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HIGH TECH: Tomorrow's telephone is almost here

The telephone will be a far more versatile instrument from 1988, thanks to its marriage with the computer. The European Community's industry ministers have already given the necessary instructions to their national telecommunications authorities.

The time-table the ministers have drawn up is in three stages, each corresponding to a set of technological developments. Telephone subscribers will have at their disposal an "incoming-call waiting" service and calling line identification from 1988, provided the relevant European standards and services have been specified by the end of this year.

In the second stage, from 1988 to 1993, telephones will automatically redial engaged numbers, identify callers (and this includes malicious calls), divert calls to another line and notify the cost of a call at once. The necessary standards and services will have to be specified before the end of next year, however.

In the third stage words and pictures will be combined. The new tele-services will be based on "packet" transmission and will include videotex, teleshopping, telesurveillance and telealarm. The technical standards and services will have to be agreed on by 1990.

At the heart of this wide range of services, linking telephones and computers, will be the Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN). Its introduction is essential to the creation of the Community-wide telecommunications network foreseen for 1995.

The economic stakes are very high, as the European Commissioner for Industry and Research, Karl-Heinz Narjes, has pointed out. By the end of the century the world market for digital networks will amount to some ECU 200 billion* annually, of which the European market alone will be worth an estimated ECU 40 billion.

The first stage will require an investment by the national telecommunications authorities of some ECU 6 to 7 billion between now and 1993.

* 1 ECU = UK£ 0.71 or IR£ 0.77.

ENVIRONMENT: Council votes ECU 30 million* to protect forests

A genuine European Community is slowly taking shape. The latest evidence of this is provided by the EC Council of Ministers which, on November 18, agreed that protecting national forests is a Community responsibility also. The ministers therefore approved the expenditure of ECU 30 million over the next five years on fire protection (ECU 20m.) and combatting atmospheric pollution (ECU 10m.).

The measures the Council adopted fall far short of the European Commission's proposals of two years ago. They are important, however, as signalling a shift in the attitude of several member states, who were strongly opposed, until now, to any action at the Community level.

The regulation on fire protection encourages Community countries to adopt preventive measures to reduce the number and scale of forest fires and to develop the necessary techniques and equipment. The regulation on combatting atmospheric pollution is aimed at helping them (1) make a periodic inventory of the damage caused by acid rain and (2) set up the network of observation posts needed for this purpose.

* 1 ECU = UK£ 0.71 or IRL 0.77.

INDUSTRY: R & D will help paper industry use local resources better

The European Community is so short of raw materials for its paper industry that it must import some 8 million tonnes of wood pulp alone. The biggest indigenous raw material in fact is waste paper. Not surprisingly, one component of the Community's extensive research programme is aimed at developing the technology that will help the paper industry make better use of locally available raw materials, including waste paper and non-wood fibres, such as straw.

The results of this research, part of a wider programme on wood as a renewable raw material, were presented to the industry recently during a 3-day seminar in Brussels, sponsored by the European Commission. The reports covered every stage of the industry, from defibring wood and pulping it to reusing waste in paper mills and energy conservation in paper manufacture.

An important by-product of the research programme was the contacts it promoted between research institutes and between researchers and the industry. Many of the project proposals for the 1986-89 programme in fact have been jointly submitted by researchers who met under the earlier programme.

ENERGY: Community progresses towards tomorrow's nuclear energy

The European Community has taken a small but important step on the long road to thermonuclear energy. Today's nuclear power stations produce energy by splitting atomic nuclei; those in the perhaps not-too-distant future will do so by uniting them. Thermonuclear plants will use such abundant fuels as hydrogen and have a smaller impact on the environment.

But controlled thermonuclear fusion is extremely difficult to handle, even in the laboratory - which is not surprising, given that it is the type of reaction taking place in the sun. To contain the heat generated by thermonuclear fusion a very strong magnetic field is needed and requires a doughnut-shaped device known as a tokamak.

The world's largest tokamak is in the European Community. It is the Joint European Torus, or JET, and is a key element of the Community's fusion programme, launched almost 30 years ago. In recent experiments plasma temperatures well in excess of 100 million degrees centigrade have been reached, under conditions which have allowed a confinement time of 0.5 seconds.

"These results are most encouraging", the JET project director, Dr Paul-Henri Rebut, told scientists attending the 11th International Conference on Plasma Physics and Controlled Nuclear Fusion Research in Japan recently. He noted that his research team had obtained "high temperatures, together with good confinement times ... and relatively high densities, with only a third of the planned additional heating power".

With increased power, and other planned modifications, Dr Rebut thought there were "good prospects of JET getting close to break even". This is the point at which the fusion power generated is equal to that put in. Thanks to this, and other, important advances of the last two years, the JET project is moving closer to its objective, which is to demonstrate the scientific feasibility of thermonuclear fusion.

The next step will be to demonstrate its technological feasibility. This task will be entrusted to NET (Next European Torus), which is already in the pre-design stage. To demonstrate the economic feasibility of fusion it will require another larger device, DEMO (Demonstration Reactor).

The European Commission has already asked the EC Council of Ministers for ECU 1,100 million* for the next five years.

* 1 ECU = UK£ 0.71 or IRL 0.77.

UNEMPLOYMENT: Andalusia twelve times worse off than Luxembourg

In Andalusia, in southernmost Spain, unemployment was running at over 30% in April. This rate, the highest in the 12-nation Community, was twelve times the lowest, that for Luxembourg. Since Spain and Portugal joined the Community, the extremes have become more marked.

This point is underlined by Eurostat, the EC Statistical Office, in its latest publication on regional unemployment, covering the period down to this April. Sardinia had the highest unemployment rate in April 1985, but it was only eight times that of Luxembourg, the lowest. This April, unemployment in Sardinia was running at just over 19% (as it was last April). But it was higher in seven regions of Spain, including Madrid and the Basque country.

If the unemployment rate for the Community as a whole has remained largely unchanged over the 12 months to April 1986, the situation is very different as regards individual countries - and even regions within the same country. In Germany, for example, unemployment rates fell in the south and rose in the north. At 13% it was at its highest in Bremen, as against 3.3% in Stuttgart. In Britain, however, unemployment was higher in every region by this April. Even so, the rise was greater in Yorkshire and Humberside, and in Northern Ireland, than elsewhere.

The regions with highest unemployment (i.e. rates of over 12%) included all of Spain, both Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic; Scotland and Wales. Other hard-hit regions were to be found in France, Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands*. Regions with unemployment rates below 8% were mainly in Denmark, southern Germany, Luxembourg and the north of Italy.

Unemployment among the under-25s fell in the 12 months to this April nearly everywhere except in Ireland and Italy. Even so, it was nearly 23% this April in the Community as a whole, and just under 27% in Ireland and Northern Ireland. It was almost as high (nearly 26%) in the north of England. However, the U.K. rates were as low as 13% in the southeast.

Almost everywhere in the Community unemployment rates for women were much higher than for men, rising to around 30% in Sardinia and parts of Spain. They tended to be lower in the U.K., however.

* No regional breakdown was available for Greece and Portugal.

REGIONAL AID: ECU 2.5 billion* in 1985

The European Community's least-favoured regions received nearly ECU 2.5 billion from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) last year (before the entry of Spain and Portugal). This was 5% more than in 1984. But 1985 was especially important because it marked a turning point in the Community's regional policy, as the European Commission has underlined in its 11th annual report on the ERDF.

The fact is that the new Community regulation, which seeks to make the EC's regional aid programme both more effective and more European, came into force last year. As a result, aid is no longer given on the basis of a rigid system of national quotas; rather, the share of each Community country has upper and lower limits. This allows the European Commission greater flexibility in selecting the projects to be financed from the Fund.

In addition, there is a greater concentration now on the least-favoured regions. Thus 82% of the funds were allocated to the four countries where most such regions are to be found. Italy received the lion's share (35%), followed by the U.K. (24%), Greece (16%) and Ireland (6%).

A higher proportion of the aid was used to finance productive investments in industry, the craft industries and the services because of their favourable effects on employment. Such aid amounted to 17% of the total, as against 14% in 1984 and 11% in 1983. As a result, some 57,000 jobs were created or saved, according to the European Commission.

To ensure maximum effectiveness, the Commission launched two types of programmes last year: national programmes of Community interest, on the one hand and, on the other, the STAR and VALOREN programmes, which are designed to help the least-favoured regions develop their telecommunications network and their energy resources respectively (see Eurofocus 39/86).

Spread over several years, these national programmes must help reduce regional disparities within the Community. Last year the Commission undertook to help finance three British programmes, two of them in Glasgow and Liverpool, as well as components of various French programmes. The ERDF contributed ECU 105m. to the British programmes and ECU 29m. to the French.

* 1 ECU = UK£ 0.71 or IR£ 0.77.

DEVELOPMENT AID: ECU 80 million* to encourage scientific research

The poorer countries are rapidly falling behind in scientific research. While the industrialized countries are making impressive gains in science and technology, many of the developing countries which had made an effort to build up their scientific infrastructure are being forced to reduce spending because of the recession - and the rising cost of scientific research. Meanwhile the continuing brain drain is hampering their research efforts even further.

To strengthen the scientific and technical resources of developing countries the European Commission has drawn up a 4-year programme, aimed at encouraging scientists and research institutes in the European Community to help their Third World counterparts in the two key areas of tropical agriculture and medicine. The programme, covering the period 1987-1990, would cost an estimated ECU 80 million and affect some three-quarters of the world's population, according to the Commission.

The Science and Technology for Development programme, as it is officially known, would be the second. The first was adopted in 1982. It marked the beginning of a new Community policy of scientific and technical cooperation with developing countries. However, the ECU 40 million provided by the Council for the years 1983-86 could co-finance only 20% of the nearly 2,000 research projects submitted by scientists in nine Community and some 70 developing countries.

The 411 projects selected under the first programme are also in the fields of tropical agriculture and medicine. Many of those engaged in the various projects are young, a fact which is bound to have a favourable long-term effect on the Community's efforts to encourage scientific cooperation with developing countries. The widespread response by Community scientists and research institutes could well mark, in fact, a revival of European scientific interest in tropical problems.

The second programme, now awaiting approval by the EC Council of Ministers, will encourage the setting up of research networks, linking researchers and laboratories in both the Community and the developing countries. It will also help Third World countries develop their basic research facilities, by providing essential apparatus to laboratories taking part in research projects. Under the second programme, training programmes will be reinforced, and will involve the mobilization of younger researchers from the Community and the Third World. This is the only way to secure the future of high-level research on tropical subjects, in the Commission's view.

* 1 ECU = UK£ 0.71 or IR£ 0.77.

PIRACY: Not on the high seas but in living rooms

The European Commission is drawing up plans to fight the new and serious kind of fraud which has accompanied the spectacular rise in sales of home videos. This is the sale of pirated videocassettes, apparently through the same channels as drugs in a number of cases.

The scale of the traffic can only be guessed at. Some estimates put it at about \$200 million a year in the European Community, where some 25 million video recorders are currently in use. About half the 12 to 14,000 million videocassettes in use in Japan reportedly are pirated copies of legitimate recordings.

The Commission is hoping to advise the EC Council of Ministers as early as possible next year of the best ways of combatting video pirates. They include penalties which are a real deterrent to pirates, effective measures for locating and confiscating pirated copies, increased cooperation between customs authorities and closer cooperation between copyright holders and public bodies.

That strict laws, strictly enforced are effective is clear from information provided by the European Commissioner for Cultural Affairs, Carlo Ripa di Meana, to the Community's cultural ministers in mid-November. In 1982 pirated works accounted for two-thirds of the British market. A legal clampdown brought this down last year to the psychologically "acceptable" figure of 15%.

Strong measures by the Spanish authorities reduced the market share of videocassette pirates from 90% to 30% between 1982 and June of this year. Over this same period sales of legitimate recordings rose by 60%.

But over 70% of videocassettes for sale or hire in the Netherlands are pirated. Some 60% of the German market reportedly is held by pirated works, although strong measures are being taken to combat them. The corresponding figure for Italy ranges between 40 to 50% - and is rising rapidly. Even in France, which has tried hard to protect itself, pirated works account for 15 to 25% of the market.

Since the Community adopted its first resolution on audiovisual policy in 1984, five member states have followed Britain's lead and introduced prison sentences for those convicted of piracy. They are Denmark, France, Germany, Italy and Portugal. But as Mr Ripa di Meana noted, the same high technology which is creating new markets is providing video pirates the latest tools of their trade.

FOOD: Europe's master cooks join forces under "Euro-toques" label

The European Community's master cooks have joined hands across the Community's internal frontiers. They have set up their own organization, modestly called the "European Community of Cooks". It was officially inaugurated in Brussels recently in the presence of the European Commissioner for a People's Europe, Carlo Ripa di Meana.

"Euro-toques", to give the organization its Gallic surname, is the brain child of a Belgian chef, Pierre Romeyer. Its aim is to defend European haute cuisine against the threat of veal treated with hormones, wines adulterated with anti-freeze and adulterated cooking oils - not to mention the explosion of fast food outlets.

The British and Irish founder members of the European Community of Cooks are David Miller and Myrtle Allen respectively.

The new organization hopes to enrich European haute cuisine by enabling apprentice cooks to train in any Community country. It will also act as a pressure group, and has set up headquarters in Brussels for this purpose.

But "Euro-toques" will also try to prevent the use of harmful products in the kitchen and keep an eye on the packing and storage of foodstuffs.

FOOD: Liver pâté by the tonne

France, as you might have guessed, is virtually the only producer of pâté de foie gras in the European Community. But even gourmets are not above sampling the foie gras produced in Hungary, Israel and Poland, judging by the quantities these countries export to the Community.

Last year French production amounted to nearly 3,300t., but its imports came to 1,300t. The French, in other words, took most of the 1,500t. of foie gras imported into the Community. The main supplier was Hungary (1,000t), followed by Israel and Poland.