



a newssheet for journalists

Weekly n° 9/89

13 - 20 March 1989

S U M M A R Y

P. 2 ENVIRONMENT: The hole in the sky
To protect the ozone layer the Twelve agree to eliminate CFCs completely.

P. 3 HIGHER EDUCATION: The entire Community between two covers
The latest edition of the student handbook is out.

P. 4 RESEARCH: Fewer major accidents in future, thanks to FORMENTOR
A European Community project is using computers to prevent serious accidents.

ENERGY: Bridging the gap between R&D and commercial exploitation

The EC Commission proposes a new programme of technological research.

P. 5 EDUCATION: Teaching languages and technologies for the 21st century
24 leading companies tell Europeans to ... stay young.

P. 6 INTERNAL MARKET: Trade barriers tumble
To start with, a pint of Belgian beer; Italians, too, can now drink cider; Will Belgian homes sprout dish aerials?; Greece offers tourists a fairer deal; Bangers get a new lease on life in Spain.

P. 9 SPACE: Monitoring pollution via satellite
The European Commission teams up with the European Space Agency.

BRIEFLY: 1,3mn. tonnes of foodgrains for the Third World in 1989

Post office: Brussels X

The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the official views of the institutions of the Community.
Reproduction authorized.

200 rue de la Loi • 1049 Brussels • Belgium • Tel.: 235.11.11 • Telex: 21877 COMEU B

EUROFORUMS

ENVIRONMENT: The hole in the sky

To protect the ozone layer, the Twelve agree to eliminate CFCs completely.

The European Community's environment ministers have agreed to the complete elimination of chlorofluorocarbon (CFC) gases by the year 2000, and to an 85% reduction in their use "as soon as possible". The EC in fact has gone well beyond the 1988 Montreal Protocol, which seeks to protect the earth's ozone layer by providing for a 50% reduction in CFCs by the end of the century. Some 46 countries have signed the Protocol, while 32 of them, including the Twelve, have ratified it so far.

But the measure was inadequate from the beginning. The fact is that the use of CFCs must be cut by 90% at once if damage to the ozone layer, which shields the earth from the sun's ultraviolet rays, is not to become irreversible. "Holes" have already been detected above the poles, which has led scientists to describe the situation as alarming.

All the more alarming, in fact, because CFCs are part of our daily lives since the last 40 years. We rely on them whenever we use aerosols to shave or set our hair; open the refrigerator and remove a plastic container and turn on an air-conditioning unit. Happily, doing away with CFCs need not mean an end to the comforts we have become accustomed to.

Substitutes exist already and can be produced in quantity within a reasonable period of time. That all the industrialized countries are now aware of the gravity of the problem is clear from the decision by the Community's environment ministers and the conference convened by the British government, in early March, on the ozone layer.

Belgium, for example, has already adopted a bold policy. It provides for the phased reduction of CFCs in aerosols, refrigerators and plastics - by 45% in 1992, 65% in 1995 and 85% in 1998. The three uses listed by Belgium together account for 95% of the CFCs used in the country. As a result of the Belgian decision, its consumption of CFCs in aerosols, for example, should fall from 3,967 tonnes last year to under 800 tonnes in 1990.

The battle to protect the ozone layer has been joined in the industrialized countries. The European Community has given a push in the right direction, as the European Environment Commissioner, Mr Ripa di Meana, has pointed out. But the efforts of the industrialized countries could be reduced to naught by the millions of refrigerators, air conditioners aerosols and plastic containers which are invading China, India and Africa. These countries obviously do not wish to give up their plans for a better life. Safeguarding the ozone layer is not a matter of top priority for them, especially as their consumption of CFCs is far below that of the industrialized world. China, for example, accounts for only 2% of world consumption, as compared to 80% for the industrialized countries. The developing countries can agree to a ban on CFCs, but want the West to pay the bill.

HIGHER EDUCATION: The entire Community between two covers

The latest edition of the student handbook is out.

All you want to know about higher education in the 12-nation European Community is contained between the covers of a handbook for students, the fifth edition of which has just been published in all nine Community languages. It is available from bookshops and the European Commission's information offices*.

Aimed at all who are interested in higher education - students, professors and managerial staff - the handbook covers the 12 national systems as well as the various educational establishments and the degrees and diplomas they offer. It also contains information on their criteria for admission; fees; entry and residence formalities; scholarships and social security benefits.

Europe is well covered. There is a section on each of the two European institutes of higher learning, the College of Europe in Bruges and the Community's own European University Institute in Florence.

The guide also contains detailed information on the Community's inter-university exchange programme, ERASMUS, now in its second, highly successful year.

* The English edition is entitled "Higher Education in the European Community - Student Handbook". It is published by Kogan, Page and costs £11.95 + VAT.

RESEARCH: Fewer major accidents in future, thanks to FORMENTOR

A European Community project is using computers to prevent serious accidents.

Those operating the nuclear power station at Chernobyl and the oil platform Piper Alpha would be alive today if they had been able to call on FORMENTOR. For the moment, it is only at the experimental stage; but should the European project, launched on 1 March 1989, succeed, major accidents could be anticipated, thanks to computers.

The system which two French companies, Aérospatiale and Cap Gemini Sogeti are working on, alongside Norway's Veritas and the European Community's Joint Research Centre, would immediately provide those operating installations where there is a risk of accident detailed information on any unusual events likely to result in a serious, or even not so serious, accident. What is more, FORMENTOR would give operators advice on how to prevent accidents.

The project was launched in 1986 in the framework of the EUREKA programme of research set up by the governments of Western Europe. Within two years, the three companies taking part in it had demonstrated its effectiveness on an experimental basis. FORMENTOR must now be tested in the field - in chemical and petrochemical factories and rocket and satellite launches. Later it will be used to give warnings of natural disasters and accidents at multi-plant sites as well as to make it easier to coordinate civil defense services.

The project will cost a total of ECU 25mn.* over a 4-year period (1988-92). This is far less steep than the cliffs at Formentor, in the island of Majorca.

ENERGY: Bridging the gap between R&D and commercial exploitation

The EC Commission proposes a new programme of technological research.

To bridge the gap between the successful demonstration of new energy technologies and their commercial exploitation, the European Commission wants the Twelve to launch a new R&D programme, named THERMIE (European Technologies for Energy Management). It would mark the continuation of a programme which ends this December and would cover energy efficiency; the clean use of coal; renewable sources, such as wind, geothermal and biomass, and oil and gas exploration and development.

* 1 ECU = UK£0.65 or IR£0.78.

EDUCATION: Teaching languages and technologies for the 21st century

24 leading companies tell Europeans to ... stay young.

In the 21st century European engineers and researchers will be 10 to 20 years older on average than their counterparts - and competitors - in Asia. If the ageing population of Europe is to remain competitive, it will have to go in for lifelong learning and remain young ... in spirit according to a study carried out by 24 leading West European companies on behalf of the European Round Table (ERT), a group of some 40 captains of industry.

In a study entitled "Education and European Competence" the ERT proposes a major programme for the development of education, EURED*. Similar to the European Community's programmes in the fields of research and technological development, EURED would widen study opportunities in a frontier-free Europe and spread more widely the results of the Community's R&D programmes. Hence the ERT's decision to present their study to Commission President Jacques Delors in person on the day of publication, February 22.

British and Irish companies which participated in the study include B.A.T. Industries, Pilkington, Plessey and Waterford Glass. The study concludes that today's educational systems are unsuited to the needs of companies active in the 21st century. It points to the widening gulf between the qualifications industry is looking for and those which Europeans looking for a job have - or don't have - at a time when unemployment is running at over 10%. The situation is made worse, according to the ERT, by the fact that the Community "encourages its young to take up studies which offer no direct outlet".

The ERT favours giving a big helping hand to scientific and technical studies, to improving collaboration between educational institutions and industry and greatly increasing the number of apprenticeships. The industrialists also want schoolchildren to learn at least three European languages.

Other ERT proposals include the creation of (1) a European educational TV network to broadcast satellite educational and open learning programmes and (2) a European business degree in business management, along the lines of the American MBA.

* European Unified Research on Educational Development.

INTERNAL MARKET: Trade barriers tumble

For more than 30 years, all kinds of barriers have held up the European Community's progress towards a frontier-free space and a genuine single market. The European Commission has a range of tools at its disposal for their removal, and they have proved increasingly effective, especially since the Community set itself the target of 31 December 1992. The task will certainly be difficult; a veritable jungle has to be removed. Even so, the Commission examined well over one thousand cases last year, including some 552 fresh complaints lodged during the course of the year. And barriers are being swept aside, as the following examples show.

TO START WITH, A PINT OF BELGIAN BEER

Under Spanish law beers which contain a sediment visible to the naked eye are regarded as unfit to drink, regardless of how they have been brewed. Now it so happens that a sediment is present in some of Belgium's best-known beers; traditionally, this is proof that the beers in question have continued to ferment after bottling or have not been filtered, so that they contain the yeasts which account for their special flavour and aroma. Numerous Belgian breweries complained to the European Commission of the difficulties they were experiencing on the Spanish market. Following moves by the Commission, the Spanish authorities accepted the principle that beers which are legally brewed and marketed in another Member State should be allowed entry into the Spanish market, and modified their legislation accordingly. One man's drink can hardly be another man's poison

ITALIANS, TOO, CAN NOW DRINK CIDER

Clearly, a single market for drinks is not going to come about by itself. In Italy, for example, there was a ban on the sale of all alcoholic beverages with an alcohol content below the legal minimum for wine, the one exception being beer. Hence no sangria, while cider was out of the question, to the manifest displeasure of producers in Spain, France, Belgium, etc. The European Commission was able, however, to convince the Italian authorities that adequate labelling offered Italian consumers sufficient protection. As a result, all alcoholic drinks which are legally manufactured and sold in the other Member States can be sold in Italy also, even if their alcohol content is much too low to satisfy Bacchus.

WILL BELGIAN HOMES SPROUT DISH AERIALS?

Belgians wanting to watch television programmes coming their way by satellite must first get the authorities' permission to put up the necessary aerial. But so far only cable television companies, hotels, hospitals and old people's homes are granted the necessary authorization. Private individuals in Belgium, in other words, cannot enjoy the benefits of direct broadcasting by satellite, as they can in other Member States. True, cable television is more widespread in Belgium than elsewhere in Europe, so that the Belgian viewer has the widest choice of all, as he can watch not only the national channels but also programmes from Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. Even so, at a time when direct broadcasting by satellite is expanding at a very fast rate, it is essential that all Community citizens have access to all the information made available in this way. The European Commission's intervention seems likely to bear fruit, however: the Belgian authorities appear ready to give private individuals also the opportunity to tune in to programmes beamed from space.

GREECE OFFERS TOURISTS A FAIRER DEAL

Travelling to the cradle of Western civilization was not always easy; what is more, it could prove relatively expensive for tourists wanting to take personal items with them. Nationals of other European countries were required to acquire, for customs clearance purposes, twice as many drachmas as the value of the items in question, unless they held a residence permit. The European Commission having turned a deaf ear to the arguments put forward by Athens, the regulation has since been modified.

BANGERS GET A NEW LEASE ON LIFE IN SPAIN

There is no ban on the import of used cars in Spain - but you mustn't be in a hurry, for registration takes anywhere from three to twelve months. Your car must conform in every respect to the models approved by the Spanish authorities, but verification is carried out in only two cities - Santander in Cantabria and Las Palmas, in the Canary Islands. As a result, the Spaniard wanting to buy a used car is hardly likely to look at the bargains on offer outside his borders. But the European Commission takes the view that it should be possible for Community citizens to make their purchases where they like. It was getting ready, therefore, to take Spain to the EC Court of Justice in Luxembourg, when the authorities decided to modify the registration procedure along the lines sought by the Commission. With the problem on the point being resolved, the Commission has decided to wait - and to make sure that new rules have been introduced.

SPACE: Monitoring pollution via satellite

The European Commission teams up with the European Space Agency.

The best place from which to monitor the earth is outer space ..., provided you have the right technology - the European Space Agency's ERS-1 satellite, for example. Which is why the European Commission and the ESA decided to join forces last month to observe our planet and monitor the damage to its environment.

Nine* EC countries belong to the ESA, together with four of their West European neighbours (Austria, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland). Together they have set up an earth observation programme to measure more effectively the damage to the environment through human activity. The ERS-1 satellite, initially conceived to monitor the oceans and ice zones, is also capable of taking high-resolution images of land masses, even through cloud cover and independently of the sun's light.

The ERS-1 satellite can be used for a variety of purposes, from studying climatic changes to mapping tropical forests and evaluating water reserves in mountain ranges, such as the Alps. The satellite will also be able to give the alarm should there be a danger of flooding, on the scale of the floods which hit Bangladesh last year, for example.

One of the satellite's many trump cards of special interest to the European Commission is its ability to detect oil pollution in enclosed seas and coastal waters. Monitoring pollution in the Mediterranean is one of the joint projects envisaged by the European Commission and the ESA.

The other areas of cooperation will concern the space industries in the context of the single market of 1992; the defense of European trade interests on the international stage; the role of satellites in telecommunications and the coordination between the research programmes of the EC and the ESA.

* Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, the U.K. and Ireland

BRIEFLY ...**1.3mn tonnes of foodgrains for the Third World in 1989**

The European Community will give developing countries roughly the same amount of food aid this year as last. The guidelines adopted by the European Commission on March 1 envisage the supply of more than 1.3mn. tonnes of foodgrains, 94,000 tonnes of milk powder, larger quantities of sugar and vegetable oil than in 1988 and, for the first time, ground-nuts. Emergency aid is not included; it is given as and when the need arises.