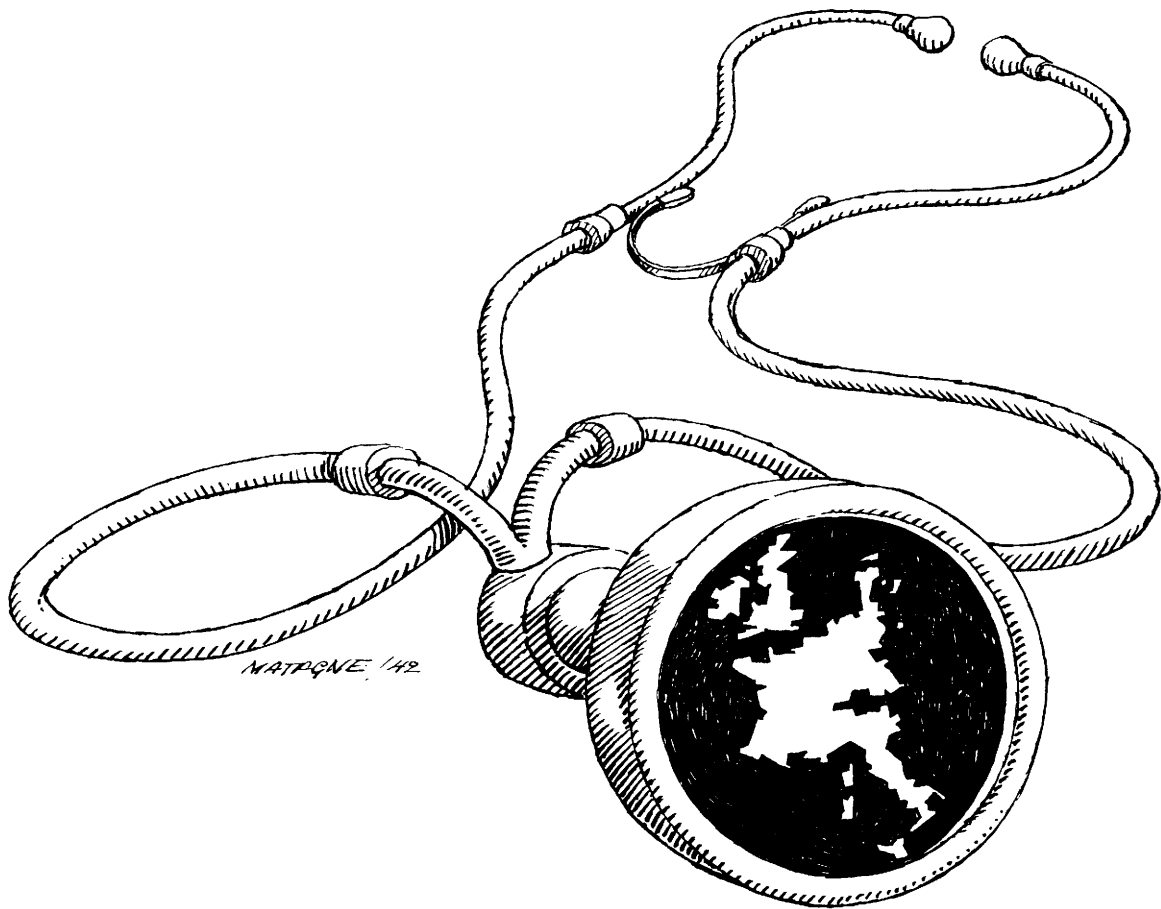


euroforum

europa day by day

Brussels, 6 December 1977

N° 44/77



Europe's health will shortly be on the agenda of the Council of Ministers (see page 3).

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This bulletin is published by the

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Rue de la Loi 200
B-1049 - Brussels - Tel. 735 0040

Further information is available from the Commission's press and information offices in the countries listed on the back page.

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++ THE NUCLEAR DEBATE

Six hundred people attended the first three day session of public hearings on nuclear energy organised by the European Commission in Brussels, November 29-December 1.

In Annex 1 Euroforum presents the outcome of the session's debates.

++ BETTER INFORMED, BETTER CHOICE

Informing consumers is the responsibility of manufacturers, consumers and the public authorities. Representatives from all three parties recently took part in a seminar to discuss the matter.

The views and ideas presented by the participants are outlined by Euroforum in Annex 2.

++ EUROPE'S HEALTH

For the first time in the Community's history there is to be a Council of Ministers meeting of the Nine's health ministers.

This does not imply, however, that the Community has been neglecting our health all these years and Euroforum outlines in Annex 3 the range of work that has been undertaken so far. A lot, nevertheless, remains to be done.

++ ADVERTISING, MARKETING AND PUBLIC POLICY

Richard Burke, European Commissioner responsible for consumer affairs has been talking in London to advertising and marketing experts about the European Commission's attitude to advertising and publicity.

"Vast sources of expertise and finance are devoted to advertising and marketing. The result is that the consumer is faced with very sophisticated advertising and marketing operations. The average consumer is not in a position to fully appreciate the real meaning and value of what is being presented to him. Thus the forces that work are unequal. It is this imbalance which leads public authorities to intervene.

A further reason for intervention is that the consumer is faced with a growing number of products which can present unsuspected dangers to his health or to his environment".

And, Mr. Burke continued: "Of its nature, advertising is very much in the public eye. It is therefore a legitimate matter of concern for public policy. Considerations of social and economic justice and concern for ethical and moral standards dictate the need for some element of guidance by public authorities."

The Commissioner stressed once more that the attitude of the European Commission towards manufacturers is in no way negative : "The objective we have in view is not that of making life difficult for the manufacturer but of making him act in a way which is more consistent with his responsibilities towards the consumer".

++ INDUSTRY AND CONSUMERS JOIN FORCES

Without precedent, consumers and manufacturers have sent a joint letter to the Community's Council of Ministers to express their concern over the delay in adopting the directive on the labelling, presentation and display of foodstuffs. The "Bureau of European Consumer Organisations" (BEUC) on the one side and the "Committee for Agriculture and the Food Industries" of UNICE (the Confederation of Industries of the European Community) on the other, have jointly stressed that the directive which was presented to the Council of Ministers in March 1976 and has already been dealt with by the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee (ECOSOC) in Autumn 1976 should be adopted by the Council without further delay. The advantages of this directive - better consumer information, easier movement of goods for industry - are not negligible. Further delay will harm both manufacturers and consumers.

++ SOCIAL EXPENDITURE

According to the latest data received by the Community's Statistical Office, social expenditure in 1975 for each Community country was as follows:

Germany	275.84 billion DM
France	310.17 billion FF
Italy	24,757.00 billion lire
Netherlands	56.30 billion florins
Belgium	514.20 billion FB
Luxembourg	18.76 billion F Lx
UK	19.857 billion pounds
Ireland	0.690 billion pounds
Denmark	55.031 billion kroner

In relation to size of population, Germany leads Europe in social payments per head, followed by Denmark, then four countries, Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg and France at the same level of expenditure. Well below the Community average are the United Kingdom, Italy and Ireland.

++ FEMALE JOBLESS AND FREE TRADE

The crisis in the textile industry has seriously affected the level of unemployment but what, asks Willi Dondelinger of the European Parliament, is the European Commission doing?

The Commission is fully aware of the importance of the textiles and clothing sector for female employment and has already negotiated and implemented a considerable number of bilateral agreements between the Community and the principal textile countries to make them voluntarily limit exports.

In addition, the Commission has obtained from the Council of Ministers the power to utilise the European Social Fund to aid persons employed in the clothing sector. The Commission has also made a special request to the Council that women be permitted special benefits from the European Social Fund.

++ EAGGF in 1976

The European Community's financial contribution to agriculture in 1976 amounted to 5,895 million units of account (1 u.a. = 1.1 US dollars approx.). Out of this, 5,570 million u.a. were allocated to guarantee the price of agricultural goods, taking into account consumer demand and farmers' incomes. Large as this may appear, it still only amounted to 0.47% of the gross domestic product of the Community.

325 million u.a. were used to improve agricultural efficiency: special assistance to mountain farmers and certain impoverished areas, reconversion of milk production to meat, help to hop producers, reconversion in the cod fishing sector, etc. All these are termed "common" projects since they concern Member States, but in addition, 808 individual projects for structural improvement received support.

The large sums distributed by the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund inevitably attract various types of crooks and swindlers both large and small, but fortunately, through its special inspection service, the European Commission has been investigating irregularities. Since 1971, more than 900 cases have been dealt with.

++ EASTERN BLOC TRADE

During this period of crisis, the European Community's trade with Eastern European countries has been a stabilisation factor. Trade with the East stood at 12.2 bill EUR (1 EUR = 1.27 US dollars approx.) in 1973, moving to 17.2 bill EUR in 1974. 1975 saw an increase to 19 bill EUR and in 1976 it topped 21 billion.

Of the State trading countries, the Soviet Union is the Community's biggest supplier and was responsible for 49% of imports from Eastern countries in 1976. Poland is in second

place with 18% followed by Romania (9.6%), Czechoslovakia (8.7%) Hungary (7.5%) and the German Democratic Republic (5.1%).

++ COMMUNITY AND THE THIRD WORLD

"The people of the third world no longer accept being the pawns of history and have decided to use their capacity, combine their energies and unite their willpower. Time is short since more than half of them - a billion people - are subject to "absolute poverty" to use the expression of the president of the World Bank. Do the industrialised countries understand that the ambitions of these poor peoples, - people who have been silenced up until now, people whom we have tried to avoid seeing - can no longer be held back?"

These are the terms used by Claude Cheysson, European Commissioner responsible for development, to introduce a new publication which, under the title "The European Community and the Third World" outlines the problems and aims of the developing countries and what the Community is doing in this field.

The brochure which is available in English, French and German can be obtained by writing to the Directorate General for Information, European Commission, 200 rue de la Loi, 1049 Brussels.

++ RADIOACTIVITY : PUBLICATIONS AND RESEARCH

In its "radioprotection" series, the European Commission has just published a report on the level of radioactive contamination in the ambient atmosphere and in the food chain. This study which covers the years 1972 to 1975 was drawn up in collaboration with Euratom and the French Commissariat for Atomic Energy and deals with human biology, the iodine metabolism and its variability, as well as the mineral composition of the human body. This document (in English and French only) can be purchased from the Community's Office for Official Publications, PO Box 1003, Luxembourg.

Some 180 people from 16 countries and international organisations took part in a seminar on radioactive effluent from irradiated fuel reprocessing plants. The seminar, which was organised by the European Commission in cooperation with Cologne's Society for Reactor Safety (Gesellschaft für Reaktorsicherheit mbH) and the Karlsruhe Society for Nuclear Research (Gesellschaft für Kernforschung mbH) took place at the Nuclear Research Centre in Karlsruhe, November 22-25.

The aim of the meeting was to bring together professional experts to exchange information and views concerning the techniques for dealing with radioactive waste and to evaluate the radiological impact of waste.

++ SEA POLLUTION CAMPAIGN

A short 16mm colour film has been made by the Belgian film producer Patrick Van Antwerpen, on the campaign to prevent sea pollution. Under the title "The battle for the sea" the film portrays many cases (North Sea, Pas de Calais, Mediterranean etc.) where Community action could be beneficial. Fishermen, politicians, scientists and factory managers all present their points of view. Additional information can be obtained from the distributors: Dupuis Film, 233 Chaussee de Vleurgat, 1050 Brussels.

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THE NUCLEAR DEBATE

Energy supply to the end of the century and the role of nuclear energy were the two topics that brought some 600 people to the first three day session of public hearings on nuclear energy held in Brussels, November 29 to December 1. In addition to experts from the European institutions, there were representatives from the energy producers and consumers, trade union organisations, industrial organisations, environmental protection bodies and some 200 journalists from the press, radio and TV participating in the debates organised by the European Commission.

Amongst the participants, there were, naturally enough, both staunch advocates and opponents of nuclear energy but there was a majority with open minds, prepared to question, listen and make up their own minds. The discussions were consequently very lively, and were sustained by the active interest of the general public who were there in force and who presented numerous written questions. All three days of these first public hearings on energy were constructive and did not at any point degenerate into sterile polemic.

Economic growth

As scheduled, the first topic for discussion was economic growth and the relationship between economic expansion and energy consumption. Two contradictory viewpoints were represented:

"Zero growth is egotistical and anti-democratic. It implies the persistence of social inequality in our countries and inequality in our relations with the third world, and can only be achieved through restraint."

"Growth as we know it leads to absurd and dangerous consequences, particularly with regard to energy."

But it was generally felt that they express only a partial aspect of the truth. This realisation led to a certain convergence of the conflicting opinions.

No longer does anyone talk of maintaining rapid economic growth as an aim in itself. It is now generally admitted that the developed countries and particularly the European Community will have a much lower rate of growth in the future than they have enjoyed in the last quarter of a century.

On the other hand, there are few people left who advocate a zero growth objective. Moderate but consistent economic growth is now the creed of most observers. Principally because it is necessary to reduce both economic and social inequality, find jobs for the unemployed, make social advance and improve the quality of life, whilst preserving our environment.

Views as to what level this moderate growth should be differ, however, between those who postulate the need to look for a change in the type of growth, and those who prefer to progressively reduce the level of growth.

Energy consumption

The direct link between economic growth i.e. the annual growth of gross national product, and the increase in energy consumption is more complex. General agreement was reached, however, that this relationship will be less direct, i.e. less than one for one, in the future. This is, essentially, since growth will strengthen the tertiary sector (services, leisure, social activity...) at the expense of the traditionally large energy consuming industrial sector. This does not imply, however, that moderate growth, measured in terms of GNP or otherwise, or another form of growth compatible with social progress, can be achieved without increasing the demand for energy.

Unanimous agreement was reached on three principles:

- the overriding necessity to ensure a more rational use of energy by improving yield, avoiding loss and wastage, and by reducing the gap in the amount of primary energy consumed by our economies and the quantities of useful energy available to consumers;
- the need to better mobilise and use more fully our own indigenous resources : coal, oil, gas, hydroelectric power, etc.
- the need to develop as best we can renewable energy sources, particularly solar energy, wind power, geothermal energy, etc.

Agreement on these three basic guidelines does not hide different views as to their impact on the Community's energy supply, and also the priority which should be given to them in our research and development effort.

It is also apparent that in terms of the probable future energy demand and the energy available, without nuclear energy and without raising the Community's energy imports to a dangerously high level, there is a risk of energy shortage in the future.

Nuclear option

The question is whether we can rely on nuclear energy to fill this gap. Opinions on this point still differ widely.

Some are ready to accept this energy shortage simply to avoid having to make recourse to nuclear energy. They think that this deficit will be smaller and could even be negligible if the funds that would be allocated to the growth of nuclear energy could be redirected towards assisting the rational use of energy

programme, or if we were to bring about a change in society and the type of growth required.

Others adhere to a policy of temporary recourse to nuclear energy whilst restricting it to the minimum. Their basic aim is to keep it at the current level, to give a breathing space to reflect on alternative solutions, and reflect on the dangers of nuclear power and the means of perfecting certain techniques such as the reprocessing of irradiated fuel. This would avoid a premature move towards other non-proven techniques such as fast breeder plutonium reactors.

Others adhere to the use of nuclear energy as it has been actually planned by the majority of governments and by the European Commission i.e. introducing - in function of electricity needs and at a regular pace - a large capacity of enriched uranium reactors, and then moving as rapidly as possible to fast breeder reactors which can make more efficient use of the world's relatively small uranium reserves.

If the maximum care and precautions are taken, there is no reason, it is argued, why Europe should give up the development of such a promising technology.

Constructive debate

The first session of the nuclear hearings has consequently led to a clarification of and agreement on the basic facts of the problem but has not produced solutions. No-one expected any more.

This first meeting has, however, enabled the most fundamental questions to be raised and argued on a wider basis of agreed fact, and on the other hand to show the need for more objective research into certain disputed subject areas, notably the size of world uranium resources, the reliability and availability of nuclear power stations, the frequency and type of reactor accidents that have occurred, the cost of electricity production from nuclear plants, etc.

Finally, according to the participants themselves, these hearings have, for the first time in Europe, enabled the free and public expression of all nuances of opinion in an atmosphere of objectivity, intellectual honesty, respect for the opinion of others and even, occasionally, with a certain sense of humour.

This is a good portent for the sessions to come of which the next one, January 24-26, will look at the supply of nuclear energy from the point of view of safety, health, and environmental protection.

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BETTER INFORMED, BETTER CHOICE

One of the essential concerns of the European Commission is declaredly to make the European consumer as well informed as possible. As mentioned in Euroforum N° 42/77, the Commission organised, in collaboration with the University of Louvain, a seminar on this subject November 23-25.

More than three hundred people, representing public authorities, industrial and commercial bodies, research centres and all the major consumer organisations, met to discuss their ideas. In opening the proceedings, Richard Burke, European Commissioner responsible for consumer affairs, stressed the importance of the meeting, which was the first of its kind, and the role of the European Commission in consumer information.

On behalf of the public authorities, Madame Scrivener, France's Secretary of State for consumer affairs set the tone : "In choosing this theme you have gone right to the heart of the subject. I personally consider it fundamental, but I would not wish to conceal how difficult it is to deal with the problem".

Who, what and why

Ignorant of the overall market, manipulated by advertising and subject to economic and social pressures, the consumer needs to be informed in such a way that he can exercise free and reasoned choice without, Madame Scrivener stressed, excluding the various subjective and emotional factors which give life that certain spontaneity.

During the course of the debates, it became apparent that the mass media provides consumers with insufficient information, and that the information provided by consumer organisations reaches most frequently the privileged social classes - those that already have the time and means to exercise choice.

The aim should be to inform the least privileged social classes since they are most vulnerable and susceptible to commercial publicity and are generally not reached by the information from consumer organisations.

What is required is clear information (avoiding codes, symbols and technical terms). It should also be true, objective, readily available and not expensive.

Results in this field have already been achieved, particularly in France with the creation of the "PO Box 5000" and in the UK by the Citizen's Advice Bureaus which at the local level provide free information for consumers.

Information sources

The legal requirements for industry to supply information varies greatly from country to country. Advertising is by its nature a means of partial information, it is the means most employed by companies to make their products known.

Informative labelling - the result of cooperation between manufacturers and consumers - could supply objective criteria to make choice more clear.

Standardised contract clauses (in as much as they can eliminate unfair clauses) and after sales service (not forgetting the publicity impact) can also play a useful supplementary role.

Consumer organisations themselves are developing specialist publications at the national and local level. Printing the results of comparative product tests in these publications is, for some organisations, a real instrument of consumer power. It should, however, be able to reach a wider public through the use of TV and radio, but the discussion revealed that such action is subject to two restrictions: cost and lack of material and professional resources.

Public meetings, handouts and brochures can also inform the consumer. At the Community level, consumer organisations are kept informed about the diverse work of the European Commission and are involved in the work of the Consumer Consultative Committee (CCC) which is linked to the Commission.

The role of the public authorities in all this varies considerably from country to country : creation of public information bodies, subsidies to private organisations, consultation with consumer organisations in drafting laws and regulations, publication of popular information brochures, etc.

Consumer organisations have made certain suggestions : the public authorities should abolish administrative secrets and authorise the publication of documents they have produced; they should be held responsible for the publication of erroneous or insufficient information when they themselves supply goods or services; they should create training centres and introduce specialised courses in consumer education.

Lots to be done

As stated Mr. Carpentier, Director General of the Commission's Environment and Consumer Protection Service, this seminar has enabled us, among other things, to draw up a critical and nearly complete balance sheet of the work being undertaken by the three sides : industry, consumer organisations and the public. Now it is necessary to evaluate the ideas that have been brought up, sort them out and fix priorities for action and decide at which level action should be taken.

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EUROPE'S HEALTH

For the first time in the history of the European Community, there will be a meeting of the health ministers of the Nine. It will take place in Brussels, December 13, at the Council of Ministers.

A few examples

This is not to say that the Community has been neglecting Europe's health up until now. On the contrary, the Community has already been active in making the free movement and free establishment of nurses and doctors possible within the Community.

It is also Europe's health that is at stake when the Community acts to vet and control the variety of substances that are added to human food: emulsifiers, gelling agents, colourants etc. These are carefully examined by the Community's Scientific Committee for Human Foodstuffs who ensure that none of the additives can endanger the health of the consumer.

The Community has also laid down basic quality standards for bathing water and water for human consumption.

In a slightly more indirect way, the European Commission has been drawing up a 'social budget' in which it proposes to harmonise the sickness benefit and social security systems in operation in the Nine. The Community has also been active in ensuring hygiene and safety in the workplace.

The European Commission has also proposed the implementation of the Community's first medical research programme (see Euroforum N° 32/77) which was drawn up a long time back by the medical research and public health committee.

When the Council of Ministers are discussing sulphur dioxide in the urban atmosphere, it is also our health that's being debated, even if the environment ministers are in the chair.

The list does not stop here, but this brief outline underlines the fact that Europe's health is dealt with under a number of different headings: social policy, environmental and consumer protection, competition, free establishment, etc.

Work to do

All this does not mean that at this historic meeting, the Nine's health ministers will not have anything to talk about. One of the most preoccupying aspects of health policy is the economic side. It is often said that health has no price but that does not mean it doesn't cost anything. All societies make considerable financial sacrifices to protect

the health of its people. But now, many additional factors have to be taken into consideration : increased longevity, progress in medical research, medical demands, social cost of occupational illnesses, the cost of hospitalisation etc. Within their own governments the health ministers are in a better position than others to appreciate the real cost to a nation of the health of its citizens. An exchange of ideas views and experiences on the subject could usefully guide the work of the European Commission in this field.

Another area of concern is public health education. But, when all is said and done, ministers can only help the public to protect their health. Without the cooperation of individuals themselves, a health policy would not be very effective. And the behaviour of individuals is far from perfect.

Everybody is aware today of the harmful effects of smoking, but the reaction of Europeans has not corresponded to the risks that are known to exist. Some active campaigns have been launched under the patronage of national governments, but the results could be better (see Euroforum N° 38/77). Here again it is a problem of public education. The ministers could discuss whether, as some governments wish, it is an opportunity for Community action.

Nutrition also needs to be discussed. Though it is not a question of controlling the gastronomic practices of certain regions, certain Europeans are not receiving the diet they should, partly as a result of the habits and partly the excesses of consumer society. Public education is needed. It could help individuals eat a more balanced diet.

Europeans also travel a lot more than they used to, either for work or pleasure. They also carry with them various germs and sicknesses which are then transmitted to others. The problem is not new, but what is new is that certain illnesses could be controlled at the Community level. Microbes do not stop at frontiers, neither should the methods of controlling them.

European solidarity has recently been demonstrated during a number of catastrophes: Friuli, Seveso, the floods in S.W. France. Such mutual assistance can and should be extended to all cases - numerous as they are - where national resources are not enough. Such assistance could not be fully effective unless the resources available in each country can be quickly mobilised. This could also be a subject for the health ministers to discuss.

The first meeting of the Nine's health ministers will have a heavy agenda. This should encourage them to meet more frequently. The well-being of Europe is at stake.

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