a less than perfect situation may be found.

WHAT IS A CUSTOMS UNION?

It is a convention whereby two or more countries agree to abolish all customs barriers i.e. all customs duties, and to impose a common customs tariff towards the rest of the world for imported goods, at whichever point they are brought into the zone of the customs union. This differs from a free trade area in that this latter type of economic organisation leaves the participant countries free to set their own external tariffs. There are thus two elements in the customs union, an internal element - the removal of customs barriers between the partners - and an external element - the creation of a customs zone which provides a new identity for the participants with regard to the outside world.

WHAT'S CHANGED

There are still uniformed men at all customs posts examining passports and still asking the old question "anything to declare" as they have for the last twenty years, so what's the difference?

An important stage in the building of Europe was reached last July when a total customs union between the nine Community countries was realised i.e. between the six founder countries and the three new members (UK, Ireland and Denmark). Since that moment, there are no more customs barriers, in the strict sense, for all intra-Community trade.

Why then does the customs continue to operate? In reality, the abolition of customs rights between Community Member States has not brought with it the removal of all barriers to trade between countries. Though customs rights have gone, differences in taxation procedures still persist. The old "nothing to declare" now exists to cater for the goods which are subject to differing VAT rates in their respective countries. If you import something which is above a certain value you are likely to have to pay the difference in VAT if it is more than in the country of purchase.

Multipurpose customs

For a long time now the duties of a customs officer have been much more than simply controlling customs duties. He also has to collect taxes, be health inspector (health protection standards differ greatly from country to country) and guardian against drug trafficking, currency inspector, collector of trade statistics, etc. Also the police officer who generally accompanies him is also there to reduce international crime.

With this variety of functions, the difficulties in abolishing frontiers completely become apparent. First of all it would be necessary to bring in tax harmonisation, standardise health norms for goods etc. etc. The Community is however moving, albeit slowly, in this direction.

Despite all these obstacles which still exist, trade between Community countries has grown considerably. Between 1958 when the Treaties establishing the EEC came into force, and 1976, trade has multiplied tenfold and progressed from 11 billion dollars to 115 billion. More than 50% of the trade of Community countries is with other members of the Nine.

This clearly has increased the average standard of living of Europe's population. They have benefitted from a sharp increase in economic growth particularly among the six founder countries, and have seen the range of goods available to them increase remarkably.

Throughout the crisis, certain countries have been inclined to give in to protectionist pressures which in reality are more insidious than the old customs barriers, and often work against the interests of the consumer. In the name of self-protection or environmental protection, new regulations and standards have been introduced which simply amount to new barriers to trade.

Imperfections

It is immediately apparent that it is simply not enough to abolish customs duties and similar measures to permit the perfectly free movement of goods in the Community. Customs duties are just a small visible part of the iceberg of real barriers - technical and legislative - to intra-Community trade.

These barriers which are in effect the new form of protectionism, are often billed as being for the protection of the consumer, the environment or public health, whereas their real object is to isolate the market and ban or limit imports of goods which frequently offer the same guarantees as national products. Similarly, the effect of certain administrative practices is virtually to neutralise the effect of the opening of the frontier, particularly with regard to public markets, and this can affect the development of certain technologies and the cost of certain materials, which are thereby protected from international competition.

Customs Union has acted somewhat like a photographic developer in bringing to light all the difficulties resulting from differing tax and monetary policies, and the differences in company rights and in national export aid systems.

Certainly consumer protection should be encouraged but not by creating new barriers to trade by virtually random methods. The solution is for measures to be taken at the Community level. The Community has been developing its proposals through its environmental protection programme and through its programme for the promotion of consumer interests.

In addition, it is necessary to cement the links of more than 250 million European citizens to the Community. Up until now there has been no sign, even a symbolic one, which could give the European citizen a feeling of being part of a truly European Community, since the signing of the Treaty of Rome 20 years ago. This could be the adoption of a Community passport which has not yet materialised due to the opposition from national authorities.

Why a seminar?

The European Commission as well as national administrations and industry, are well aware of the fact that the Customs Union is not perfect, that certain procedures and formalities could be simplified, that the regulations could be perfected so that the Customs Union should be truly universal and have its full impact.

The seminar organised by the European Commission will permit the users as well as the heads of national and Community public services to assess the situation and draw practical conclusions.

The main themes of the seminar will be:

- free movement of goods : reality or illusion
- European citizen and Customs Union
- Community customs regulations, the way to perfection

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