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SPORTS: European Commission comes to the help of footloose footballers

It plans to negotiate with UEFA over the freedom of movement for professional players.

A century ago the Italian football championship was won by the Genoa Cricket and Football Club, fielding a team made up of 10 Englishmen and a lone Italian. But the time perhaps is not far off when European Community football clubs will once again have the right to deploy teams full of imported players.

The fact is that, legally speaking, football players are workers. Under the Treaty of Rome they have the right, therefore, to take the field in any Community member state (with the exception of Spain and Portugal, during the transitional period following their entry into the EC).

The European Court of Justice in fact ruled as much 10 years ago. But the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), and more particularly the various national federations have, some minor concessions apart, acted with bland disregard for it.

The Commission, as guardian of the Treaty, must see to it, of course, that the players' freedom of movement is respected and the 1976 ruling upheld. But professional sport, especially football, is a world of its own, which is why the Commission has been pragmatic and informal in its approach so far.

It has preferred to talk to the federations rather than start legal proceedings, which would be directed against the member states, who are responsible for upholding the freedom of movement of workers. It is up to them in fact to get the feudalistic federations to see reason.

Faced with what looks like a goalless draw, the European Commission has decided to ask its Vice-President, Manuel Marin, to resume contacts with the federations and the representatives of the member states in order to redress the situation. In the meantime, the Commission's own experts will make an in-depth study of the economic and social consequences for all concerned.

The meeting has already been convened, and before the end of June Mr Marin will report to his colleagues on the results of both his talks and the study carried out by his department.

Meanwhile the score remains 0-0.

ENVIRONMENT: From monk seals to used electric batteries

Ten environmental projects for the Community's Mediterranean regions.

The Mediterranean regions, which many associate with holidays on sun-drenched beaches, are suffering no less than other regions of Europe from environmental damage. In order to show that their ecological problems can be solved, the European Commission has just granted its financial support to 10 projects. All are relatively modest in scale but are representative of the difficulties facing these regions.

Among them are four which seek to protect endangered species: the monk seals near the Greek and Italian coasts; the otter in Italy and the gizani, a species of freshwater fish from the Greek island of Rhodes. One of these projects should lead to the creation of an underwater reserve in the Greek islands of Sporades.

Another four projects deal with the removal and recycling of wastes. Community aid should help finance a campaign in favour of the recovery of waste oil in the Mediterranean regions of France and the introduction of a boat to collect oil residues from the Greek port of Patras. The recovery of used electric batteries at Reggio Emilia, in Italy, and the removal of sewage and industrial waste from the Greek city of Thiva are other projects which the Community is helping finance.

Two other projects relate to the protection of sites in Corsica - the small island of Saint Lucia and the mountain lakes in the "beautiful isle".

Together, these 10 projects make up the first stage of the strategic action plan for the Mediterranean, inaugurated in 1984 by the European Commission in order to tackle the environmental problems typical of the Mediterranean region. This first series of projects, to be carried out by national bodies in liaison with the European Commission, will allow those responsible for the action plan to test their ideas. It will also facilitate preparations for the second stage, which should focus on more long-term activities.

The European Community will meet 20 to 25% of the cost of each of the 10 projects. Its total contribution will come to just under ECU 700,000*.

* 1 ECU = UK£ 0.75 or IR£ 0.78.

REGIONAL AID: More than 4,000 projects backed financially in 1986

The European Commission makes the last allocations for 1986.

For the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), an important source of finance for the European Community's less-favoured regions, 1986 has just ended, with the European Commission's release of the funds representing the last two allocations for the year. In the course of 1986 the ERDF will have helped finance 4,352 investment projects in the 12-nation Community for a total of ECU 3,200m.*, as against ECU 2,500m. in 1985 (but in the Community less Spain and Portugal).

The last two allocations amounted to ECU 969m., and will help finance 833 investment projects in all the member states except Luxembourg. Some ECU 811m. of this has been earmarked for infrastructure development, while the balance of ECU 158m will help to create or save over 26,000 jobs in industry, the craft industries and the services sector.

Several projects are in the energy sector. In Spain, 82% of the funds for structural investments will be devoted to the transport and distribution of natural gas, as well as the treatment of liquid gas. The ERDF is also helping finance the transport of lignite in Greece and the construction of a gas pipeline in Bavaria.

Other projects are aimed at encouraging tourism. The ERDF will help in the construction of a centre for nautical sports in Plymouth and improve facilities in the towns near Vesuvius, Italy's still active volcano. It will also make possible a training school for the hotel industry in France and another for fishermen in Denmark.

The ERDF's main beneficiary last year was Italy, which received nearly ECU 800m. Other countries to receive substantial amounts from the Fund include Spain (ECU 656m.), Britain (ECU 545m.), Portugal (ECU 410m.) and Greece (ECU 315m.). Ireland received a total of ECU 133m.

Since it was set up in 1975 the ERDF has provided ECU 16,900m. for regional development. This includes some ECU 14,000m. for improving the infrastructure in the Community's less-favoured regions and nearly ECU 3,000m. to promote industrial development.

* 1 ECU = UK£ 0.75 or IR£ 0.78.

REFUGEES: The EC has offered asylum to over 160,000 Indochinese refugees

Over one-third of them are "boat people".

Eleven years after the Communists came to power in the three states that make up Indo-China, more than 160,000 refugees from Vietnam, Kampuchea and Laos are living in the European Community. While this is considerably fewer than the 628,000 in the United States, the Community's record nevertheless is good.

The war in Vietnam ended in 1975 with the fall of South Vietnam to the Communists, who had been in power in the North for over 20 years. At about the same time the Khmer Rouge gained control of Kampuchea, even while the Communists took over Laos. In the months and years that followed, and especially after the invasion of Kampuchea by Vietnamese troops, hundreds of thousands of Indochinese fled their homelands. Many fled by sea, often in small, frail boats; hence their surname, the "boat people".

Most of the refugees who sought asylum in the Community are settled in France. As all three countries are former French colonies or protectorates, many of the refugees knew French and some had relatives living in France. More than one-third of the refugees in the Community are "boat people", as the following Table shows:

<u>Country</u>	<u>Total number of refugees</u>	<u>"Boat people"</u>
European Community	161,156	66,340
Belgium	4,360	1,563
Denmark	3,455	3,110
France	102,986	18,737
Germany	22,810	18,330
Greece	144	144
Ireland	244	241
Italy	3,062	2,163
Luxembourg	97	87
Netherlands	6,008	5,484
Spain	927	409
United Kingdom	17,063	16,072

HEALTH: The right to unrestricted medical care in other EC countries

It is not automatically granted, in the absence of a harmonization of national laws.

A key principle of the European Community is the freedom of movement of persons as well as goods. But what if a worker falls ill and seeks treatment in another member state?

Under a Community regulation, an employed or self-employed person who is insured in one member state may receive treatment in another, provided he has the authorization of a "competent institution" in his own country. This authorization may not be refused, as long as the treatment in question is among the benefits provided for by the patient's country of residence but cannot be given in time at home. These provisions apply to the worker's family by analogy.

The regulation therefore imposes certain limits on the powers to grant or refuse authorization. The European Commission in fact has not received complaints to date of an unfair refusal to authorize treatment.

Even so, a Euro-MP has expressed his concern to the Commission over the introduction, in several member states, of what he has termed "a restrictive and discriminatory system of reimbursing medical expenses". Among the discriminatory elements, in his view, is the obligation to obtain the authorization of a specialist in the patient's country of origin.

While Community rules seek to give effect to certain fundamental principles, they do no more than coordinate national legislations, without changing their substance, according to the Commission. It takes the view that without the genuine harmonization of national legislations it is difficult, even "futile", to postulate the unconditional right of patients to medical treatment anywhere in the Community.

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: Perhaps not as well-known as all that
43% of the Community's voters know about "their" Parliament.

Should elections to the European Parliament be held every six months? The question arises almost spontaneously if one looks at the results of the latest poll - the "Eurobarometer" - conducted on behalf of the European Commission. It shows that the European Parliament is largely ignored, except at election time.

Last autumn only 43% of the people in the 12-nation European Community claimed to have heard the European Parliament mentioned on radio or television or seen an article on it in the press. In the spring of 1984, shortly before the last European general election, this figure was as high as 75% in the 10-nation Community (i.e. before the entry of Spain and Portugal).

Since then the proportion of those who have heard of the European Parliament has fallen steadily: from 61% in the spring of 1985 to 53% that autumn and to 48% last spring. The same phenomenon was evident before and after the first general election to the European Parliament in 1979.

Between spring and autumn of last year, Parliament's standing suffered an eclipse in nearly all Community countries. This includes Spain and Portugal, despite their recent entry into the Community and the existence of very strong pro-European feelings.

Limited media coverage has not enhanced Parliament's reputation. Only 36% of those polled last autumn who had seen or heard references to it were favourably impressed, as against 40% last spring. Only in Portugal, Spain and Italy did this figure exceed 50%. The U.K., however, was the only country where those with an unfavourable impression were in the majority.

As for the European Parliament's role in the 12-nation Community, this was felt to be "very important" by 11% of the Europeans. Another 38% thought it "important" while 26% felt it to be of little importance. Those who saw the European Parliament in a very favourable light were to be found mainly in Spain, Portugal, Ireland and Greece. Germany, however, was the only country where a majority of those polled felt Parliament's role to be small or even non-existent.

RACE RELATIONS: A red cabbage by another name ...

A British Euro-MP wants his countrymen to change their name for red cabbage.

Call a black a "niggerhead" and you may well have a fight on your hands. But calling a variety of red cabbage "niggerhead" is just as racist, in the view of a British Euro-MP, George Cryer.

He has asked the European Commission to see the word is removed from the European Community's very official common catalogue of vegetable species.

The Commission shares Mr Cryer's views. It has pointed out to him that the common catalogue is compiled from national catalogues. As a variety of red cabbage is marketed in Britain under the synonym "niggerhead" the name automatically appears in the catalogue.

The Commission has taken the matter up with the U.K. authorities, who have agreed to use their best endeavours to persuade traders to find another name for this particular variety of red cabbage.

HEALTH: Injecting cocaine is a shortcut to AIDS

60 international experts met in Luxembourg from January 14 to 16 to study cocaine addiction.

In a world both avid and impatient for heady sensations, drug addicts are not going to be the exception. They no longer sniff or snort cocaine but inject it.

As a result, to the ravages due to cocaine can be added those caused by AIDS, whose spread is favoured by the use of infected hypodermic needles.

Some 60 high-level experts from the European Community, the United States and South America were joined by experts from the World Health Organisation and the Council of Europe at a 2-day seminar on the problems posed by cocaine addiction. Organised by the European Commission, the seminar was held in Luxembourg from January 14 to 16.

After having insisted on the importance of health education and prevention, the participants stressed the need for a global approach to the drug problem, as regards both supply and demand and distribution. The fight, moreover, will have to be conducted on a Community-wide basis if this growing menace is to be overcome.

And if the threat from AIDS is to be contained, steps will have to be taken, as a matter of urgency, to reduce the use of hypodermic needles by cocaine addicts. This, after all, is how a high proportion of those taking cocaine intravenously have become infected. Their numbers in fact have doubled in a year, especially in the south of the Community.