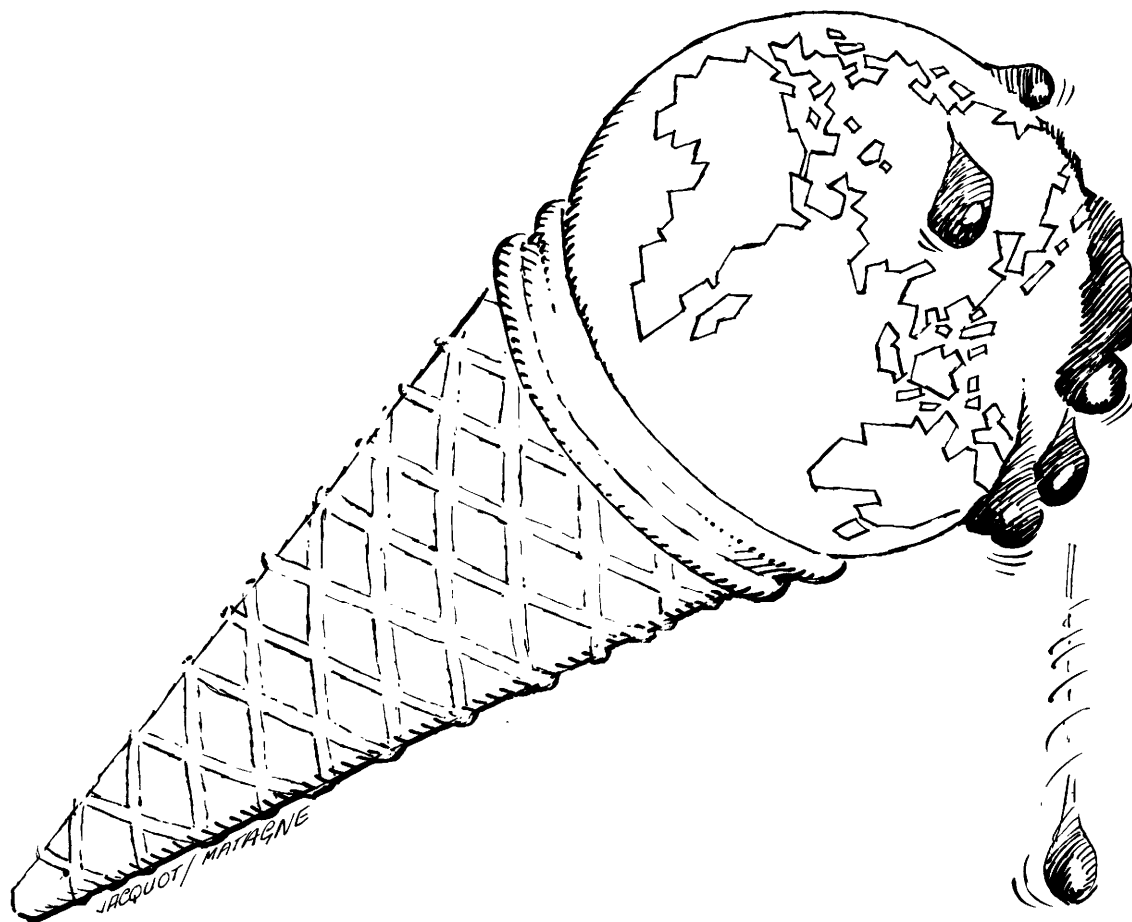


Brussels, 3 October 1978

N° 34/78



If we don't keep an eye on atmospheric pollution and the climate, the earth could overheat. See page 3.

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This bulletin is published by the

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++ WEATHER RESEARCH

With droughts, torrential rains and abnormally high and low temperatures, the climate in recent years has been quite extreme and unpredictable. Climatology is in its early days but as our growing food and water requirements depend so heavily on meteorological factors, the science needs to be rapidly advanced.

The European Commission's ideas for a research programme on the climate are outlined in Annex 1.

++ ENERGY LABELS FOR HOUSEHOLD APPLIANCES

Household gadgets and appliances used in the European Community consume the equivalent of 44 million tonnes of oil each year, or 4.8% of domestic energy consumption.

The measures proposed by the Commission to reduce the energy bill in the home and in the Community are discussed in Annex 2.

++ STUDENT FOREIGN STUDY SCHOLARSHIPS

Out of the Community's four million students only 21 000 of them or 0.5% study in a country other than their own.

The Commission has proposed a scholarship system to assist students in following courses in other Community countries. Details in Annex 3.

++ CONSUMER PRICE INDEX STABILISES

For the Community as a whole, the consumer price index in August showed the lowest increase since the beginning of the year : only a 0.4% rise on July. Price rises in the United Kingdom and Ireland were slightly higher than average at 0.7% and 1% respectively.

In Germany, prices actually fell (-0.3%) and only increased slightly in Luxembourg (+0.1%) and in Denmark and the Netherlands (+0.4%). Prices rose 0.5% in Italy and Belgium. (Only estimates are available for France).

Compared to August of last year, the overall rise is 7.3% for the Community which, broken down, is as follows:

| | |
|----------------|----------------|
| Germany | 2.4 |
| Luxembourg | 2.8 |
| Netherlands | 4.1 |
| Belgium | 4.1 |
| United Kingdom | 8% |
| Ireland | 8.2 |
| Denmark | 9.4 |
| France | 9.5 (estimate) |
| Italy | 11.7 |

++ DWINDLING ORCHARDS

Europe's orchards are shrinking, according to a survey undertaken by the Community's Statistical Office last year. Some 17 000 hectares of land planted with fruit trees - 3% of the total - were put to other uses. Pear trees were most affected with a reduction of 10.6% or 10 000 hectares. Peach trees similarly suffered a reduction of 5%, and apple trees 3%. Orange groves on the other hand expanded by 6 000 hectares (+6%) in Italy alone.

In the Community as a whole, land area planted with pear, apple and peach trees decreased (with the exception of France and Luxembourg for pear and apple trees). Biggest reductions in apple and pear trees were found in Belgium (-32% and 30%), and in Germany peach tree orchards were cut back 33%.

++ FARM PRICES

The index for agricultural producer prices in the Community increased 3.7% during the second quarter of 1978 compared to the same period last year. The rise was mostly due to the increase in prices of animal products and livestock, whilst the average index for vegetal products (with the exception of fruit and vegetables) stayed unchanged.

The most substantial drop in prices compared with last year was found in potatoes (- 36%) and seed (- 13.5%). By contrast, there were above average increases in cereal prices (+ 7.6%), animals for slaughter (+ 7.9%) and wine (+ 14.4%). Contrary to other butcher's meats, the price of pork only increased slightly.

The changes in the average index of producer prices have affected Community countries in different ways. In Italy and Ireland they were above average (+ 8.6% and 15.6%). In the United Kingdom, France and Denmark, the prices of vegetal products decreased but were offset by 8-10% increases in the prices of animal products.

The general index rose 4-6%. Luxembourg, Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium by contrast experienced a sharp drop in the price of vegetal products causing the general index in these countries to fall.

++ X-RAY DANGERS

"Numerous radiology specialists think X-rays are being used excessively. Considering the risk of serious damage which this abuse implies, it is necessary to introduce a system which can check the total dose of X-rays received by an individual at any given moment..... Within the Community there is only one country with such a system, Germany. Does the European Commission not think it necessary for reasons of public health, that a common control system for X-rays be developed in the Community?"

The European Commission has replied to this question from Mr. Kofoed of the European Parliament emphasising that radiation resulting from medical treatment is by far the largest and most preoccupying of all non-natural radiation sources. In July 1976 the Council of Ministers adopted a directive proposed by the Commission, inviting Member States to reduce all non-natural radiation to the necessary minimum (including medical treatments). In addition, to give concrete substance to this directive, the European Commission is currently preparing a proposal to improve the protection of patients from radiation.

++ COMPETITION : PROTECTING FARMERS

The European Commission just banned certain commercial practices restricting competition in the production and sale of maize seeds for agricultural use. The ban affects two French and two German companies. These prohibited practices were largely responsible for the 70% price differences between maize seeds in France and Germany, which worked to the detriment of German farmers.

This decision has important repercussions beyond this major sector (production of maize seed amounts to some 100 to 150 million kilos per year) and establishes these principles immediately in other seed and general plant sectors.

++ CHLOROFORM TOOTHPASTE

"Is there any risk of cancer with the chloroform approved for use in toothpaste? Is it true that chloroform serves no technical purpose? Why is its presence not mentioned on the label? asks Mr. Schyns of the European Parliament.

The European Commission has replied that chloroform is used to give a particular flavour to toothpaste and there is no scientific evidence to indicate that it produces cancer. The substance is only toxic for the liver. Experts consulted during the drafting of the directive on cosmetics did not consider it necessary to mention its presence on the label.

Despite this, the question will be put on the agenda of the Community's Scientific Committee for Cosmetology which has been set up to assist the Commission with its cosmetic directives.

++ JOBS FOR THE HANDICAPPED

For the first time a statistical study has been undertaken at the Community level to examine the possibilities for social and economic integration of the physically and mentally handicapped in Community countries. The study covers the different legislations on the employment of handicapped people, special training, vocational retraining centres, supervised workshops, public and private organisations who find jobs for the handicapped, etc.

This statistical report entitled "The handicapped and their jobs" drawn up by Mr. Rouault on behalf of the Community's Statistical Office, is available from Community bookshops listed on the last page of Euroforum, priced £4.20.

++ COMMON TRACTOR NORMS

The European Commission has proposed harmonising legislation in the Nine covering the towing brackets and reversing provisions of agricultural and forestry tractors. This proposal follows last June's proposal dealing with tractor lights and signals which should be standard throughout the Community. Establishing common standards is an additional step in facilitating trade in goods throughout the Community.

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WEATHER RESEARCH

Since earliest times, man has turned his attention towards the sky to discern what the heavens had in store for him. Sometimes it was a question of his survival.

It is not really necessary to point to the great flood to be convinced of the dangers from extreme meteorological conditions. One glance at the events in recent years shows how harshly droughts, crop failure and floods have hit many regions of the globe, including our own.

Droughts and hurricanes

- 1968-1973 : Africa's Sahel (Mauritanian Mali, Niger, etc.), Ethiopia and the Cape Verde islands were badly hit by the prolonged drought which was the most severe this century.

- 1875 : a heat wave descended on Western Europe during the summer and countries such as the Netherlands and Denmark experienced their highest temperatures on record. For the first time in the 20th century, ice from the Arctic ocean found its way to Iceland in the month of July.

- 1975-1976 : the drought hit all of western, central and southern Europe. Rainfall in England from May 1975 over the following 16 months was the lowest recorded since 1727.

- 1976 : a new heat wave hit Western Europe at the beginning of the summer. For 24 days in England, temperatures were 4°C above the monthly average for the previous 300 years. The USSR and Canada, by contrast, suffered a very cold and humid summer.

The catastrophic drought which tortured a large number of tropical and subtropical countries between April and August (from Sri Lanka to West Africa) was followed by torrential rains. Over the same period, Europe suffered bad weather, whilst extremely violent hurricanes ravaged the coasts of Madagascar and Mexico.

Zero safety margin

The impact of such climatic traumas on man and the earth's resources is enormous. During the period 1960-1970 for example, extreme meteorological phenomenon caused some economic disasters. World reserves of wheat were reduced to negligible size, foodstuff and market prices went haywire. Millions of people in developing countries found themselves

threatened with starvation.

The climate of our planet has always been unstable and will doubtless stay so in the future. We know neither the causes of these changes, nor their size or speed. It is vital to direct our research and forecasting resources to these climatic variables.

Whilst our vulnerability has greatly increased compared to past centuries, current world reserves of wheat only represent a small fraction of our annual consumption. The galloping birthrate and increased food requirements imply that a period of bad weather could be catastrophic. It would not require another glacial era to destroy our agriculture. Our water resources are also becoming increasingly scarce given the population growth and the expansion of our cities and industries. For the future, we can probably expect droughts to threaten our supplies of water for home, industrial and agricultural use. By contrast, well dispersed rain could feed our underground waters and increase our water reserves. Though we know that our security (water and food) depends on the climate, we do not know the precise quantitative relationships involved. Urgent scientific research is required.

Weather forecasting limits

This urgency has led the European Commission to propose to the Council of Ministers a research programme into the mechanics of climate and temperature. The five year programme aims to coordinate research work in Community and associated countries. The total cost will be around 15 million EUA (1 EUA = + 1.3 dollars) of which 8 million EUA will come from the Community budget.

This European climatology programme will form part of the international research being conducted by the World Meteorological Organisation (GARP). In the science of climatology, coordination of efforts produces good results which is why the European Commission wishes to mobilise the leading specialists from the Nine rather than see European researchers work in relative isolation.

The programme proposed by the Commission covers two research fields:

1. Climatic mechanisms

This area of research covers short term climatic forecasting, i.e. over a period of a few weeks. All weather

forecasting techniques have their limits and it is currently impossible to forecast the weather or the state of the atmosphere more than two weeks ahead.

The gaps in our knowledge not only concern the actual weather but also causes and origins and the precise moments when certain changes will occur.

At the moment only visionaries can predict climatic disasters with any precision.

To develop useful forecasting techniques, the climatic conditions of ancient times have to be reconstructed to find historical precedents for the current climatic cycles. Information on climates in ancient times can be collected from fossils, tree rings, river beds, analysis of insect life and marine microorganisms in sedimentary layers, etc.

2. Man-climate interactions

Man is increasingly concerned to know if he is in any way responsible for the increasing changes in climatic conditions. Technological progress increases energy consumption which pollutes the atmosphere either thermally or chemically.

The second area of research proposed by the European Commission is composed of the following two themes:

- the effect of climate on European resources (food and water). Evaluation of climatic risks (crops, droughts, avalanches, etc.) The impact of climatic conditions on energy production (importance of rainfall for feeding hydro-electric power stations or cooling nuclear power stations;
- influence of man on the climate : chemical pollution through carbon dioxide in particular and thermal pollution of the atmosphere (see box).

Pollution fiction?

Thermal pollution of the atmosphere has considerable influence on our environment, and can also affect the climate. By burning fossil fuels - coal, gas and oil derivatives - (and we should not forget the growth of nuclear power stations) we are affecting energy reserves and the climate.

The effects of these heat sources on the continental and world scale are still uncertain. It can nevertheless be imagined that sooner or later there will be some effect on local and global meteorological patterns.

The chemical pollution of the atmosphere is also of great concern. Certain gases and particles can inhibit the passage of solar and infra-red rays. These particles also have an effect in the formation and condensation of clouds. Amongst these gases, the most dangerous, in view of its potential impact on the climate, is carbon dioxide. (CO₂). Its concentration in the atmosphere is increasing exponentially : 10% since the beginning of the industrial age, 20% in 20 years, 100% by 2020. Such an increase in the global concentration of carbon dioxide could, in the view of certain specialists, raise the earth's surface temperature by 2°C (greenhouse effect). The consequences of such a temperature rise could be serious : amove of important climatic zones towards the north, glaciers floating in the Arctic, changes in the level of the Antartic plateau, flooding of low lying coastal areas.....

ENERGY LABELS FOR HOUSEHOLD APPLIANCES

Buying a household appliance such as a washing machine, a dishwasher, vacuum cleaner, deep freezer, etc. involves weighing up a number of sometimes tricky factors. There is price for a start, but through the work of consumer protection associations, consumers have become particularly conscious of the price/quality factor. And before reaching for the chequebook, the customer has to consider how long the appliance will last, how it will perform, the quality of after sales service facilities and, of course, electricity consumption (some refrigerators consume more than deep freezers).

What goes for our everyday consumer also goes for the European Community which is actively trying to reduce its energy bill. Household appliances consume on average 2 300 kilowatt hours per year (kW hour = 1000 watt hours) in each of the 84 million households in the Community - equal to half a tonne of oil-equivalent per year - simply by employing machines to wash, dry, vacuum, cook or freeze. Total energy consumption from such appliances is heavy - 44 million tonnes of oil equivalent (toe) or 4.8% of the Community's domestic energy consumption.

Back to the dolly peg?

Should Europeans be persuaded to go back to the joys of washing clothes and dishes by hand? The most practical approach is not to do away with the appliances but increase their efficiency, and thereby cut consumption down to 3.8% instead of its current 4.8% share of the Nine's energy bill.

Adopting this approach the European Commission has proposed to the Council of Ministers a labelling system for domestic appliances which would clearly state expected energy consumption. Such a system would have two effects:

- it would allow the consumer to compare more accurately the different makes being offered in the shops and would encourage them to buy the more economical brands, those which are better for the environment.
- consumer attitudes would influence manufacturer's product policies, and encourage the production of low-consumption appliances.

If this labelling system achieves its stated objectives, it will doubtless be an important weapon in the Community's rational use of energy campaigns.

Yellow-orange labels

Under the Commission's proposals, this energy consumption information system would apply to:

- water heaters
- ovens
- refrigerators and deep freezers
- washing machines
- dishwashers
- spin dryers
- vacuum cleaners
- television sets

Energy consumption specifications will be supplied by manufacturers who will be responsible for this accuracy. Approved organisations will act as watchdogs. Retailers will stick these labels on appliances when they are displayed, sold and delivered.

The labels will be yellow/orange in colour, about 9cm x 10cm in size, and will carry a small symbol representing the Community in the left corner. Headed "Information about the product", these labels will provide details of energy consumption. The directive also makes provisions for other information to be added such as noise level or water consumption.

Role of the consumer

If the European Commission's proposals are adopted by the Council of Ministers, they will be optional and not compulsory for Member States i.e. national authorities will have the opportunity but not the obligation to demand suitable labels on all the above-mentioned goods being marketed on their territory.

Any labelling system needs to be standardised from one Community country to the other to ensure that manufacturers who wish to inform the consumer are not forced to adhere to regulations which vary from country to country.

France already has a labelling system included in its provisions on advertising. Other countries intent on introducing new systems have suspended their work in anticipation of the new Community-wide standards. It is indicative that a number of countries are already falling into step with this directive even though its application is not compulsory.

In the end, consumers have the most important role. All the labels in the world will have no effect if consumers do not clearly demonstrate through their purchasing power that they are opposed to wastage of their own and the planet's resources. There are, of course, other ways of curbing excessive energy consumption, e.g. by providing information on the most economical ways to wash clothes, sharing a deep freezer between neighbours, etc. But this sort of behaviour cannot be imposed by a Community directive; it requires a change of mentality. The European energy savings action programme could be one way of bringing this about.

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STUDENT FOREIGN STUDY SCHOLARSHIPS

Out of the Community's four million higher education students only 21 000 - i.e. 0.5% - are following courses in countries other than their own. The European Commission intends to take measures to improve the mobility of students and increase study abroad. As a start, the Commission has proposed offering 650 scholarships each year for students wishing to spend a year in a higher educational establishment in other Community countries. The only condition is that the tuition to be followed fits in with the students own courses, so that the year abroad can be recognised by national educational authorities. The scholarships will be open to students of all disciplines except modern languages, who are covered by separate Commission proposals.

Common study programmes

The scholarship scheme proposed by the European Commission aims to encourage universities to introduce common study programmes and to help increase the number of students experienced in studying and working in another European language.

Each of these scholarships will be worth 4,500 EUA (1 EUA = + 1.3 dollars) per year, and the total cost of the scheme during the first academic year of operation, 1981/82 will be more than three million EUA. Scholarships will be allocated as follows:

| | |
|----------------|-----|
| Luxembourg | 10 |
| Denmark | 20 |
| Ireland | 20 |
| Belgium | 50 |
| Netherlands | 50 |
| Germany | 125 |
| France | 125 |
| Italy | 125 |
| United Kingdom | 125 |

According to the Commission's proposal, applications will be limited to students following courses recognised by several Community higher education establishments.

To increase the mobility of European students, the Community has already taken a number of steps:

- a student guide to studying in other Community countries has been published by the European Commission;
- subsidies have been allocated to higher educational establishments to help finance common study programmes;
- the Commission's services have been analysing the current obstacles to student mobility : admission criteria, linguistic requirements, administrative procedures etc. Proposals aimed at resolving these problems will be discussed at the next session of the Council of Education Ministers.

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