

Eurofocus

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Editorial : For more than a year, Eurofocus has covered various aspects of European integration and policies. In doing so we have avoided coverage of "hot news" which generally receives ample space in the national media. Instead, we have concentrated primarily on background information and the lesser known aspects of European integration which nevertheless directly affect the daily life of 270 million citizens of the European Community.

At the start of the year 1981, marked by the entry of Greece to the Community and by the renewal of the European Commission, EUROFOCUS is enlarging its audience. We welcome our new readers and hope we can fulfil our main goal of providing an effective and useful service. In this effort we remain open to your comments and suggestions.

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TOURISM : Rest for the weary traveller

Recent tragedies and mishaps in various countries have highlighted the widespread need for greater security and safety for tourists and other travellers.

Airline crashes, road accidents and other events are a constant reminder to millions of voyagers that they need not only reliability in their choice of transportation but also some form of additional travel insurance. As a result of the continued popularity in tourism and business travel, a whole segment of the insurance industry has developed to specialise in travel insurance coverage.

But as more and more companies and groups become involved in this type of insurance, the possibility of business failures by such firms also grows. The failure of a French company during the summer of 1980 with contracts covering some 380,000 travellers underlined the need for additional vigilance to assure that these companies can actually meet their financial responsibilities.

That's why the European Commission recently proposed a uniform system of standards and regulation for such companies. The Commission recommended that Member Governments respond to the growing proliferation of such groups and companies offering travel aid and insurance by adopting Community-wide rules that would be the same throughout the 10 member countries. That way, the millions of tourists and business travellers would be assured of getting the same reliable coverage regardless of the policy they bought at the airport or through their agent before they embarked on their trip.

What the proposed European regulation would establish would include minimum uniform capital requirements for such companies comparable to what is demanded of other insurance companies. As a benefit to the companies themselves, this would also help guarantee that they could do business and compete throughout the Community countries more easily, since the standards would be the same, instead of having to face different national rules. As recommended, the law would not apply to the automobile clubs that provide road repair or other related services.

The Commission experts hope that the European Parliament, the Council of Ministers and other Community institutions will approve these new standards in the coming year in time for travellers to take their trips in greater security at least by 1983.

DEVELOPMENT : Lomé II Convention enters into force on January 1

The new Lomé Convention, linking the ten members of the European Community to some sixty developing nations in the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) region, entered into force on January 1, 1981, almost fifteen months after it was signed in the small Togolese capital of Lomé (hence its name) on October 31, 1979. The first Lomé Convention, signed in February 1975, expired on March 1980, but the EEC continued to apply certain trade, aid and economic provisions of the Convention, on a provisional and unilateral basis, throughout 1980.

While unmarked by any major outstanding achievements, 1980 was not a completely inactive year as far as EEC-ACP relations are concerned. Both sides worked assiduously at preparing for the implementation of the new Convention in such key new areas as the system for the development of ACP mining potential.

The EEC also sent a series of expert missions to the different ACP countries in order to determine the amount of aid each country should receive from the fifth European Development Fund (totalling 4.6 billion EUA (about £ 2,5 billion)). The missions also determined, in collaboration with the various ACP authorities, which sectors would receive the EEC assistance. An evaluation of the work accomplished by these missions shows that the ACP countries are most concerned about the state of their rural populations; almost 40 % of the EEC aid has been earmarked for this key sector. Transport and communications receive about 20 % of EEC assistance, followed by the social sector (education, training, health), etc. About 600 million EUA (£ 336 million) of the new EDF will be used for the promotion of ACP regional cooperation, a major ACP priority in the 1980s.

A major event in this sector was Zimbabwe's membership of the Lomé Convention on November 4, 1980. The newly-independent country's interest in the Convention was made clear very soon after the independence celebrations were completed in April, 1980, but it took a series of long and heated discussions before Zimbabwe's terms of accession to the Convention could be worked out by both sides - and approved by the other ACP countries.

1980 was also the year that both the EEC and the ACP representatives made it amply clear that the successful implementation of the Convention would depend on the solution of the larger problems covered by the North-South dialogue, including food, finance and energy.

TRADE : In Marco Polo's footsteps

Ever since the People's Republic of China opened up its markets a few years ago, European businessmen have been trying to re-enact the historic undertaking by their predecessor Marco Polo centuries ago. The vast market represented by the largest nation on earth has been enticing all types of industrialists and merchants.

Numerous European companies have already made their own historic voyage to this promising country and secured contracts to participate in its efforts to modernise and industrialise itself with outside assistance.

A key part in this process was the signing in 1978 of a framework trade agreement between the European Community and China.

The pact was designed to provide a set of policy guidelines to help develop the trade and economic contracts between the two. Since then there have been repeated official and trade visits.

But in what promises to be perhaps the biggest such gathering, the European Commission and the Peking Government are jointly planning a major EEC-China Business week from 30 March to 10 April in Brussels. The first of its kind, the meeting will offer EEC businessmen an opportunity to meet Chinese planners to discuss practical ways of increasing their business in China.

Some 100 Chinese officials and senior executives from about 300 European companies are expected to attend.

INSTITUTIONS : Jobs for the new Thorn Commission

The 14 members of the new European Commission presided by Gaston Thorn decided during the night of 7 to 8 January on the allocation of the different "portfolios" they will have for the next four years. Mr Thorn of Luxembourg will personally take charge of the general secretariat, the legal service, the spokesman's group, the security services and cultural affairs. François-Xavier Ortoli, of France, continues with economic and monetary affairs and credit institutions. Wilhelm Haferkamp, of Germany, also maintains external relations; agriculture and fishing for the time being are retained by Finn Olav Gundelach of Denmark. Claude Cheysson of France holds the responsibility for development and aid policy and Etienne Davignon of Belgium energy, industry and science. Information, enlargement and Mediterranean policy were given to Lorenzo Natali of Italy while his fellow countryman Antonio Giolitti received regional policy and coordination of Community funds. Michael O'Kennedy of Ireland will be the delegate of the President for budget reform, personnel and administrative matters. Relations with the Parliament and competition policy were given to Frans Andriessen of Holland. Transportation, tourism and later fishing will be handled by

George Kontogeorgis of Greece. Ivor Richard of Britain received employment and social affairs, the tripartite conference and education and training. Christopher Tugendhat will handle budget, taxes, and financial institutions. Lastly, Karl-Heinz Narjes of Germany will take over the internal market, industrial innovation, environment, consumer affairs and nuclear safety.

OPINION : For or against Greek membership ?

Since January 1, the Hellenic Republic has been a member of the European Community. As part of its Euro-Barometer series, the European Commission is preparing to publish the results of a public opinion poll conducted two months before accession of the attitude of the residents of Greece and the nine other Community countries. It marks the first time that the question concerning Greek entry into the Community was put to Greek citizens by an international opinion poll.

The results of this sampling indicate that membership has not aroused much interest on either side. It is seen in most member countries as "something neither good nor bad"; this is the opinion of 30 percent of persons asked throughout the nine Community states. At the same time, 28 percent of Greeks consulted expressed a similar opinion. Among those in the Community who see the entry of Greece as "a good thing", Italians are in the lead with a percentage of 60 percent of those polled, followed by Germany, the Netherlands and Ireland. On the other hand, 19 percent of Danes, 15 percent of Britons and French don't look upon the entry as a good thing.

On the Greek side, 38 percent of those questioned feel that the entry of their country into the Community is a positive development, 41 percent have no firm opinion on the matter, and 21 percent hold a negative view. The replies vary slightly depending on the age and sex of the respondents : 43 percent of the men and more than 40 percent of the older persons reacted favourably to accession, but the percentage declines for women and younger persons. Political ideology is also a factor : citizens who see themselves as right of centre are markedly more positive to the idea than those on the left.

In several areas Greeks foresee a positive result of their membership, especially concerning tourism, trade, the future for young people, agriculture and the conduct of democracy.

The public opinion poll discloses that on both sides, citizens who take an active part in political affairs look upon this membership as a favourable development. All hopes are therefore permitted. As for the pessimists, it is well known, that they have nothing but pleasant surprises.

BRIEF ... BRIEF... BRIEF... BRIEF... BRIEF...

ENERGY : A new major solar energy station in Sicily

The European Community has just completed the installation of the Eurelios solar power station in Adrano, Sicily. This 1 megawatt station, which involves 182 large mirror reflectors to convert the sun's rays, will be the first in the world to produce electrical energy for a power network. The first tests were successfully completed and Eurelios will be placed in service during the course of the coming months. Half of its costs will be contributed by the European Commission and the other half by Italy, France and Germany. Similar installations are also under construction in Spain, France, Japan and the United States.

COMPETITION : Dutch tomatoes under scrutiny

Several members of the European Parliament recently expressed their opposition to the supply of natural gas at reduced prices to Dutch producers of hothouse tomatoes. These conditions allow them to obtain a price advantage of about £ 1 per kilo of tomatoes. As a way of ending this distortion of competition, which particularly harms Mediterranean producers, the European Commission has asked the Dutch Government to explain the situation and it is also ready to institute proceedings with the European Court of Justice if necessary.

TRADE : Imports of television sets and tubes from Japan

Between January and October of 1980, imports of television sets from Japan into the European Community increased by 44 percent over the same period in 1979. Imports of cathode tubes also increased during the same period by 33 percent. This sharp rise in Japanese sets and tubes took place immediately following the conclusion of an accord between the United States and Japan to limit Japanese exports of these products to the United States. Discussions are now in progress between European and Japanese authorities to define a new common trade strategy. But, according to the European Commission, industries in the 10 member countries would find themselves in difficulty if imports of Japanese tubes were stopped.

HEALTH : Additional measures on the ban of hormones used in animal raising

Since the month of October 1980, the principle of banning the use of hormones in animal raising has been accepted throughout Europe. The European Commission has just submitted two additional regulations to the Council of Ministers.

The first provides an exemption for three specific substances that will be permitted for therapeutic use of a precise nature, but not including preventive treatment. The second proposal recommends the introduction of a uniform system of inspection by sampling throughout the Member States, either in the slaughterhouse or at the farm.

EQUALITY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN - A PRINCIPLE OR A REALITY ?
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Men and women are treated equally on the job market - at least in theory they are. In practice, working women have found out how difficult it is to claim their professional rights, to be treated according to their real competence and to avoid sexual discrimination. Statistics prove that working women continue to be discriminated against in their professions compared with their male colleagues. Whereas women account for only 37 % of the European Community's active population, about 45.7 % of them are currently unemployed.

The promotion of equal employment opportunities for men and women has been one of the priority objectives of the European Community's labour policy for several years. Three directives, guaranteeing equal treatment for men and women as regards employment, remuneration and social security have been adopted by EEC ministers (since 1976).

The first two directives have been translated into the national legislations of the Member States, and should, therefore, be applicable throughout the Community. But there is still a long way to go before the provisions included in these laws are effectively applied in practice.

The European Commission has just published a report giving details of the state of play on the translation of the first of these three directives into national laws. Adopted on February 9, 1976, this directive aimed at giving concrete form to the principle whereby men and women would have equal treatment as regards employment, promotion, access to professional training and working conditions.

In order to be applied, each Community directive must be translated into national legislation in the different Member States. It was for this reason that the Commission submitted a detailed questionnaire to the governments of the Member States asking them to give indications of the follow-up to the directives taken on the national level, particularly as regards the adoption of national laws. National committees on women's working conditions were also consulted, as well as European employers associations and trade union representatives.

The Commission's report is a synthesis of the different answers obtained to its questions. The Commission notes, for instance, that with the exception of France and Luxembourg (and of course, Greece), all Member States have adopted general legislation aimed at implementing the principle of equal opportunities for men and women.

However, certain Member States' legislation is more restrictive than the Community directive, and others are formulated in a more or less ambiguous manner which could lead to interpretation difficulties.

The directive gave Member States discretionary powers as regards the exclusion of certain jobs from the scope of application of the directive, but only if this was justified either by the nature of the job in question or by the conditions of work. While most Member States only excluded those professions which are naturally reserved for one or other sex (for instance wet nurse or a soprano singer), others drew up rather exhaustive lists including such professions as customs agents, midwives, etc. . This was particularly the case in Ireland and the United Kingdom. The Commission feels that some of these exceptions are unfair and not compatible with the spirit of the directive, and has requested a group of experts to undertake a study aimed at fixing the guidelines for a more specific policy in this area. This group will also look at the thorny question of measures designed to protect women from certain dangerous jobs.

There is also a problem as regards access to toilets. Denmark considers that firms (and boats) should have facilities for workers of both sexes, whereas the Irish feel that the absence of adequate facilities justifies a restriction to work for a certain sex.

Other Member States are also guilty of going against the provisions of the directive, as regards employment notices, access to employment for pregnant women, equality of access to professional training, or working conditions. The Commission is now getting ready to put pressure on Member States to conform to the directives. There is a general feeling that Member State efforts should be reinforced in the field of educational and professional guidance for women as there is still a general tendency to think in terms of jobs "suited to women".

Finally, the Commission shows a certain amount of reserve as regards the practical implementation of the principles covered by the directive, taking into account the fact that the present economic difficulties make the problem even more complex. As such, it is planning to submit new measures aimed at solving the problems faced by women. These will include the need to disaggregate the job market, allow for mixed employment, prepare women for the utilisation of new technologies, and a better division of labour at home.

The Commission also intends to set up a "European Committee on Equal Opportunities" which will back up these efforts.