



A NEWSHEET FOR JOURNALISTS • REPRODUCTION AUTHORIZED

No. 15/81

BRUSSELS, April 27, 1981

Week of April 20 to 25

CONSUMERS : The labelling of articles in supermarkets

- For several years, Europe's large stores and supermarkets have been introducing various information coding systems for their consumer products. These new labelling systems, which can be deciphered by computer, have the advantage of improving the management of supplies and billing procedures, and have therefore also increased productivity in the retail sector.

But there is another side of the coin, connected with the fact that the usual price label no longer always appears on the item purchased but instead is found on the shelf. So once the consumer has taken the item off the shelf, he may no longer be able to compare the price with that of other articles.

Questioned on this subject by Mrs Weber, a member of the European Parliament, the EEC Commission indicated that it was not considering any Community measures requiring the maintenance of readable prices on consumer products. Nevertheless it stated that it was preoccupied by the question, and is examining German legislation which has recently been adopted on the subject.

S U M M A R Y

- BUDGET : p. 2 New resources for the Community
- ENERGY : p. 3 A hard look at "soft energy"
- ENVIRONMENT : p. 4 Holding back the tide
- IN BRIEF : p. 5
 - . EEC Agricultural Fund financing for 172 new projects
 - . Towards a new EEC-India accord
 - . The European Parliament and the death penalty

CLOSE UP

- : p. 6 Europe's research centres : what do they do ?
The European Community has its own research centres where high technology inventions regularly see the light of day. We give a few examples ...

This newsheet is published in six languages (English, French, German, Dutch, Italian and Danish) by the Directorate-General for Information of the

Commission of the European Communities,
Rue de la Loi 200 - 1049 Brussels um.
Tel. 736 60 00 - Telex 21877 COMEU B.

Its contents do not necessarily reflect the official views of the Community institutions.

Editor : Will. J. Reckman



BUDGET : New resources for the Community

To help underdeveloped regions, to guarantee farm price stability, to finance infrastructure or scientific research, costs, not surprisingly, a lot of money. The European Community, which is responsible for these problems as well as many others, is today confronted by the difficulty of running out of the funds it has available. For some 15 years, these financial resources have been generated largely from tariff duties levied on products imported into the Community and a portion of the value-added tax collected by national governments, an amount limited to 1 percent of the total collected. The Community agricultural policy absorbs some three-quarters of the EEC budget, and a further increase in farm prices was recently approved by the 10 Ministers of Agriculture. The amounts allocated for agricultural policies are already so high that they are preventing the Community from developing other joint policies. Without even considering the introduction of new programmes, there is widespread agreement that if expenditures continue to grow at the same pace as they have over the past five years, the Community will run out of funds.

The 10 member Governments have assigned the European Commission in Brussels the chore of making recommendations for the restructuring of the Community budget. These should be prepared by the end of May. But already the European Parliament has adopted, by a vote of 96 for, 32 against and three abstentions, a report asking for an increase in the limit on these Community funds. This report, prepared by the Italian Communist member Altiero Spinelli, is based on the assumption that the Community budget in the future will need to grow more rapidly than those of the Member States without increasing the burden on the European taxpayer.

What the Parliament suggests is to increase the 1 percent limit on the VAT which can be passed on to the Community and the establishment of a procedure to review the responsibility and resources of the Community. This examination should, according to the Parliament report, take place every five years after the European Parliament elections so that these elections could become the setting for a major political debate on the objectives of the European Community.

The ball is now in the court of the Commission and the Council of Ministers.

ENERGY : A hard look at "soft" energy

Are the advocates of so-called "soft" energies utopians or dreamers ? The most ardent supporters of these natural and renewable resources, such as author Amory Lovins, have gained considerable attention with their recommendations of a fundamental switch in patterns of production and consumption. Instead of continued emphasis on large-scale exploitation of "hard" energy supplies based on oil, coal, gas and nuclear power, they propose smaller, more decentralised reliance on solar, wind, ocean, biomass or geothermal energy. Following the 1973-74 energy crisis, which has made us more conscious of the limits and the cost of traditional energy supplies, more efforts have been devoted to examining the whole spectrum of energy use and supplies. But so far, there is still more weight given to the development of oil, coal, gas and nuclear energy than the soft energies, which are seen as providing only some 5 to 10 percent of total energy needs in the foreseeable future. But there are also a number of authorities who feel that all avenues in this important domain should be fully explored. As an example, the United Nations is planning a world-wide conference on renewable energy resources this summer in Nairobi, Kenya. And a recent report of the European Parliament has also underlined the need for a full and close study of the potential of these resources as well as the impact they could have on economies and societies in general. The report, prepared by Parliamentarian Hanna Walz for the Committee on Research and Energy, sketches the problems and opportunities offered by these alternative energies.

Following the principle that "small is beautiful", the report notes, supporters of soft energies recommend a decentralisation of energy production and a reduction to smaller scales adapted to more limited use. For instance, the size and choice of energy supplies could be largely determined by the availability of wind, sun, geothermal or other sources and the need of the community, dwelling or plant. But the report also notes that such a choice could involve a radical restructuration of modern industrialised economies and societies which might or might not be appropriate or acceptable. But with the new concern directed at the encouragement of small and medium-sized enterprises, there might still be some desirable use for such concepts using soft energies. On the other hand, less-populated developing countries might be better suited for such decentralised energy supplies, while the choice and mix might be different still for rapidly industrialising countries such as India, Brazil or Mexico.

There is also still the problem of the cost of developing such available resources, a picture that changes rapidly, the report stresses, with the continuing increase of oil and other prices.

But with this first overview of the issue, the European Parliament report recommends that a thorough and democratic debate be initiated on this fundamental choice facing our societies in the coming decades.

ENVIRONMENT : Holding back the tide

While much of the world is by now familiar with the gradual spread of deserts, probably fewer know about a related process of erosion that is eating away a significant part of Europe's coastlines.

This lack of information is actually one of the most important aspects connected with the problem. It is estimated that about 1,100 kilometers of European coastline is affected by erosion which is continually washing away part of the land surface into the oceans. Just about all of the North Sea coast is said to be subject to the threat of erosion, as well as certain parts of the Atlantic. Erosion of the Mediterranean coastline is said to be less significant.

But aside from this general information, there has been little study devoted to the gravity and the causes of the erosion of the shores of the European Community. There is no indication of the amount of land lost to erosion each year or the economic loss to agriculture, industry, private property, energy resources or tourism resulting from this situation.

Even the causes of the deterioration of the coast are not completely understood. They are probably the consequences of a combination of natural and human actions, such as water, waves, wind, ice, ocean currents, tides, geology, destruction of vegetation, urban development, industrialisation, road building, tourism or intensive agriculture.

Part of the reason for this lack of information is that responsibility for the coastline is fragmented among national and regional organisations and that there may not be the means for extensive research or exchange of information. But a recent report by John Hume of the European Parliament's Committee on Regional Policy and Land Management notes that many of the regions facing the problem of coastline erosion are also among the most underdeveloped in the European Community and that the Community should serve as a catalyst and clearing house for action and information about the problem. He notes that about 600 kilometers of the 1,100 affected by erosion are in regions eligible for financial aid from the Community's Regional Fund. These include Northern and Southern Scotland, the North of England, Wales, Southeast Ireland, the German Baltic and North Sea coasts, Northern and Southern Jutland, the Nord-Pas-de-Calais, Pays de la Loire and the Provence-Côte d'Azur. The report also indicates that the problem is being looked at by the regional and environmental programmes. But the author stresses that much more research must be undertaken into the impact and prevention of coastal erosion and that more funds should be set aside in the Community budget especially aimed at this problem.

IN BRIEF ... IN BRIEF ... IN BRIEF ... IN BRIEF ... IN BRIEF ...

FISHING : EEC Agricultural Fund financing for 172 new projects

While negotiations for implementation of the so-called "blue" Europe's fishing policy seem to have reached stalemate, the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund has just released some E 10 million to help coastal fishing projects. This amount will be divided among 172 projects, including 86 which concern the construction of boats under 24 meters, 64 with the modernisation of boats and 22 with the establishment of fish farming operations. Italy, the United Kingdom, Ireland and France in that order are the main recipients of the aid, but Germany, Belgium, Denmark and the Netherlands will also receive a portion.

TRADE : Towards a new EEC-India accord

Negotiations aimed at the conclusion of a new trade and economic cooperation agreement between the European Community and India were completed on April 14. The accord should be signed sometime during the year and will last for a five-year period. Its main objective is to stimulate trade and economic relations which have been in effect between the two parties since the signature of an earlier 1974 accord. The new pact will especially benefit industrial, technological and scientific cooperation, thus widening the scope of the links between the Community and the world's largest democracy.

JUSTICE : The European Parliament and the death penalty

The death penalty, which has been abolished in a number of Member States of the European Community, is still in effect in others. On a number of occasions, members of the European Parliament have sought to organise a debate on this subject by presenting resolutions and circulating petitions.

The Parliament's Legal Affairs Committee has just published a report in which it expresses the "ardent wish that the death penalty be abolished in all the Community" and "requests the Member States to modify if necessary their legislation". The Parliamentary Committee raises three main arguments in favour of this position :

1. as a number of statistical studies have shown, the death penalty does not serve as a more powerful deterrent than long prison terms.
2. if the aim of prison is the rehabilitation of the prisoner, then the death penalty becomes illogical.
3. the application of the death penalty makes the correction of a judicial error impossible.

THE EEC'S JOINT RESEARCH CENTRES

Before making it to the consumer market, new inventions have to go through several different steps : research, obtaining a trade mark, commercial evaluation, creation of a prototype, financing and finally, production and marketing. But, once sold on consumer markets, new inventions are very quickly accepted by buyers. It is hard to remember that the first radio, the first television set, the first computer or, indeed, the first pocket calculator were seen as "miracles" when they first appeared on the scene; today we accept them as part of our daily lives.

Scientific research is a vital sector in the life of all industrialised countries. The economic exploitation of new inventions is one of the main factors contributing to an increase in industrial competitiveness, enlarging employment possibilities and allowing for a better utilisation of energy resources and raw materials. However, individual countries can rarely undertake such costly research on their own. It was in the 1950s that the crucial importance of international cooperation for scientific research was first brought home.

The European Community encourages research in the steel and coal sector (ECSC Treaty of 1951), nuclear energy (Euratom Treaty of 1957), and, since 1973, in several new areas such as electronics, chemistry, solar energy, environmental protection and scientific and medical equipment (within the framework of the EEC Treaty of 1957).

Not only does the EEC finance research through contracts in industry, private research institutions and several European universities, it also undertakes its very own research activities in five Community research centres. The Joint Research Centre has four establishments working in Ispra (Italy), Geel (Belgium), Karlsruhe (Germany) and Petten (Holland). The ambitious Joint European Torus (JET) programme devoted to seeking out new sources of energy is being undertaken at a research institute at Culham in the United Kingdom.

The inventions coming out of these centres belong to the Community as such, which can then conclude licensing contracts with European companies willing to sell the inventions on the market. It is clear that most of the work being done in these centres is not immediately perceptible. Projects designed to increase security and safety in nuclear power plants, for example, are of key importance to the nuclear sector but rarely have a direct economic impact.

However, the Community's research centres have come up with at least 100 inventions. About 25 firms are currently working on their final form and marketing. The European Commission has now decided to make an additional effort to exploit these inventions, particularly through participation in fairs and exhibitions, etc.

One of these inventions is the "precision heating" mechanism. A number of industries currently require very high and stable temperatures. Silicon, the basic material for the production of transistor radios, for example, must be heated at a very high temperature during the manufacture of the electrical components. The Joint Research Centre at Ispra has come up with a simple technique designed to provide such high, constant and precise temperatures during such an operation.

A second such invention is the "Progetto H" solar ray captor, a special mechanism which allows the absorption of a maximum amount of solar energy.

Special metallic X joints produced by Community research centres can put up with extreme differences in temperature, ranging from below freezing point to up to 600° C and more, and can, therefore, be used in the EEC's chemical and nuclear sectors.

In the newly-expanding field of data processing, the EEC's research centres have come up with a new range of logistic machines intended for different uses and which are especially interesting because they do not require special programming. The programmes can be used immediately for those who know how to work them. These machines are named Dali, Miro and Picasso, undoubtedly to prove that science and art can indeed go well together ...