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INSTITUTIONS: 17 Commissioners for a 12-nation Community

The 14 are now 17 on the thirteenth floor of the Berlaymont, the star-shaped building which houses the European Commission. Social affairs, employment and education are now in the hands of Manuel Marin, one of the two Spanish Commissioners. His colleague, Abel Matutes, a former Spanish businessman, has been given a new portfolio covering credit and investments but also responsibility for small and medium-sized enterprises.

The Portuguese Commissioner, Antonio Cardoso e Cunha, a former Fisheries Minister, has taken over the fisheries portfolio, following the redistribution of tasks among the 17-member European Commission on January 3.

Manuel Marin, who negotiated Spain's entry into the European Community, also becomes the sixth of the Commission's vice-presidents. Commission President Jacques Delors took the opportunity to carry out a minor reshuffle of the Commissioners' responsibilities. He has kept the monetary affairs portfolio but has turned over the coordination of the EC's structural funds to Grigoris Varfis, who also assumes responsibility for consumer protection.

Alois Pfeiffer has added regional policy to his economic affairs portfolio. Several of the 11 other Commissioners have had to hand over part of their responsibilities to their new colleagues but otherwise keep their portfolio. The new Commission will remain in office until end 1988.

REGIONAL FUND: Dividing the cake among the Twelve

With the entry of Spain and Portugal into the European Community the regional aid funds must now be shared among 12 countries. In terms of the limits proposed by the European Commission and approved by the EC's Council of Ministers just before Christmas, Spain this year will receive between 17.95 and 23.93% of the aid extended by the European Regional Development Fund, while Portugal's share will be between 10.65 and 14.20%.

Italy will continue to receive the lion's share of ERDF funds: between 21.59 and 28.79%. Other major beneficiaries are the U.K. (between 14.48 and 19.31%) and Greece (between 8.35 and 10.64%). France's share is between 7.47 and 9.96%, that of Ireland between 3.81 and 4.61% and of Germany between 2.55 and 3.40%. The Benelux countries and Denmark will receive less than 1% of ERDF funds, which will amount this year to some 2,000 million ECU*, as against 1,160 million ECU in 1985.

* 1 ECU = UK£ 0.62 or IR£ 0.72.

FOOD: Goodbye to hormones - in two years' time

After 1 January 1988 European consumers will be able to savour the real taste of meat again because it will be free of the hormones which destroy a good part of its flavour and some of which are considered dangerous to health. Before leaving for their own Christmas dinners the European Community's agricultural ministers agreed to a total ban on the use of hormones, both natural and artificial, for fattening livestock.

Both the production and sale of meat treated with hormones will be banned from 1 January 1988. Meat imported into the 12-nation EC will have to meet the same conditions. In addition, Community producers will not be allowed to export meat treated with hormones to third countries.

With one exception, however: U.K. producers will be authorized to produce and sell meat from livestock treated with hormones during 1988; but from 1 January 1988 they will have to certify that meat shipped to their EC partners has not been treated with hormones. The use of hormones for treating sick animals will be authorized, provided it is prescribed by a veterinary surgeon.

A total ban on hormones was first proposed by the European Commission in 1980. It has long been sought by the European Parliament and consumers organizations.

WOMEN: Greater equality in 1990?

Women have fewer opportunities than men, especially at work, in the European Community. Despite a 4-year European Equal Opportunity Action Programme the situation still leaves a good deal to be desired. The European governments therefore will have to try harder - which is just what the European Commission is asking them to do under its proposed second Action Programme.

The first aim of the new programme (1986-90) is to ensure the full application of existing European regulations. The programme also envisages more training for women and seeks to prevent discrimination based on sex in employment and social benefits, even while helping the most disadvantaged women. The Commission is also seeking more facilities, such as nurseries, and an extension of the practice of granting "maternity" leave for both parents. The programme aims also at changing attitudes - but that is another story.

THE ECONOMY: Inflation in the European Community continues to fall

There was good news in the fight against inflation in 1985. Prices rose by an estimated 5.0% during the year for the 10-nation European Community, as compared to 5.5% a year ago. The increase for the 12-nation Community was somewhat higher at 5.6%, according to the EC's statistical office.

As always, some member states were more successful in curbing inflation. Germany and the Netherlands both did equally well: the Germans held down the rise in their consumer price index to an estimated 1.8%, the Dutch to 1.9%. Denmark, with a rise of 3.4%, did almost as well in the fight against inflation. Greece was less fortunate, however: prices rose by nearly 24% during the year, giving it the highest inflation rate in the 12-nation EC.

Portugal recorded a price rise of some 13% during 1985 and Spain (somewhat better than Italy with 8.7%) one of 8%. Inflation rates in the other EC countries ranged themselves neatly around the 5% recorded by the Community as a whole, with Belgium and Luxembourg at 4%, France 4.7%, Ireland 4.9% and the U.K. at just over the 5% mark with 5.6%.

Even so, the EC will have to try harder if it is to match its two main trading partners. The U.S. held inflation down to an estimated 3% last year, Japan to a mere 2%.

Number of jobless up 3% over 1984 in the European Community

The number of registered unemployed in the European Community rose by at least 3% last year to about 12.8 million, according to the EC's statistical office. This corresponds to an unemployment rate of 11.2%.

These figures do not include either Greece or the Community's newest member states, Spain and Portugal. This is because recording unemployment changed in Greece, resulting in an apparent surge in unemployment of some 30% between October and November. But a labour force survey shows the underlying situation to be more or less unchanged.

The unemployment rates for Spain and Portugal will be included in the statistics for 1986. The rate for the 12-nation Community will be somewhat higher, given that unemployment in Spain, which has a total population of 38 million, has been running at around 20% of the workforce. The rate for Portugal (8%) is close to the end-November rates for Germany (8.2%) and Denmark (7.9%).

Unemployment fell last year, in some cases significantly, in Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg (by some 4 to 10%). But it rose in Italy, Ireland, France, the U.K. and Germany (by some 2 to 9%).

EDUCATION: ERASMUS, a Programme for a Students' Europe

A ten-fold increase in the number of European Community students who attend university in a member state other than their own is the goal for 1992 which the European Commission has set before the Twelve. To reach it, the Commission has drawn up an ambitious programme, baptized ERASMUS (European Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students).

Desiderius Erasmus (1469-1536) was a famous Dutch philosopher, and one of the leading intellectuals in Renaissance times, who spoke and wrote in Greek and Latin.

Today's students and professors are probably less "European" than their 16th century predecessors. Less than 1% of the roughly six million students in the Community benefit from the EC's current exchange programmes. In fact, those who do go abroad for a part of their studies head more often than not for the United States.

This is hardly encouraging for a European Community that wants to maximize cooperation between universities, business firms and the administration in the 12 member states in order to meet international competition and successfully resolve the various problems encountered at the European level, from satellite television to the protection of the environment.

The Commission feels it is important that the future leaders of Europe, whatever their field, should acquire a taste for Europe during their studies, with all that this implies by way of exposure to other languages, new contacts and fresh experiences. In any case, it is well worth the 175 million ECU* required for the first stage of ERASMUS, which would run from 1987 to 1989.

ERASMUS would make possible 44,000 scholarships as well as European seminars on specialist subjects and the creation of a genuine network of 600 universities in 1987 and 1,700 in 1989. ERASMUS would also make easier the academic recognition of degrees acquired in another member state and allow more contacts between teachers in the 12-nation Community.

The European Commission's programme also envisages annual grants to staff and student associations prepared to add a European dimension to their activities, and the award each year of an ERASMUS prize to a university and to 12 gifted students, one from each member state.

* 1 ECU = UK£ 0.62 or IR£ 0.72.

AGRICULTURE: Farm incomes decline in 1985

In 1985 the incomes of European farmers* declined. The indicator used to measure incomes registered a fall of some 8% in relation to 1984. The bad weather was mainly responsible, according to the European Community's statistical office.

Incomes fell by 12% in the case of the non-hired agricultural labour force (mainly the holder and family members). This follows an increase of about 3% in 1984 for all farm incomes and of 5% for the non-hired labour force. But in 1984 the weather was much more favourable.

Last year's fall in income affected especially farmers who had recorded sharp gains the previous year : the British, Germans and Irish, who saw incomes fall by 17.5%, 15% and 12.2% respectively. In France there was a 9% drop but it was much less in the Netherlands (4.4%) and Luxembourg (2.9%). Farm incomes declined only slightly in Belgium (0.6%) and Greece (0.8%) and they even rose in Italy by 3.2% and in Denmark by 1.5%.

If annual variations are left to one side, European farm incomes have been relatively stable, according to the statistical office. Between 1983 and 1985 they were at roughly the same level as in the period 1973-75. They showed a rise of 3% in relation to the period 1980-82.

* The figures for the European Community as a whole do not include Greece, Spain and Portugal.

FOOD: And why not amaranth?

At a time when European consumers are turning more and more to exotic foodstuffs and Community farmers are on the look-out for novelties, a suggestion they turn to amaranth, a South American plant related to the sugar beet, should go down well. A French Euro-MP, Emmanuel Maffre-Baugé, in fact wants the European Commission to encourage research into it.

The basic foodstuff of the American Indians, amaranth appears to be particularly nourishing as it contains more protein than the soya bean. Moreover, it grows well in arid zones.

The Commission has pointed out that research is at an early stage in the Community. In any case, before promoting its large-scale cultivation in the Mediterranean region, the Commission wants to be sure there is a market for amaranth.

WOMEN: Poll reveals widespread interest in Community issues

Women are not supposed to take an interest in politics. But they took part in the 1984 elections to the European Parliament to almost the same extent as men and are not far behind them in wanting to see it play a more important role, according to a study of women's attitudes to the European Parliament and their voting behaviour during the 1984 elections.*

Their response to this key European institution is very similar to that of men; women tend in fact to be just that little bit more positive in their attitude to the European Parliament. They gave a lack of information about Parliament and general ignorance of what was at stake during the 1984 elections as the major reason why many of them did not vote. An earlier study had shown that women are less well-informed than men as to the existence and activities of the European Parliament. This is not due to indifference but to the fact that they pay less attention to political news on radio, television and in the newspapers. The fact that they were almost as numerous as men at the polling booths only indicates the importance they attach to the exercise of their voting rights.

To the question why they did not vote, women tended to give a somewhat different answer than men. They put forward personal reasons and an indifference to politics rather than a lack of interest in Europe. And while the great majority of the voters who stayed at home on polling day had no regrets, women tended on the whole to regret not having voted. Of the 10% or so of the voters who felt "guilty" at having stayed away, some two-thirds were women.

More surprising, perhaps, was the finding that the great majority of voters - 69% of the women and 72% of the men - attached no importance to the efforts of some of the political parties to put up more women candidates. An earlier study had shown, however, that the majority of voters were indifferent to whether they were represented in the European Parliament by a man or a woman. The great majority regarded the candidates' political views as more important.

Both attitudes to the European Parliament and voting behaviour depend a great deal on nationality. While men invariably are better informed than women, the poll revealed national differences. Thus women in Luxembourg, Germany and Belgium tended to be better informed than women in Ireland, the U.K. and Greece. But Irish and Italian women lead all the others in the importance they attach to the role of the European Parliament.

* Women of Europe (No 21) analyses the results of the 1984 poll.

EDUCATION: European Community archives now open to public

Historians are certain to view the post-war moves towards the integration of Europe as an important strand in its history. They will be able to follow these moves closely, thanks to the decision of the European Communities to open their archives to the public, subject to the customary delay in the case of official records (30 years in the Community's case).

All Community institutions, including the European Commission, Council of Ministers, Parliament and Court of Justice, are transferring their official papers to the European University in Florence, Italy, where they will be available for consultation.

HEALTH: European Commission calls for "Europe Against Cancer"

The fight against cancer has become as important for rich countries as the fight against hunger in many poorer countries. A people's Europe can be expected, therefore, to accord as high a priority to the health of its citizens as to the health of its industries.

The European Community's summit meeting in Milan last June stressed the importance of launching a European programme against cancer. Some six months later the heads of state or government returned to the subject when they met in Luxembourg.

The political will to fight cancer on a Community-wide basis clearly exists. The European Commission wants to draw on it to launch an action programme to be known as "Europe Against Cancer". To this end it last month called on the member states to (1) take steps to ensure the effective coordination of all initiatives in the fields of cancer prevention and research and (2) look at the Commission's proposals on these subjects as a matter of priority.

The Commission also announced its intention to convene an ad hoc expert committee which would make recommendations for a European programme. It feels that consultation and coordination are needed at the Community level both to avoid duplication of effort and to optimize the results.

The Commission has already initiated a number of actions in the fight against cancer. There are ongoing research programmes in medicine, radiation protection and environmental protection; directives for the protection of workers from the risks of exposure to chemical and other agents and asbestos as well as directives or recommendations covering drugs, food additives, pesticides and dangerous substances in general.

ENVIRONMENT: Use of recycled glass is rising

The recycling of waste is no longer an issue which interests only environmentalists; it has developed into a veritable industry in recent years. A rising percentage of the glass consumed in the European Community consists in fact of recycled glass, which suggests that the "bottle banks" - the bins into which housewives are invited to throw empty bottles - are working.

Bottle banks in fact prompted a Euro-MP from Luxembourg, Ernest Mühlen, to ask the European Commission whether more were not needed, as demand for glass for recycling seemed to be outstripping supply. In its reply the European Commission pointed out that it has already taken steps to encourage the recycling of glass, while a Council Directive of last June calls on member states to draw up programmes for separating bottles from other household waste.

The proportion of recycled glass is highest in the Netherlands: in 1984 it accounted for 53% of total consumption. Belgium came second, with 36%, followed by Germany (31%). But if the proportion was between 20 and 25% in Denmark, Italy and France, it fell to under 10% in the U.K. and Ireland.

RACISM: European Commission calls for a Joint Declaration

Racism is a blot on the European Community and is totally incompatible with the ideals and principles which inspire the Community. The European Commission in fact wants the EC's key institutions - the European Parliament, Council of Ministers and the Commission itself - to take a moral and political stand against racism and xenophobia by solemnly adopting a Joint Declaration.

The text which it recently sent to the Council and Parliament does not confine itself to a vigorous condemnation of "all forms of discrimination, defamation, racial theory or insult": it calls on all member states to "protect the identity and dignity of every member of society, regardless of race, religion, nationality or ethnic origin".

The Commission's initiative flows from the Resolution for a Community policy on immigration which the Council of Ministers adopted last July. It also fulfils an undertaking given by the European Commissioner with special responsibility for social affairs.

Commenting on the Commission's draft, the Commissioner pointed to the "disturbing growth" of racist attitudes and action, often directed against immigrant workers and their families. He saw in the proposed Declaration "a significant moral and political stand" against racism as well as an expression of solidarity with its victims.