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SURVEY: Moves towards greater equality of the sexes

But the situation of women is still seen as a problem.

Europeans increasingly want husband and wife to share household tasks and the children's education. Politics is viewed less and less as a male preserve. Even so, public opinion in the 12-nation European Community continues to consider woman's place in society as a problem. Such, at any rate, is the broad conclusion that emerges from a survey, published this summer but carried out in the spring on behalf of the European Commission.

In the Community as a whole 41% of those polled feel that the ideal couple is one in which husband and wife devote roughly the same amount of time to their work and share in both the housework and the task of bringing up their children. In the 10-nation Community (the EC without Spain and Portugal) 40% of those interviewed were of this opinion, as against 36% in 1983.

Denmark is the only Community country in which 53% of those polled were in favour of such equality of the sexes. In most of the other countries between 40% and 50% were in favour of housework being shared between husband and wife. However, only 34% of Belgians and Irish, 26% of Germans and 20% of Luxembourgers favoured the idea. The strongest advocates of equality are to be found among the under-25s and those with the strongest reservations among the more elderly.

Some 29% of Europeans believe that a wife should have a job which is less absorbing than her husband's and devote more time than he does to home and children. This view is somewhat better appreciated today than during the last survey, some four years ago. Finally, only 25% of those interviewed find it desirable that the husband work while his wife devotes herself entirely to the home; they were 28% in 1983.

As for politics, only 22% of those polled believe it should be left to the stronger sex, as compared to 26% four years ago. In all Community countries the majority of those interviewed rejected the idea that politics should be a male preserve; those advocating it were more numerous in Luxembourg, Greece, Germany and Belgium.

Be that as it may, nearly half those interviewed in the 12-nation European Community feel that women's role in society poses a major problem when compared to that of men.

UNEMPLOYMENT: A slight rise in July

School leavers in search of jobs.

There were some 15.6m. registered unemployed in the 12-nation European Community at the end of July, an increase of 1% over the previous month. The increase was due largely to school leavers signing on at unemployment exchanges, according to the EC's statistical office, Eurostat.

The number of young unemployed rose in July in all Community countries except Greece, Spain and Portugal. The increase in fact was over 29% in Belgium and 11% in the Netherlands. However, unemployment among the under-25s has declined by 5% in the Community as a whole since July 1986. All countries recorded a decline except Greece, Spain and Ireland.

The total number of jobless in the Community has fallen by 0.3% in a year. But the number of unemployed women had risen by 2.7% to over 7m. at the end of July. Male unemployment declined by 2.6% - or 200,000 - over this same period.

In several countries the trend has been in the opposite direction, however. Thus male unemployment rose by more than 6% in Greece, 8% in Denmark and 36% in Luxembourg in a year. Meanwhile, female unemployment declined in Belgium, Denmark, the U.K. and Portugal.

INDUSTRY: ECU 1.5m.* for the modernization of steel mills and coal mines

The European Commission helps finance seven research projects.

Seven European coal and steel firms are to receive nearly ECU 1.5m. from the European Commission to finance research into the modernization of work stations.

Most of the projects relate to the use of computers, whether to control the quality of steel products, operate the points on railway lines or train steel workers.

The firms receiving Commission funds include such giants as British Steel (U.K.), Arbed (Luxembourg) and Nuova Italsider (Italy), as well as major coal mines in France (Charbonnages de France) and Germany (Ruhrkohle).

* 1 ECU = UK£ 0.70 or IR£ 0.78

TAXATION: Watch out for double taxation

A problem which still faces the 12-nation EC.

No one enjoys paying taxes. But imagine having to pay them twice over, in two different countries. Unhappily the European Community has not yet eliminated problems of this kind, which affect some Europeans, who reside in one member state but are paid in another.

This point was made by the European Commission in its reply to a question by Ernest Mühlen, a Euro-MP from Luxembourg. If most Europeans can avoid double taxation in practice, it is because of the agreements member states have concluded between themselves, agreements which owe nothing to the Community's existence.

The countries of the 12-nation Community have concluded such agreements with their neighbours but have occasionally overlooked countries somewhat further off. According to the European Commission there are no agreements against double taxation between

Denmark and Greece
Greece and Spain
Greece and Ireland
Greece and Luxembourg
Greece and Portugal
Ireland and Spain
Ireland and Portugal
Luxembourg and Portugal
The Netherlands and Portugal

Moreover, existing agreements can contain very different provisions: taxation in the country of residence, in the country of work, etc. The Commission envisages the harmonization of those provisions which prevent free movement between member states.

SOCIAL: Coming soon, a European senior citizen's card?

The European Commission is looking into the matter.

Elderly Europeans may soon be able to show the same card from Glasgow to Athens and from Lisbon to Berlin in order to enjoy the same reductions on the railways and in museums. The European Commission recently told a Dutch Euro-MP, Jessica Larive-Groenendaal, that it is looking into the matter.

The Commission organized a meeting of experts on this subject in Madrid in January. It is now trying to find the best technical means of enabling elderly persons to enjoy certain advantages throughout the 12-nation Community. It has not ruled out the possibility of harmonizing national cards.

DEVELOPMENT AID: ECU 100 million for Africa south of the Sahara

The European Commission proposes a special programme in favour of these countries.

Many African countries are being slowly crushed under the weight of their external debt, despite their efforts to keep up the necessary payments. This is particularly true of the poorer countries, who are among the most heavily in debt, in relation to their national incomes.

The Venice summit of Western nations recognised this at its meeting in June. Since then the 12-nation European Community has accepted the need for special measures to deal with the problems of these countries. It has undertaken to reach a decision before the end of the year on the various proposals put to it by the European Commission.

Priority must be given to easing the foreign exchange shortage resulting from excessively high repayments, a fall in export earnings from raw materials and insufficient aid flows.

The European Commission has proposed the Community implement a special ECU 100m.* programme over the period 1988-89 in favour of the poorer, heavily indebted countries south of the Sahara. The funds made available would be in addition to those already being provided under the third Lomé Convention. They would be used to finance imports in particular and would therefore be quick disbursing.

The fact is that countries have been forced to reduce their imports below the strict minimum in order to meet the service charges on their external debt. The result has been a fall not only in spending by households and businesses but also in investments and expenditure on maintaining the country's basic infrastructure.

Such conditions can only act as a brake on development. Hence the importance of trying to remedy them by means of a series of measures which will complement normal, long-term development aid flows. Action must be adapted to objectives and must be rapid, especially as regards the sectoral import programmes.

* 1 ECU = UK£ 0.70 or IR£ 0.78.

CONSUMERS: Equal before the law - but not when it comes to aspirin

The European Commission has announced a programme of 12 regulatory measures aimed at bringing order to the pharmaceutical sector.

There are major differences between the European Community's member states when it comes to the rules governing pharmaceuticals, the prices of pharmaceutical specialities and the reimbursement policies of the various national health services. This was made amply clear in a study carried out two years ago by the European Bureau of Consumers' Unions (BEUC) and recently published by a Belgian consumer association.

It was this publication which prompted a Belgian Euro-MP, Ernest Glinne, to ask the European Commission what measures it intended to take in order to standardize the existing rules - or at the very least reduce disparities between them - for the benefit of all Europeans.

The 1992 deadline is approaching. The completion of the single internal market clearly implies that the pharmaceuticals sector be tidied up also. The European Commission has already provided for this in its White Paper "Completing the Internal Market", as Commission Vice-President Lord Cockfield underlined in his reply to Mr Glinne. He pointed out that the programme of 12 regulatory measures announced in the White Paper met the objectives sought by Mr Glinne.

The EC Council of Ministers adopted four directives mentioned in the programme on 22 December 1986. They relate to high technology medicinal products derived from biotechnology as well as a recommendation on the testing of proprietary medicinal products. A week later the Commission sent the Council a proposal for a Directive on the transparency of measures regulating the pricing of medicinal products for human use and their inclusion within the scope of national health insurance schemes.

ENVIRONMENT: The Commission publishes an inventory of existing chemical substances

EINECS will enable the Community's control system to be strengthened.

No fewer than 100,116 chemicals are listed in EINECS, or the European Inventory of Existing Commercial Chemical Substances, which has been prepared by the European Commission under the 1967 Council Directive on the classification, packaging and labelling of dangerous substances. This rather impressive inventory lists, indexes and defines all the chemical substances known to have been on sale in the member states of the European Community between 1971 and 1981, and which can therefore be marketed throughout the Community without prior notification or any new safety assessment procedures. On the other hand, any substances not included in EINECS are subject to special Community rules regarding dangerous substances. This will make possible more effective controls, something which is especially important in view of the single internal market and the sharp increase in trade in chemical products.

Compilation of the inventory took more than four years and was carried out with the help of the United States Chemical Abstracts Service. It required the preparation of a core inventory of 34,000 substances and the analysis of 130,000 declaration forms collected from the chemical industry by the governments of the member states.

EINECS will become a legal document six months after it has been published in the Official Journal of the European Communities. It will be a valuable tool for both manufacturers and dealers, as well as for customs officials and environment protection agencies.

Every new chemical must undergo thorough testing before being put on sale. A notification dossier has to be presented to the competent national authority, which forwards it to the Commission, for onward transmission to the other member states. The latter, as well as the Commission, have 45 days in which to lodge any objections. If no objection has been laid, the manufacturer is free to market the product throughout the Community.

ENERGY: European cash for "hot rocks"

The European Community backs a Franco-German project to tap a new energy source.

Coal, oil and gas are not the only forms of energy that lie hidden underground. A team of French and German experts is trying, with funds from the European Community, to tap the heat contained in the rocks that lie beneath the ground at Soultz, in northern Alsace. An agreement to this effect was concluded between France and Germany at the end of last month.

Underground temperatures are exceptionally high in Soultz: more than 50°C at a depth of 500 metres and 110°C at 1,000 metres. Normal underground temperatures are around 20°C.

But the traditional geothermal technique, which makes use of hot water found underground, cannot be used at Soultz. The experts plan to inject cold water to a depth sufficient to obtain boiling water in return.

The experts hope to find out by the end of next year if their plans will in fact work. If they are successful, the heat could be used to generate electricity or provide hot water for heating.

The EC is providing ECU 2.1m* of the ECU 7.6m. needed, in the context of the Community programme of research into non-nuclear sources of energy. The balance will come from French and German organizations.

CULTURE: The first European piano competition will be held from November 5 to 19

ECUs will reward the winners.

Brussels, Luxembourg and Strasbourg will host the first-ever European piano competition, to be held from November 5 to 19. It is open to all pianists under 30 years of age who are nationals of any one of the 12 European Community member states.

A jury, presided by Georges Cziffra, will select the four best pianists. The first prize, worth ECU 7,500*, will be awarded by the European Commission and European Parliament.

* 1 ECU = UK£ 0.70 or IR£ 0.78

INTERNAL MARKET: The time-table set out in the White Paper will be met

The Twelve reaffirmed at Copenhagen their willingness to meet the 1992 deadline, although differences remain over procedures and strategy.

The European Community's Council of Ministers remains united in its support of the single internal market, as was made clear when it met informally in Copenhagen recently. But the Council remains divided over the approach to be followed.

A number of ministers were critical of the systematic recourse to majority voting; they preferred the search for consensus, in order to prevent one or other member state from finding itself isolated, depending on the point at issue. But as Lord Cockfield, Vice-President of the European Commission, pointed out, the very fact that a vote can be taken encourages ministers to seek a compromise acceptable to everyone.

Nor was there unanimity over a proposal to limit the number of meetings at which senior officials lay the groundwork for decisions by ministers, whereas the procedure for working with the European Parliament should give a fresh impetus to their work and not hold it up.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION: Death of Mr Alois Pfeiffer

Memorial service in Brussels on 23 September for former Commissioner.

The European Commission organized a memorial service, commemorating the work of Alois Pfeiffer, in Brussels on 23 September. Mr Pfeiffer, the European Commissioner responsible for the European Community's economic affairs, regional policy and its statistical office, died in Düsseldorf on August 1.

Born on 25 September 1924 in Bauerbach, Germany, he was active in German agricultural trade unions from 1946 onwards, and was elected President of the European Federation of Agricultural Workers in 1969.

A member of the Federal executive office of the Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund from 1975, with responsibility for national and international economic policy, Mr Pfeiffer assumed the office of vice-president of the EC's Economic and Social Committee in 1982.

He took office as a member of the European Commission on 6 January 1985.