

Eurofocus

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JUSTICE: Toward a "European legal zone"

- Community Justice Ministers meeting in Dublin have signed an accord on the application of a Council of Europe Convention of the suppression of terrorism.

The contents of this accord, strenuously discussed for several years, has now been approved by all the members of the Community, including Ireland, which up to now had refused to sign for constitutional reasons. Under the terms, the Nine agree to extradite or try the authors of a series of infractions that will henceforth be denied any political cover. These include kidnapping, taking of hostages, hi-jackings, bombings and, in the broad sense of the word, "grave" attacks on property that can create "a collective danger" for other persons.

To be applied, this accord will have to be ratified by the various European Parliaments.

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The northern beer drinker has been seduced by wine, the southern wine lover has been enticed by beer. In fact Europeans are drinking more. But from cirrhosis of the liver to heart attacks, the list of dire consequences of alcohol should give anyone fond of his cups pause for thought.

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CONSUMERS: an early warning system for dangerous products

The European public has retained a nightmarish memory of mercury-impregnated oranges or of lethal baby powder. Occasionally there are products that are dangerous to the health and safety of consumers because they contain a toxic substance or because they suffer from a defect in production. But once such a product is discovered, all countries where it is sold should be alerted as rapidly as possible. That's why the European Commission has just proposed the installation of a European system of rapid exchanges of information on danger arising from the use of consumer products. A number of initiatives in this direction had already been taken, notably in the OECD framework, but they were not effective for short-term measures because they did not foresee quick action to safeguard the consumer. If the Nine adopt the system proposed by the Commission, the Community countries would create a network of alarm "buttons" so that a dangerous product can be withdrawn from nine markets without wasting any time.

AGRICULTURE: the duel between consumers and the producers

The farm programme recently proposed by the European Commission (see Eurofocus of 26/11) has been criticised by the European Bureau of Consumer Unions (BEUC) as creating inconveniences for the consumers while at the same time penalising small farmers.

The reaction of the Confederation of Agricultural Producers Organisations was also critical. It feels this proposed system would seriously undermine the income of farmers in all regions of the Community at a time when their production costs are witnessing a rapid increase. For the farmers' organisation, the annual saving of £ 663 million foreseen in the plan presented by Agriculture Commissioner Gundelach is a blow at the common agricultural policy, which is the only real joint policy in the Community.

The farm group suggests concrete measures to limit products from non-member countries, because a number of such imports are directly responsible for the difficult market conditions and the increase in prices.

Will the "lamb war" take place?

The lamb, a peaceful animal above all, is at stake in a "squirmish" between the United Kingdom and France, the two largest producers in the European Community, with 240,000 tonnes and 150,000 tonnes annually respectively. These lambs are raised in widely different surroundings depending on their native grazing lands: a large number of animals per farmer in the United Kingdom and a herd of small producers practicing a more intensive type of breeding in France. In the first case, the meat is considered as an economical dish while it is regarded as a luxury in the second. The difference in methods partly explains why the British lamb costs a third of the French lamb. Another factor for the disparity in prices is the fact that the United Kingdom annually imports nearly 213,000 tonnes of frozen lamb meat from New Zealand at very low prices.

The competitiveness of the British lambs is a threat to the about 150,000 French producers. To protect these, France shut its frontiers to lamb from across the Channel. From their side, the British demanded that the frontiers be re-opened in keeping with Community rules guaranteeing freedom of trade inside the Common Market. The European Court has judged in favour of the British case. But Paris has replied by insisting on the establishment of a Community system for lamb meat in order to regulate production and trade. In the meantime, France has been asked to re-open its frontiers before December 12.

RAILWAYS: money problems

Railway expenses in all European Community countries are increasing faster than the cost of living. In addition, personnel costs are always high and any attempts to reduce the number of employees provokes trade union reaction. What's more, railway revenues are diminishing steadily, resulting in a parallel increase in government assistance. In the future, the European Commission urgently recommends:

- use of modern railway management techniques;
- modernisation of the principal European lines;
- installation of true cooperation between the different national enterprises;
- simplification of border administrative formalities;
- development of combined transport systems, such as road and rail.

RESEARCH: the Nine intensify the struggle against cancer

The European Community is playing a more and more active role in the fight against cancer. The research programme in radio-protection has cost £ 25.8 million and will probably be supplemented by a new phase amounting to £ 45 million which has yet to be approved by the Council of Ministers. In addition, the European Commission has just granted some £ 130,000 in assistance to the European Organisation for Research in the Treatment of Cancer to create a biological and clinical data bank.

ENERGY:

a real Community policy

During its last plenary session, the Economic and Social Committee of the European Community expressed its fears about the lack of coordination in energy policies in the different member countries. The Community should limit its imports of energy to 50 percent of its total needs and better inform the public of the consequences of the energy crisis on its standard of living in order to gain acceptance for necessary restrictive measures. The Committee also expressed its support for an increased effort in the stocking of radioactive waste, for the development of new energy sources and for the establishment of a real dialogue with the petroleum producing countries.

The Economic and Social Committee of the Community is a consultative body of 144 members representing employers, trade unions and a number of interest groups, such as farmers and consumers.

preventing thefts of enriched uranium

Since most of the European countries have decided to increasingly resort to nuclear energy, additional measures of protection will be required. One will involve the protection of workers and of the general population against radioactivity and another type will mean safeguarding nuclear materials against thefts and diversion. The second type of danger has been the subject of negotiations for two years and the resulting international solution will be signed by Guido Brunner, the member of the European Commission charged with energy matters, next year on behalf of the entire Community.

TOURISM: an increase in duty-free allowances

Europe has abolished the customs duties between countries, but it still has not eliminated customs altogether. Crossing the border loaded with goods purchased in another country is still not allowed. This will probably remain this way until the nine in the European Community will have harmonised their tax structures, notably concerning excise taxes and value-added tax levels. Nevertheless, the European Commission has just proposed an increase in the quantity of duty-free merchandise. This would not cover alcohol, wines and tobacco for which the quantities exempted would remain unchanged. For other articles bought in a Community country, the total value permitted would be increased from £120 to £139. Travellers under 15 years of age could bring in £39 worth of goods. In addition, the exemptions allowed to Denmark and Ireland would be increased in the same proportion and they would be allowed to exempt from customs duties merchandise in excess of £106 and £66 in unit value. Inflation and currency fluctuations have made the adjustments necessary and the Commission wants to continue to increase these allowances in order to enlarge the interpenetration of the different Community economies so that citizens could become better aware of the reality of the Common Market. If they are approved, these new rules would be applied beginning on January 1, 1980.

HEALTH: increasing food hygiene

Healthy, natural and ecological foods are in style. But consumers still continue to eat foods that are too rich and too fat and to ignore the contents of what they are eating. They should be informed of the systematic use of modern technology in the food industry, educated about food hygiene and informed of the nutritional properties of food products. This is precisely one of the objectives of the European Commission in a conference on nutrition and the technology of food products and information. This symposium will be held in London March 19 to 21, 1980.

HOW ABOUT A DRINK? - ONLY A SMALL ONE!

Whether you like it or not drink plays an important part in the daily lives of most people. After all, who doesn't like to have a "couple" with good friends, or to celebrate one of life's milestones? Who's not had a glass of his or her favourite "tipple" to relax after a hard day at the office or as a quick pick-up when life's getting you down? Unfortunately drinking, like so many pleasures, is not a totally harmless pastime.

Regular drinking (whether heavy or sometimes not so heavy) can have serious side-effects on both the body and the brain; or so it appears from studies on the subject. The European Commission has asked a group of experts to take a look at the problem. Their conclusions make unhappy reading.

The list of illnesses and functional disorders resulting from excess drinking includes: cirrhosis of the liver, cancer, blood-pressure, heart attacks, brain disorders, loss of memory and the inability to concentrate. Since the end of the last war the consumption of alcohol has rocketed in Europe. From 1952 to 1972 the amount of alcohol of one type or another drunk in these EEC countries has gone up by the following %: -

Netherlands	276 %
West Germany	182 %
Denmark	133 %
Luxemburg	69 %
Ireland	66 %
Belgium	45 %
U.K.	40 %
Italy	37 %

The fact that France is not in this list does not mean that the French do not drink. Far from it! It's just that they remain Europe's No. 1 drinking nation, but their consumption is not shooting up because they already consume a large amount of alcohol.

To be precise, last year they consumed not less than 16 litres of alcohol per person (at 100 degrees). It's not for nothing that France has earned a reputation for alcohol, from the hearty "big reds" to fine brandies that finish off a pleasant meal.

Producers of chianti and grappa, Italians also hold their own with a consumption rate of nearly 13 litres of alcohol per person. But, surprisingly they were overtaken in the contest for the silver medal by Luxemburgers, who imbibe more than 14 litres per inhabitant. German beer-drinkers consume enough to remain near the top of the league, but how many beers at 6 degrees does it take to obtain 12.4 litres of alcohol at 100 degrees per year? Despite their reputation for being "regulars" in their "cafés" Belgians and Dutch tipplers are relatively sober, with 10 and 9 litres of alcohol per person respectively. The Danes are even more moderate in their taste for aquavit: 8.5 litres per resident of the kingdom. Finally, who would have believed it, the most temperate of all Europeans are the Irish (8 litres) and the British (7 litres). What's happened to the reputation of the pubs of bygone days?

From the point of view of sources of supply the "Eurodrinker" is truly well-served. Europe produces 78 % of the world's wine and 50 % of its beer. Another side to the problem is that Europe's drink is getting stronger. Even "vin de pays" that used to be somewhere between 12° to 16° proof is now being replaced with stronger stuff of 19° to 23° proof. Also as the Common Market has progressively been breaking down customs barriers, exports of drink have been encouraged. Notherners are now drinking much more wine whilst countries from the south of Europe are drinking more beer. But this doesn't mean they have stopped their more traditional beverage! Drinking is a snob thing in Europe today - a competition to collect the rarest, purest or just most pricey drinks. What can be done to deal with the problem? At the moment prevention seems easier than cure. To stop heavy drinkers overdoing it. Europe is way behind in this field - in the USA both public and private research institutes are tackling the problem already. Now the EEC experts recommend:- a list of existing research institutes, - promotion of new multi-disciplinary centres for study, - the setting up of new research programmes, - the creation of a "European Alcohol Research Society".

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Eurofocus has been specially created to help those journalists, who, far away from Brussels, have to explain to their readers, the effects of integration on their daily life.

With only four issues published, Eurofocus is still in the experimental stage. There is room for improvement. We think we can give you a better service if we can cater more to your special needs. But to do so we have to know what these needs are.

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