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Mailed from: Brussels X

Journalists

EUROBAROMETER: Eastward ho!

EC citizens warmly welcome the changes taking place in Eastern Europe.

Mikhail Gorbachev is the personality that two-thirds of Europeans would like to see play a more important role in Europe. He topped the poll just ahead of the French President, François Mitterrand, who was followed by Lech Wałęsa and Helmut Kohl. The President of the European Commission, Jacques Delors, came fifth.

These are the results of a poll conducted in all 12 EC countries in the EUROBAROMETER framework from mid-October to mid-November 1989. The fact that the Soviet leader headed the list of European political personalities, while the leader of Solidarity came third, is a clear indication of how the Community's citizens are reacting to developments in Eastern Europe.

To begin with, as many as 93% of them want the Western countries, coordinated by the European Commission, to encourage progress towards democracy. At the same time, 34% regard the programme of immediate food aid to Poland, organized by the Commission, to be "a good thing". Just as many Europeans favour closer economic cooperation between Western and Eastern Europe, while 78% welcome a common policy by the European Community aimed at strengthening links between the two halves of Europe.

The best way to ensure the success of East European programmes for political and economic reform is for the European Community to speed up its own economic, political and monetary integration, in the view of 70% of all those interviewed and as many as 83% of those who expressed an opinion. Britain and Ireland were among the countries that scored above the Community average on this particular issue, along with Portugal, France, Italy, Spain and Luxembourg. Doubts about the attitude of the Germans seem totally unjustified: two-thirds of the Germans interviewed favoured a speed-up in integration, as did some three-quarters of those who expressed an opinion.

The reunification of Germany should not present a threat to the building of Europe, especially in view of the fact that nearly 8 EC citizens out of 10 are in favour of it. The results of the poll in the Federal Republic of Germany in fact matched the Community average exactly. What is more, the 78% of Germans in favour of reunification would dwindle to 18% if it meant leaving

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the European Community. And as for the French, Italians, Greeks, Portuguese and Spaniards, they favoured German reunification even more than the Germans themselves!

On the whole, Europeans merit the name. As many as 89% of those who expressed an opinion are in favour of European unification and 53% of them would be "very sorry" if the Community were to be dissolved (as compared to 48% last spring).

The Community's citizens are highly conscious of social issues. Thus 70% considered the Social Charter of minimum rights for workers, approved by 11 Member States at the Strasbourg summit, to be "a good thing". The percentage in fact rose to 79 in the case of those who expressed an opinion.

Britain may have refused to adopt the Charter but its citizens feel differently about it. Some 67% of them approve of it (more than the Germans, French, Luxembourgers and Danes). The score rose to 75% in the case of those who expressed an opinion, as compared to the 16% who thought it "a bad thing" and the 8% who were indifferent to it.

Clearly there is overwhelming support for the idea of a "European social space" and a feeling that the single market must not be achieved at the expense of workers. At the same time a growing number of Europeans put their hopes in the completion of the single market, the percentage having risen from 72 in the spring of 1989 to 96% in October/November, when the latest poll was conducted. Fewer than one in 10 continue to regard "1992" as "a bad thing" and no more than one in 20 is "very worried".

HIGHER EDUCATION: 2 to 3% of "European" students between 1990 and 1995

The Twelve adopt the second phase of the ERASMUS programme.

During the academic years between 1990/91 and 1994/95, some 2 to 3% of European Community students will be able to undertake a part of their studies in another Community country than their own. The period of time spent away from their own university will nevertheless count towards their degree or diploma, thanks to a decision of the EC's education ministers in mid-December, extending the interuniversity exchange programme, known as ERASMUS and launched in June 1987 for a second, 5-year phase.

The first phase, which entered its third academic year this autumn, has been an unqualified success. Before the launch of ERASMUS the EC helped some 2,500 young people study in another Community country. During the 1989/90 academic year their numbers will have swelled to some 25,000. As many as 8,000 higher education teachers will be able to undertake study visits or train in another Community country, while nearly 1,000 establishments of higher education will enjoy the EC's financial support in order to carry out joint activities with their European counterparts.

The programme's success can also be measured in terms of the number of demands for financial aid, which has always greatly exceeded the sums available. The Twelve have made a special effort in the case of ERASMUS II: they have granted it ECU 192mn.* for the first three years of the second phase. This is twice as much as was allocated for the same period during the first phase.

Among the other innovations: the division among the Twelve of the funds intended for student scholarships will hereafter take account of the distance between the interested countries and differences in the cost of living between one EC country and another. ERASMUS will also be thrown open to students that have been excluded so far - essentially those who have completed one set of studies in their own country and would like to begin another elsewhere in the EC. ERASMUS II will also make it possible to finance for three years - and not just one as at present - interuniversity cooperation programmes. Finally, administrative changes should make the programme more suited to university needs.

* 1 ECU = UK£0.73 or IR£0.77

A PEOPLE'S EUROPE: When in Italy, start with a visit to the police station

The EC Court of Justice finds that Italy gives nationals of other EC countries little time to notify their presence.

The leaning tower of Pisa, the Palace of the Doges and St. Peter's Square no doubt all merit a visit when in Italy; but a police station beats all of them hollow. This, at any rate, is the firm conviction of the Italians who require all Europeans visiting their country to call at a police station, in order to notify the authorities of their presence. Failure to do so can result in heavy fines of up to ECU 270* and even imprisonment.

A German national, an employee, one Mr Messmer, who came to Italy to work, was dragged before the country's courts for having failed to inform the police authorities in Volterra of his presence. Mr Messmer should have done so within three days of having crossed the border, as required under the Italian law on public safety.

This hardly allows one time to reach one's destination, track down the competent authorities and learn about the formalities to be carried out. Never mind. In Italian eyes Mr Messmer was guilty of having undermined public safety. But the German refused to take the matter lying down; he took it to the EC Court of Justice in Luxembourg. The Court recognized the right of Member States to require strangers to notify their presence, even though they were nationals of another EC country. But it held that the period of three days was "excessively constraining" and the penalties totally disproportionate.

Any such obligation as the Italian must not threaten the rules governing the free movement of persons. But this free movement has aroused a good many reservations in several Member States, and this on the eve of 1992 and among some of the staunchest supporters of Europe, such as Germany, France and the Benelux countries, who have put off the signature of the Schengen accord on the elimination next year of the frontiers between them.

The Court's ruling is all the more important in that it could set a precedent. Only France and Ireland do not require foreigners to notify their presence, while Germany threatens with a fine, that can be as high as ECU 2,500 those EC nationals who do not signal their presence on German soil for professional reasons.

* 1 ECU = UK£0.73 or IR£0.77

AGRICULTURE: Disappearing wine lakes and butter mountains

European stocks fell sharply in 1989.

The butter mountain is continuing to melt. It came to no more than 32,000 tonnes at the end of September 1989, as compared with 221,000t. the year before and more than one million tonnes in 1987. The wine lake is drying up at the same time, having shrunk to 4,800t. last September, as compared to 14,000t. the year before and 721,000t. in September 1987. According to figures published by the European Commission in December, the European Community's total agricultural surplus was worth ECU 1,600mn.* on 30 September 1989, as compared to ECU 4,600t. in September 1988, and ECU 10,600mn. in September 1987.

For the European Commission, the sharp fall in Community-held stocks recorded in 1989 was due mainly to the rise in low-priced exports of dairy products, olive oil and grain; the measures taken to dispose of surplus beef and veal and - accounting methods. The book value of stocks is now based on the prices at which they could be resold, rather than their actual cost to the Community budget under the price support programme.

In volume terms stocks of certain products have remained largely unchanged since last year. This is true of soft wheat and barley, for example. Stocks of maize, rye, alcohol and tobacco have even risen. The problem of agricultural surpluses has not disappeared altogether.

* 1 ECU = UK£0.73 or IR£0.77

AGRICULTURE: Turning plants into petrol and plastics

The European Commission wants to encourage the non-food use of agricultural products.

No more than 2% of the EC's agricultural production is put to non-food use at present. This is far too little, in the European Commission's view; and it is asking the Twelve to encourage alternative uses of agricultural raw materials. The fact is that if industrial outlets, for example, could be found for the Community's agricultural surpluses, it would no longer be necessary to sell them off cheaply at the European taxpayers' expense - and often against a background of disputes with competitor countries, such as the United States.

The Commission has proposed that this policy of promoting non-food uses for agricultural products be launched with cereals, which are both in surplus and offer several industries outlets,

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especially for the manufacture of alcohol for motor vehicles and biodegradable plastics. Cereals are produced throughout the 12-nation Community; and as the support price is not much above the world price, the cost to the Community budget would be relatively small. The Commission in fact is proposing to subsidize cereal farmers who can find a non-food outlet and enter into a delivery contract, at prices close to world market prices, with the industry in question. In return for the subsidy, farmers would have to put part of their holdings into set-aside.

The Commission is also proposing to cofinance, with interested industrial firms, agro-industrial demonstration projects. Projects which use raw materials currently held in stock by the Community could obtain them at favourable prices. Finally, the Commission would like an expert committee to be set up to follow and, if necessary, monitor all relevant activity in the non-food sector.

TRADE: An end to border checks on meat and other animal products

The Twelve agree to replace them with checks at point of shipment.

The Twelve took a further step towards the single market on 11 December 1989, when their agricultural ministers agreed to eliminate veterinary checks at the European Community's internal frontiers and replace them with checks at the point of shipment.

This measure should put an end to the occasional scandal of meat shipments which have been examined at border checkpoints, under conditions which are open to criticism, as when containers are left standing for hours until veterinary inspectors can look at them. It remains to be seen how this new European legislation, adopted unanimously by the Twelve will be applied. The fact is that although border checks on certain types of meat have already been eliminated on paper, they continue to be carried out.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS: An open network and joint research for 1992
The Twelve agree to a single telecom market.

Telecommunications will play their part in the 1992 single market. The EC Council of Ministers reached agreement on December 7 on a European law which allows a telecommunications network open to competition to be set up. This "law", the exact text of which will be formally adopted later, will set out common European rules for gaining access to telecommunications networks and public services and using them.

As for the technical aspects of the future European network, the Council intends setting up an expert body, which will continue existing research programmes for an integrated wide band communication system. This is a kind of Community-wide electronic highway which can handle telephone calls as well as data and document transmission. The body would allow equipment manufacturers, PTTs and telecom users to work together. A special group, made up of representatives of the Twelve will study the eventual setting up of such a body.

VOCATIONAL TRAINING: The new technologies at work
The Twelve adopt the EUROTECNET programme.

From this January vocational training can take account of the new technologies with the European Community's financial backing, thanks to the EUROTECNET programme, adopted by the EC Council of Ministers on 30 November 1989.

With a budget of ECU 7.5mn.* for three years, EUROTECNET will enable the European Community to help finance new training methods to introduce workers to the new technologies, especially computers. The programme pays particular attention to the needs of small and medium-sized businesses and non-skilled and semi-skilled workers.

The results of the EUROTECNET programme will be publicized throughout the 12-nation Community, thanks to a network provided for in the programme.

* 1 ECU = UKL0.73 or IRL0.77

ROAD TRANSPORT: The trucks are en route to 1992

Carriers press for a key role in the single European market at a European Commission round table.

The 1992 single market will bring about a good many changes for carriers. Faced with a genuine single market, they will have to see to it that they can offer a better service and at cheaper rates than their competitors, without at the same time damaging the environment. The European Commission has promised them its help as they cope with this particular bend in the road.

At the round table, which brought together carriers from all over the 12-nation Community, the European Transport Commissioner, Karel Van Miert, pressed for a guarantee of fair and loyal competition for all carriers, including small ones. He pointed out that there would be a place for everyone on the 1992 motorway. It will be up to the public authorities to adapt the infrastructure to the needs of the single market, and to reorganize road taxation on the basis of the principles of healthy competition, a fair remuneration and a contribution to environmental protection.

The European Commission itself will intervene mainly on the social level. Mr Van Miert undertook to re-examine Community legislation, especially as regards rest periods for truck drivers. "My aim", he said, "will be to guarantee drivers genuine rest."

Greater road safety and reduced environmental damage from road transport are also among the Transport Commissioner's main preoccupations. In this context Mr Van Miert stressed the need to encourage combined transport, which is both clean and safe.