



a newssheet for journalists

Weekly n° 17/89

22 - 29 May 1989

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Mailed from: Brussels X

Europe

HEALTH: Cigarette packets may have a "European" look from 1993

Eleven ministers agree on warnings to smokers.

From 1 January 1993 all cigarette packets sold in the 12-nation European Community will carry at least two health warnings: a general warning, such as "Tobacco seriously damages health", and a more specific one, such as "Smoking causes cancer" or "Smoking causes fatal diseases". A decision to this effect was taken by the Community's health ministers by 11 to 1 on May 16, in order both to safeguard people's health and to ensure the smooth working of the single market in the tobacco sector.

Warnings to smokers will have to be in bold letters and cover at least 4% of the surface they are printed on. In countries with more than one official language, the surface covered by the warnings will be correspondingly greater. Tar and nicotine yields will also have to be clearly indicated on cigarette packets.

The new Community regulation will mean better information for EC consumers, especially those in Britain, Greece and the Netherlands. The fact is that only Ireland already applies the new measures. The number of cigarettes sold in the EC each year has been put at 500 billion, and the number of premature deaths from diseases caused by smoking at more than 1,000 each day.

All tobacco products conforming to the new regulation, whose provisions also cover cigars, pipe tobacco, etc., could be put on sale throughout the 12-nation Community.

A PEOPLE'S EUROPE: The right to residence for everyone remains blocked

The European Commission asks the Twelve to face up to their responsibilities.

When will the European Community's students, pensioners and those with independent means have the right to reside in the Community country of their choice? It is now some 10 years since the European Commission sent the Twelve a proposal which gives all EC nationals, whatever their situation from the professional or family standpoint, the right to reside where they will.

As a step in this direction the Commission asked the 12 Member States at the end of April to grant students, the retired and those with independent means this right of residence, subject to two conditions: (1) they would not be entitled to social security benefits in their country of residence and (2) would have to take out health insurance. But the Twelve were unable even to agree to these principles at their meeting on May 3, whereupon the Commission withdrew its proposal.

It plans to submit fresh proposals in the coming weeks, however. Under existing Community regulations, only those who work, or have worked, in an EC country other than their own, and their families, enjoy the right of residence. Those who are in the three categories mentioned earlier enjoy no such rights, except in the case of students in vocational training.

Granting the right of residence to people in these categories poses two kinds of problems. Britain and Denmark are opposed to the very principle of right to residence; several other EC countries, including France and Belgium, fear they will find themselves overrun by students or old-age pensioners. London and Copenhagen maintain that the freedom of movement, as provided for in the Treaty of Rome, the EC's "Constitution", covers only the active population. But for the EC's internal market commissioner, Martin Bangemann, limiting this freedom to certain categories of Europeans is to make a mockery of it. He has pointed out that the Community fosters student exchanges and training schemes under its ERASMUS programme, on the one hand, while on the other it still refuses to grant students a generalized right of residence.

The Commission believes the right of residence for everyone would be an essential part of a People's Europe, certainly in the context of the single market, set for the end of 1992. Member States that are not opposed in principle to this right are prepared apparently to accept old-age pensioners and those with independent means, although countries in the Community's southern half are concerned at the prospect of an eventual invasion by the retired from their northern neighbours.

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Students pose a more thorny problem. Belgium, France, Germany and Italy receive relatively large numbers of students from their EC partners, especially Greece, Spain, Portugal and, to a lesser extent, the Netherlands, according to the latest figures available. The situation is more balanced as regards Britain, Ireland and Denmark. Clearly the fears of some Member States, that they will have to bear additional costs in the name of freedom of movement, do not help matters.

INTERNAL MARKET: A boost for the telecommunications of 1992

The Twelve want to speed up the work of their PTTs and experts.

Nearly a year ago the European Community's telecommunications ministers decided to make it possible for people living in the 12 Member States to travel with their personal computers and telefax machines and to use them anywhere in the Community after 1992, thanks to the integrated digital services network (IDSN). But progress has been slower than expected. The ministers therefore decided to give the project a boost when they met on April 27.

They face two major problems. Work on drafting European technical standards is going very slowly, while coordination between the national telecommunications administrations leaves much to be desired. The Ministers therefore decided to mobilize their experts and to give the European Telecommunications Standards Institute (ETSI) the necessary means, even while bringing it closer to that other European standards institute, CEN/CENELEC*. They also asked the European Commission and their national administrations to meet more often and consult more frequently, so as to improve the coordination between the various PTTs, which must bring IDSN to the public.

UNEMPLOYMENT: Unchanged in March ...

... when 9.4% of the Community workforce was unemployed.

The level of unemployment was unchanged at 9.4% in March, in the 12-nation European Community, according to Eurostat, the EC's statistical office. Unemployment among those under 25 has continued to fall: it was 18.1% in March as against 18.3% in February and 20.2% last August. Both men and women have benefitted. Young female unemployment stood at 20.9% in March, young male unemployment at 15.6%.

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The level of unemployment varied a good deal from one EC country to another. It ranged from a low of 1.9% in the case of Luxembourg to 18.1% in that of Spain. Unemployment was below the Community average in Britain, Denmark, Germany and Portugal; elsewhere it was above it.**

* European Standards Committee and the European Committee for Electro-technical Standards

** Eurostat had no exact figures for Greece.

SOCIETY: A European card for the EC's senior citizens

The European Commission favours the introduction of a European citizen's card for the over-60s.

Being elderly has its drawbacks, but also its privileges - at least in a civilized society. Several countries have even sought to enshrine certain privileges in a card which gives its holder a number of benefits, notably reduced fares on public transport, cheaper cinema and theatre tickets, etc.

As from 1 January 1991 all Community citizens who are over 60 years could enjoy the benefits which the Member States they are in offers its own nationals, thanks to a proposal which the European Commission has just sent the Twelve. It provides for a European citizen's card, reserved for those over 60, with a view both to helping the elderly and encouraging intra-Community tourism. Such a card would also promote the feeling of belonging to a people's Europe and help the elderly play a more active part in society.

If the Twelve adopt the Commission's proposal, each of them will have to let Brussels know which benefits are available to the elderly, so that a handbook containing this information can be prepared.

HEALTH: The second campaign against cancer is launched

The European Commission proposes an action plan for 1990-94.

The European Commission has just launched its second action plan against cancer, in order not to lose the momentum generated by the first. It will cover the period 1990-94. The activities undertaken between 1987 and 1989 in the areas of prevention, information and health education will be continued and strengthened, with the aim of reducing deaths from cancer by 15% between now and the year 2000.

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The fight against tobacco addiction continues to head the list of actions to be implemented in 1990-94. The plan provides for the stimulation of projects of European interest concerning the prevention of tobacco smoking among youngsters and women as well as teachers and health workers. It also provides support for (1) pilot actions aimed at teaching techniques for giving up smoking to those working in the fields of education and health and (2) innovative information campaigns to prevent smoking among both the general public and at the workplace.

The action plan is also aimed at those who delight in good food and alcoholic beverages. It provides for the ongoing studies on the links between food and cancer to be extended to areas not covered so far. As for the fight against cancer-forming agents, all Community activities which seek to protect against ionizing and ultraviolet radiation will be continued. They must surely signal an end to that holiday pastime which consists of soaking up the sun, glass in hand and a cigarette between the lips.

The list of carcinogenic agents is a good deal longer, of course; the action plan therefore envisages further studies on the risks posed by certain chemical substances at the European level.

Systematic screening for and early diagnosis of cancer is another key element of the action plan. Comparative studies on ways of improving the organization of cancer screening policies will be continued, as will the evaluation of existing cervical cancer screening programmes, while the European network of pilot programmes of breast cancer screening will be monitored and extended. Finally, studies of European interest on the efficiency and feasibility of the screening and detection of other cancers will be promoted under the second action plan.

As for informing the general public, the European information action on cancer will continue to take place each year during the second week of October. Television programmes will deal with the prevention, screening and treatment of cancers, while the European Code on cancer will be widely diffused among the general public, especially after each revision.

Health workers will be able to count on the setting-up of three European pilot networks of medical schools, dental faculties and nursing schools, implementing the recommendations on the cancer content of training programmes made by three advisory committees in 1988. The action plan will also encourage health workers to follow courses of specialized training in cancerology in EC countries other than their own.

RESEARCH: Meeting the American and Japanese challenge

The European Commission wants to extend the scale and scope of Community R&D.

The European Community's present framework programme for research, which comes to an end in 1991 in principle, is inadequate to meet the challenge of the 1990s and the severe competition from the United States, Japan and the newly industrialized countries of Asia, according to the European Commission. It wants industry more closely associated with research, so that it can meet the market's needs, on the one hand, and people's concerns over environmental pollution, for example, on the other.

The Commission has set out its ideas in a paper it sent to the Twelve at the beginning of May; and it hopes to persuade them to revise the Community's research programme before the year is out. The fact is the EC is not especially well placed in key sectors of technology. It has an annual trade deficit of nearly ECU 8,000mn.* in consumer electronics, a sector in which some 60% of the world market is held by Japan. Information technology is largely the preserve of the Americans.

The EC devotes only 2% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to research, as against 2.8% in the case of the United States and Japan. What is more, Japan recently launched some very ambitious research projects, while the American administration decided to increase its financial support for research by 7% in 1990. Nor is the situation much better when it comes to human resources. The Community has far fewer researchers and engineers than its two major rivals: roughly 500,000 for a total population of 323mn., as compared to 823,000 for the United States (with a total population of 244mn.) and more than 400,000 for Japan (122mn.)

The European Commission considers that the EC must continue to finance pre-competitive research. But it also wants the Community to back projects closer to the stage of industrial application. The Commission believes Community research in addition must make a growing contribution to environmental protection, through setting exhaust emission standards for cars, for example, as well as drafting nuclear safety measures or preparing products to replace the CFCs which are damaging the ozone layer.

The Commission feels it essential that a growing number of researchers be given the opportunity of working in another Community country than their own: some two-thirds of them have never studied or worked outside their own frontiers.

* 1 ECU = UK£ 0.65 or IR£ 0.78

ENVIRONMENT: For the first time, a conference with a "human face"

A summit conference on bio-ethics promotes a new relationship between man and nature.

"The continuous degradation of the setting for life which man has received as a legacy from his forebears must necessarily prompt him to approach that legacy in terms of duties and responsibilities", the European Commission President, Jacques Delors, declared in his opening address to a major international conference on the ethics of the environment. The conference was held in Brussels, from May 10 to 12, at the invitation of the European Commission and in the framework of the sixth economic summit conference on bio-ethics.

The reasons for holding such a conference are obvious. As everyone knows, research into environmental problems is taking place on an unprecedented scale today. So far these problems have generally been framed in scientific and economic terms. But the sixth international conference was singular in that it approached them from an ethical viewpoint.

For the first time, in other words, man's relationship to nature was posed in terms of duties and responsibilities; science was invoked only insofar as it helps in taking decisions. Environmental issues were not treated in isolation from the values which a society adopts in order to ensure its well-being, any more than the choices which must be made in order to protect the biosphere.

During the three days of the summit the participants reviewed the ecological problems that have arisen as a result of man's activities, such as the greenhouse effect, the result of the accumulation of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, and the destruction of the ozone layer. The participants also looked at such regional and local problems as the pollution due to acid deposits, the deterioration in the quality of water and the multiplication of deposits of toxic waste. While these problems are probably better understood than the more global ones, the strategies needed to deal with them effectively have yet to be finalized. The conference also examined the problems which the destruction of forests is posing for both plant and animal life.

The three days of discussions resulted in a general agreement on the possibility of developing an ethics of the environment, based on the idea of collaboration and partnership between man and nature.