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POLLS: Yes to the Chunnel and to Europe with no internal frontiers

A majority in the 12-nation European Community back the two major projects to be completed by 1992-93: a Europe with no internal frontiers and the Channel tunnel. This is one of the findings of the Eurobarometer, the public opinion survey carried out last spring for the European Commission.

More than three-quarters of the Community's population agree that from 1993 people, goods, services and capital should be able to move as freely within the Community as they do at present within national frontiers. If those who expressed no opinion on the subject are excluded, the advocates of a single market amount to 83% of the population.

The replies vary from country to country. But the project of a Europe with no internal frontiers has met with the approval of at least 60% of those polled - even in Denmark, whose Parliament initially voted against it. Although 60% of the Danes favour a European "area", this figure is the lowest for the 12-nation Community. It is 63% for the U.K., 68% for Greece, 72% for Ireland, 79% for France, around 80% for Belgium, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Spain - and a massive 84% for Portugal.

As for the Channel tunnel, 58% of those polled in the 12-nation Community thought it "a good thing", as compared to only 13% who thought the project "bad". In every Community member state but one the "pros" outnumbered the "antis"; only in the U.K. were the "pros" outnumbered: some 46% of the British are suspicious of the Chunnel, as compared to the 31% who favour it. In France, on the other hand, 64% are in favour of the tunnel, a mere 6% against it.

According to the Eurobarometer, opposition in the U.K. comes from the elderly and those at either end of the political spectrum, with more women than men against the tunnel. Britons opposed to the U.K.'s membership of the European Community are generally against the Chunnel also.

REGIONAL FUND: Commission approves another ECU 334m.* in grants

Nine European Community countries are to share a total of ECU 334m., representing the fifth allocation this year from the EC's European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The U.K. and Ireland are among them**.

Some 660 investment projects in industry, craft industries and the services sector will share just over ECU 100m. Their number is much higher than usual as the emphasis this time is on small-scale projects, costing not more than ECU 5m. each. But infrastructure projects, generally the more expensive of the two, will get the lion's share as before - ECU 225m. under the fifth allocation.

The investments to be funded by the ERDF are expected to create more than 8,600 new jobs, of which as many as 2,056 will be in the U.K. and 5,254 in Italy. But the number of jobs to be saved should exceed 12,000, and will include 553 in the U.K. and 11,481 in Italy.

Britain is to receive UK£ 347,500 for improvements to the Teeside airport. It brings to ECU 77m. the funds it has received so far this year from the ERDF (for a total of 285 projects). The grant to Ireland of IR£ 630,000 will go towards the construction of a business centre in County Cork. Ireland will have received a total of ECU 35m. this year for 28 projects.

Many of the ERDF grants under the fifth allocation are for industrial projects. Among them is one for the expansion of a factory making sports footwear (Italy) and another making hydraulic equipment (Denmark). A more unusual project is a regional archaeological museum in Belgium, which it is hoped will attract more tourists to the region.

Infrastructure projects include roadworks in Spain and improvements to the water supply system in Greece and Portugal.

With the fifth allocation, the aid extended by the ERDF so far this year totals over ECU 1,300m. Projects in industry, craft industries and the services sector will receive ECU 142m. in all, and infrastructure projects nearly ECU 1,200m.

The ERDF is a major channel for the transfer of resources to the Community's less-favoured regions. Over the period 1975-86 it has provided these regions ECU 15,100m. in all. Some 82% of this has gone for infrastructure development, 18% for industrial projects and ECU 41m. on studies.

* 1 ECU = UK£ 0.64 or IR£ 0.71

** The others are Belgium, Denmark, France, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain.

TRADE: Shoe industry seeks foothold on Japanese market

The European Community's footwear industry has scored a first in its efforts to persuade the Japanese to walk on European leather. Last month, (July) some 30 manufacturers displayed their wares at Tokyo's annual footwear exhibition.

They were the first foreigners ever to be allowed to take part in this trade fair. The fact is that the Japanese market is protected by high tariffs and tiny import quotas. Last year the European quota, for example, was a mere 1.2 million pairs - for a population of 120 million. After intensive negotiations, the Japanese agreed to double the quota for 1986 to 2.4 million pairs.

Even so, the European industry needed a showcase for its products, if it was to take advantage of Japan's "largesse". Hence the efforts by the European Commission's representatives in the Japanese capital to secure access for European footwear manufacturers to the Tokyo fair. The Confederation of the European footwear industry, which represents 15,000 firms, promptly responded by taking out space at the fair and organizing a trade delegation to Japan to contact potential importers.

FOREST FIRES: Emergency aid for victims in Portugal

In the European Community's southern regions forest fires invariably accompany a long, hot summer. The Community's emergency aid, normally granted to victims of such natural disasters as floods and earthquakes, is not available in the case of forest fires.

The European Commission has now broken with this rule by giving ECU 175,000* in emergency aid to help the victims of a fire which destroyed 8,000 hectares of forest in central Portugal. Some 16 people died in the blaze, in which a school building and fire-fighting equipment were gutted.

The aid given by the Community must be seen as a mark of solidarity with one of its newest, and poorest, member states.

* 1 ECU = UK£ 0.64 or IR£ 0.71

NATIONAL BUDGETS: Deficits which hurt

If European governments ask voters to tighten their belts it is partly because most European Community countries are running substantial budgetary deficits. In the 10-nation Community* these deficits totalled ECU 40bn.** in 1975; by 1984 they had soared to over ECU 160bn., according to the European Communities' Statistical Office, Eurostat.

In all member states, with the exception of Germany, public spending has risen faster than revenue during the last 10 years. The fact is that at a time of economic crisis both income and consumption tend to fall, with the result that taxes bring in less for the Government. It is more difficult, however, to reduce spending.

In such a situation deficits tend to blossom. The rise in budgetary deficits has been especially dramatic in Denmark, where it increased 10-fold between 1975 and 1984. During the same period the Dutch deficit increased 9-fold, the Belgian by nearly six times and there was a 5-fold increase in the Italian and Greek deficits.

Only Luxembourg has proved to be an exception: its budget was in surplus from 1975 to 1978 and again in 1984. The other EC countries have been continually in the red, although with national variations. The German deficit has been falling steadily since 1982, the Irish since 1983, while the French and British deficits have fluctuated over time.

These deficits weigh heavily on national policies - and on our daily lives - because they are substantial in relation to each country's Gross Domestic Product. In Denmark's case its budgetary deficit was 28% of the country's GDP in 1984. The corresponding figure for Italy and Belgium was 15% and for Ireland 12%. The percentage is tending to rise in Italy and Denmark; in Belgium it has remained high since 1981.

Greece's deficit represents 9% of its GDP. For the 10-nation Community it was nearly 6% - higher than in the case of the U.S. (5%) and Japan (under 3%). In 1984 France's budgetary deficit came to 3% of its GDP, that of the U.K. to under 3% and Germany's to a mere 1.6% of GDP.

* The EC without Spain and Portugal.

** 1 ECU = UK£ 0.64 or IR£ 0.71

SOCIAL POLICY: Long live the family! (?)

(1) The family is the basic unity in society. (2) It is not, and the very use of the term "family" as designating a basic social unit is inappropriate. These two very different viewpoints appear in two documents presented to the European Parliament, and they suggest why the subject of a Community family policy is a veritable minefield.

The European Parliament has a long-standing interest in the subject, however. In 1983 it adopted a resolution calling for a European family policy as an integral part of all Community policies. And now its Committee on Social Affairs and Employment has adopted a draft resolution and report renewing its earlier call.

The first viewpoint is that of the French report's author, the French Euro-MP Nicole Chouraqui, the second that of the Committee on Women's Rights, as expressed in its opinion on the Chouraqui report. They indicate why the European Commission's reply to Parliament's demand for an action programme has been largely limited to allocating ECU 300,000* for the implementation of a family policy.

But the family needs to be taken seriously by the Community. As Mrs Chouraqui points out, it is involved in almost all policy decisions, including key economic decisions, and has been deeply effected by the present economic crisis. The report in fact states that the crisis cannot be considered in purely economic terms; "any solution must take into account the family".

An additional reason why a family policy is needed is that the size of families has been changing since 1960. In the EC as a whole the birth rate has fallen by 30%. What is more, an ageing population can be expected to effect European dynamism adversely.

The report indicates three guidelines "which should govern family policy". The first is the interest of the child, which the report notes "may seem obvious" but is often ignored. The second is the freedom of the individual and the responsibility of families. While the Community cannot dictate the number of children in a family, for example, it must "encourage the provision of resources to make families' choices easier".

Finally, the report wants girls and women to have equal access with men to education and professional activity. The EC, it notes, must prevent women being (1) penalized in their professional life because of their role as mothers and (2) disregarded as mothers because of their professional activity.

* 1 ECU = UK£ 0.64 or IR£ 0.71

EC/US RELATIONS: Condemned to cooperate, according to EC Commissioner

A trade war between the 12-nation European Community and the U.S., which was averted at the 11th hour earlier this year, could yet break out, if the dispute at the root of it is not finally settled by the year's end. But the only path to a durable settlement of this, and other bilateral disputes, is through cooperation rather than confrontation, according to Willy De Clercq, the European Commissioner with responsibility for the EC's external relations.

Paradoxically, the very fact that the world's largest trading and industrial powers have a good deal in common seems to make confrontation easier than cooperation. Mr De Clercq tried to resolve the paradox in a speech earlier this year in Brussels. Both the EC and U.S., he noted, are market economies and advocates of economic liberalism. But on both sides this economic liberalism is tempered on occasion by very different considerations.

The Community, according to the European Commissioner, is more attentive to social needs and concerned, therefore, to ensure the social welfare of its population. It is also more alert to Third World problems. The U.S., while firmly opposed to protectionism since the end of World War Two, has not broken entirely with its protectionist past, in the Commissioner's view. In recent years it has developed an aggressive attitude to what it regards as the unfair practices of its trading partners.

It is essential, therefore, that the EC and U.S. try to foresee their possible differences in the trade field and deal with them intelligently and with a better understanding of each other's economic and political difficulties. But while Mr De Clercq is convinced that sporadic differences of interest are inevitable in the traditional fields of agriculture and industry, he sees the threat of similar differences in high technology sectors.

In fact they are only too evident in the key telecommunications sector. The Community clearly must develop telecommunications and information technologies if its industry is to meet the needs of the 21st century. Hence the European Commission's determined efforts to launch a Community-wide action programme. The U.S. Congress, meanwhile, has unilaterally concluded that American industry faces barriers in Europe to its exports. Legislation before Congress threatens the EC with reprisals unless these barriers are removed.

Happily, the two sides have already entered into a dialogue on this particular problem. They have also begun work on a system of consultations for high technology issues. Cooperation may not guarantee peace, but Mr De Clercq sees no alternative to it.

STUDENTS: A shrinking band

The student population reached record levels a decade ago in the 10-nation European Community*, when it numbered 61m. The numbers have been falling steadily since then as population growth rates have declined**.

The changes taking place in the student population vary from country to country. In Germany, the Netherlands and the U.K. the peak year was 1976-77, as it was for the Community as a whole. In Belgium and Luxembourg the numbers peaked a year earlier, and in 1978-79 in Italy and 1981-82 in France, Denmark and Greece. As for Ireland, the only country with a high birth rate, the number of pupils and students continues to rise each year.

The trend has been much the same for both sexes in the Community as a whole. There are differences, however, according to the level of education. The numbers enrolled in kindergartens was highest in 1976-77, while in primary education the numbers have been falling since 1973. The number of pupils in secondary schools (first stage) reached record levels between 1977 and 1979.

As for secondary education (second stage) and higher education, the number of students rose steadily until 1983 and probably 1984. This was almost certainly because of the decision of several governments to raise the school-leaving age.

European youngsters, in other words, are staying on at school longer than before. Fewer than 70% of the 15-year old boys and 67% of girls were still at school in 1970-71; by 1981-82 the figures were 92% for boys and 94% for girls. That same year nearly 20% of the 20-year olds were continuing their studies, whereas 10 years earlier only 12% of the girls and 18% of the boys were still at school.

Students accounted for 21.5% of the total EC population in 1982/83; while this was still substantial, it was down from 23% in 1976-77, the record year.

* The EC without Spain and Portugal

** Education and Training, 1985, published by the Statistical Office of the European Communities. It covers the period 1970/71 to 1983/84 in the 10-nation Community.

TOURISM: Portrait of the European as holidaymaker

The typical European holidaymaker vacations in July or August. He stays in his own country, preferably by the seaside, at any rate at the same place for the entire vacation. He organizes his holidays himself, travelling by car, and refuses to be intimidated by terrorists. Such is the portrait of the European holidaymaker as it emerges from the pages of the survey carried out this March and April in the 12 member states of the European Community.

Last year some 185m. Europeans - over 56% of the Community's population - took a holiday lasting more than four consecutive days. Among them were 45m. children.

Most went on holiday only once during the year. Even so, one-third took two or more holidays. Nearly half of those who stayed at home virtually never take a vacation.

As always, there are substantial differences from one member state to another. If nearly two-thirds of the Dutch and the Danes took a holiday last year, fewer than one-third of the Portuguese did so. In seven Community countries over 57% of the population was able, or wanted, to take a holiday: the Netherlands, Denmark, the U.K., Germany, France, Luxembourg and Italy. In the five other states - Greece, Spain, Belgium, Ireland and Portugal - fewer than 47% were able to do so.

Some one-third of the Europeans who left chose the month of August and 28% July. Those holidaying in July were to be found mainly in Denmark (52%), the Netherlands (44%) and Belgium (40%). August was the more popular month in France (39%), Spain (43%), Portugal (48%) and Italy (49%). German, British and Greek holidaymakers were more evenly divided between July and August.

Over two-thirds of European holidaymakers stayed in their own country last year, another 20% visited other member states, 10% other European countries, while 3% travelled outside Europe. If 94% of Luxembourgers, 64% of the Dutch and 60% of the Germans took their vacations outside their country, only 7% of the Greeks and 8% of the Spaniards did so.