

Week of July 1 to 5

Energy : Solar electricity for Europe

Following the launching of the European Commission's new research and development programme on solar energy in February this year, the Commission is now selecting the first dozen solar electricity generating projects which will benefit from EEC funds. Final choice is expected to be made later this year from more than 30 projects submitted to the European Commission.

Each EEC member state will host at least one of these projects which convert sunlight directly into electricity by means of photovoltaic cells. These work in diffused or direct sunlight and even in times of rain. This type of generator has never been built in Europe before. The projects finally selected will have to be completed by the middle of 1983.

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Why it is important for the future of mankind that the industrialised and developing countries launch a new dialogue aimed at a better distribution of international wealth and resources. |

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EDUCATION: What happens after the year of the child?

In our society there is a need to rethink a school system that turns out young people who cannot effectively be incorporated into productive economic activities.

While the year 1979 concentrated on the rights and general treatment of children as part of the world-wide "year of the child", one of the unfinished missions of that effort concerned the need to resolve the problem of education.

That's why the Education Ministers of the European Community or their substitutes had a lot to talk about when they met recently in Brussels. Some of the issues they discussed are fundamental to the future of the society we live in because they touch directly the lives of the 60 million persons under 15 years of age in the European Community. It also had a lot to do with making another effort to try to ease unemployment that affects some 2.2 million young persons in the Community alone. The trend in births and mortality in the member states also ensures that the problem of jobless youths in the Community will get progressively worse in the coming years as more young people come onto the job market at the same time as fewer experienced workers reach retirement age.

The action programme in education that they discussed involved several priority areas. One such area concerned the need to better inform and educate migrant workers and their children both about the culture of the European country they live in and the society they left behind and may eventually return to. Although it is recognised that the existing diversity is a source of strength, another concerns the need to coordinate the various systems of education in the European Community countries so that students can more easily spend part of their educational career in a neighbouring country. An important part of this particular effort is the need to improve the mutual recognition of diplomas, degrees or certificates issued by the various national educational systems. It is also aimed at the promotion of exchanges of students and teachers from one country to the next and the teaching of foreign languages.

All these ideas not only have the worthwhile goal of expanding contacts and understanding about one's next-door neighbours, but it also may help open up employment opportunities in nearby countries as well.

Another aspect of the closer attention devoted to education, however, is naturally the desire to make the systems more relevant to the current employment realities and needs. For instance, many graduates or school leavers today find that they have no useful skills for the job market. So there should be greater meshing of instruction and the job needs, such as in fields where there is a shortage of workers or which are in expansion, such as electronics, or to prepare future generations for more leisure time.

INSTITUTIONS: Opening up the historic archives of the Community

Researchers and historians have just been handed the good news that the historical archives of the European Community will probably be opened in 1982. In conformity with the 30 years foreseen, the 1952 files will be accessible at the beginning in 1982, those for 1953 in 1983 and so on. The European University Institute in Florence will probably be assigned the responsibility of serving as a depository for these archives and microfilm duplicates will also be kept at the European Commission in Brussels. The documents of the Commission will be supplemented by additional archives of the University Institute from a variety of diverse sources. Additional newspaper files, studies, donations of material from various personalities and other institutions will create as complete a record as possible for the public. Nevertheless, since the laws regulating access to archives vary from country to country it will also be necessary to create uniform and equal opportunities to examine the documents in the Community archives and those in the national archives of the member states.

Before the opening up of the files in 1982, therefore, a lot of work will have to be done, to identify and sort the files, to assemble them in some type of order, to begin the process of microfilming them and to publish research tools such as guides, indexes, tables of contents and so on. Some of these preparations have been underway since last year and they have already revealed a number of difficulties. One of the most obvious ones has been the declassification of confidential and secret documents.

Another has been the constitution of mixed files assembled from such diverse sources as institutions, national government ministries or the Community itself. The European Commission in Brussels, in conjunction with national archive experts, is currently studying the best way of resolving such difficult problems. The Community reached its 30th anniversary this year and it's normal that it should begin to promote more study of its origins and past. There's no doubt that this opening will lead to a flourishing of studies and reports on the history and development of the Community.

So that we can improve "EUROFOCUS" and the general service we try to offer to our subscribers, we should be happy to receive any comments, criticisms or suggestions. If you should use any of the copy a reference to "EUROFOCUS" (and possibly a copy of the final article) would be much appreciated.

ENVIRONMENT: Building the ecological car of the future

Somewhere down the road of progress may be an "ecological" car that is more adapted to present day reality than are today's mechanical status symbols. This automobile of the future will be designed and constructed to pollute less, consume less energy and raw materials and probably be safer as well. This is the aim of research being carried out by both European automobile manufacturers and officials. The idea for greater European cooperation in the quest for a cleaner and more efficient car was first raised last year by the German participant at a meeting of European Community Environment Ministers in Brussels. As an immediate result, the nine Community countries agreed on a moderate reduction of the automobile exhaust emissions for a number of pollutants. In addition, the Federal Republic of Germany, supported by Denmark and the Netherlands, also wanted a second and more-far-reaching step as soon as possible at the Community level to bring about an appreciable reduction in emissions and the noise made by motor vehicles, taking into account the energy and economic aspects that such measures would involve.

The European Commission in Brussels was also asked to prepare its ideas on the general characteristics of this car of the future in time for the next Environment Ministers' Council on June 30.

What the Commission visualises is a car operating at an appreciably lower level of emission of pollutants, a reduced level of noise emission, greater energy savings and rational use of construction materials with a view toward recycling.

Following the initial reduction in emissions, the Commission feels that the next step should involve a lowering of noise levels, a problem once regarded as merely a nuisance but now seen as a serious health hazard.

But the experts feel that to avoid jeopardizing the technical developments underway in the industry, a detailed analysis is essential of the energy and economic effects of these objectives. This analysis will have to include thorough forecasting on the expected growth in the number of vehicles, the quantity of noise and other pollutants released and various options to take. Preparatory work on putting together the data has already begun, but a detailed analysis is expected to take more time. In the meantime, the European Commissioner for Industrial Affairs, Etienne Davignon, has also encouraged the European auto industry to undertake cooperative efforts to more effectively meet the challenge represented by possible advantages their American and Japanese competitors have in designing the car of the future.

COMMUNICATIONS: Telephones and a bank unlike any other

Although frequently taken for granted, communications have taken on a vital importance to Europeans, especially in places like the Polar wasteland of Greenland. With a land area that dwarfs other European countries and located 2000 kilometres from Denmark, this country depends on a communications network to develop its industry. It contains some 50,000 inhabitants and needs to grow. As a result, it also relies on the European Investment Bank for help.

The European Investment Bank sometimes crops up in the news, but few Europeans really know or understand its role. It's a special bank that helps Europeans without most of them being aware of it. In effect, it's the bank of the European Community of nine and soon to be 10 members.

As far as communications are concerned, this bank based in Luxembourg has since 1965 helped financing some £ 1,062 million worth of equipment in this sector. And during the last five years alone, its loans for this purpose have amounted to an average of £ 150 million per year. Five countries have been the beneficiaries of this type of aid specifically aimed at developing telecommunications facilities, Italy, France, the United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark, and especially the latter's province of Greenland. About 15 percent of all the bank's loans have been destined for such communications systems.

According to the bank itself, there are about 445 million telephones in operation in the world, with about 100 million of them in the Community, an average of 38 phones per 100 inhabitants. It's a lot but it's also not enough, if one considers that in the United States the number is 77 per 100, in Canada it's 65 and in Japan the figure is 44. Naturally, this number varies greatly from one country to the next and even within different regions of the same country. For example, Luxembourg has proportionally three times more telephones than Ireland. These figures are obviously linked to the standard of living in the individual countries.

This is why the European Investment Bank has sought to stimulate the economic development of a given region through expansion of communications. The demand for telephones, telex and other installations has also increased tremendously in the European Community. Some industries, such as coal mining, scarcely used such systems. But they have been gradually replaced by so-called "light" industries, that use such means heavily. Even agriculture has more and more need for such means of instantaneous communication. The priority is therefore directed towards the Italian Mezzogiorno, France and Ireland. The latter has benefited the most from European Investment Bank financing.

THE NORTH-SOUTH DIALOGUE, A HOPE FOR MANKIND

The world economic picture is grim. Worldwide inflation, industrial slow-down and balance of payment problems prompted by spiralling oil prices are the order of the day not only in the poor countries of the South, but also in the world's leading industrialised nations of the North.

But while the industrialised countries can tighten their belts a little and still cope more or less successfully with the present economic ills, the situation of the Third World countries is, indeed, disastrous.

The increase in oil prices over the last two years has more than doubled the oil bill of the developing countries which now amounts to over 50,000 million dollars. This is expected to drive them into ever-increasing indebtedness, and threaten the whole basis of their economic growth and social progress. The problem is further complicated by chronic food shortages. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), there was a 60-million tonne decrease in world cereal production in 1979. This has created serious food shortages in as many as 25 Third World countries.

These food supply problems are expected to worsen as population continues to increase in both the North and the South. By the year 2000 there will be 6 billion people on earth, compared with the current 4.3 billion.

The gap between the North and the South is growing wider, and given the current state of the world economy it is most unlikely that the poorer countries will be able to catch up with their richer neighbours. This could lead to increasing tensions between the North and South, a factor which could ultimately threaten world peace in general.

But there is a way out. It lies in cooperation and consultation between the North and the South, a recognition of mutual areas of interest and of the fact that, in an interdependent world, no one country or even group of countries can get by alone.

This is the basis of the North-South "dialogue". Frustrated with the current international economic order which gives the Third World only a very minor say in international trade, ^{industrialisation,} and other vital decisions, the developing countries decided that a new series of global negotiations on international economic cooperation would be launched in New York at the Special Session of the UN General Assembly scheduled to be held in September this year. An earlier North-South dialogue was held in Paris in June 1977. While it succeeded in bringing a number of problems, including those related to energy and financing, into the limelight, the Paris meeting was deemed a failure by more than one international expert.

The initiative to launch the new dialogue, however, has been taken by the Third World. These negotiations will aim at reorganising international relations in such crucial areas as energy, raw materials, trade, international finance, and development in general.

The Third World initiative has been welcomed by the rich nations, including the European Economic Community which feels that the North-South dialogue will complement its own regional "dialogues" with the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, the member countries of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Andean countries and other groupings. But while agreeing that the industrialised countries have an obligation to help their poorer partners, the EEC also feels that the oil-exporting nations and Socialist countries should share the responsibility for assisting Third World nations.

This was stressed recently by the seven leading industrial nations at the economic summit held in Venice. The Venice meeting also underlined the fact that the North would "cooperate with the developing countries in energy conservation and development, expansion of exports, enhancement of human skills, and the tackling of underlying food and population problems". The meeting also took note of the report on North-South issues drawn up by a team of international experts working with the former German Chancellor, Willy Brandt. But the seven leaders were unable to agree on whether a "mini" North-South summit should be held early next year, as recommended by the Brandt report.

The European Community has backed the Brandt report's proposals for the launching of an emergency aid programme for the Third World which would deal with the most urgent problems facing the South: energy, food, and balance of payment problems.

Such an emergency action, according to the EEC, should be selective and should tackle the practical and urgent problems of the developing countries which are threatened with strangulation as a result of the increase in oil prices.

Such an action would include a substantial increase in official development assistance to the poorest countries in the form of aid which can be rapidly disbursed through bilateral or multilateral channels. Recent figures published by the OECD's Development Aid Committee indicate that development aid from the North to the South is stagnating rather than increasing. This aid currently totals 22.3 billion dollars.

The role of international financial institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and other regional development banks in the recycling of international financial resources should be increased, according to the EEC. This would also mean making it easier for the developing countries to have access to IMF credit facilities, and increasing the capital of the World Bank.

Finally, the Community proposes that the introduction at international level of credit guarantee and investment protection machinery should also be considered.

In the energy sector, the Community has called for "comprehensive cooperation" between energy producers and consumers which would eliminate future "oil crises" or sudden and abrupt oil price increases. Moreover, the transition to a less oil-dependent world economy should be made. The need to reduce food insecurity is seen as a "moral imperative" by the Community. This was echoed by the Western leaders in Venice who called for "comprehensive long-term strategies to increase food production" and the development of national and international research services in this sector. The North-South question is therefore expected to dominate international discussions in the coming months. Who knows, mankind's survival may lie in the success of the North-South dialogue?

FISHERIES: Towards a common fisheries policy?

Although the Common Agricultural Policy has been operating for about twenty years now, Europe has still to adopt a Common Fisheries Policy. However, this could become a reality by the end of the year, as the Nine could go ahead with the adoption of an EEC-wide fisheries policy - with which they have been struggling for about three years - which could become one of the Community's major, and indeed, concrete achievements.

For the moment, there are only a series of vague transitional measures which distribute fishing rights between the EEC countries. These measures which were to be phased out by June 30, 1980 have now been extended for another month. The European Commission will submit proposals on the definition of quotas between the Community countries, the total allowable catches, and certain conservation measures within a month. The distribution of catches is a rather controversial problem, given the continuing reduction in exploitable stocks and the fact that third countries are increasingly preventing access by European fishing vessels to their waters. Experts were unanimous on the need to stop increases in the allowable catches for herring and cod.