



a newssheet for journalists

Weekly n° 19/90

11 - 18 June 1990

S U M M A R Y

- P. 2 CARS: "European" civil liability insurance
The Twelve decide to secure better guarantees for accident victims.
- AIR TRAVEL: Interline tickets for tailor-made journeys
The European Commission secures facilities for consumers.
- P. 3 ENVIRONMENT: The Euro-MPs favour help for the victims of Chernobyl
Some 4mn. Soviet citizens live in zones contaminated by radioactivity.
- P. 4 SOCIETY: Sexual harassment at work in the dock
For the Twelve it is contrary to Community legislation.
- EDUCATION: How are 15mn. handicapped young persons to be trained?
The Twelve want to integrate them into the regular educational system.
- P. 5 ENVIRONMENT: A list and a label to protect animals
Two possible ways of saving "guinea pigs".
- EASTERN EUROPE: Attitudes towards German unification seem more reserved ...
... although there is a majority in favour of it in all 12 EC countries.
- P. 6 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: The Autant-Lara incident will not be repeated
Euro-MPs do away with an inaugural address by the oldest member of the House.
- P. 7 DRUGS: The European Commission proposes to fight drugs ...
... by keeping a close watch on trade in the chemicals used to process them.
- P. 8 TECHNOLOGY: European achievements on display
Successes of the BRITE/EURAM programme.
- TECHNOLOGY: 107 new projects in the ESPRIT programme ...
... to help the EC keep up in the information technology race.
- P. 9 ENERGY: The EC's balance sheet for 1989
The EC is more economic in its use of energy - but also more dependent on outside suppliers.

Mailed from: Brussels X

Journalists

CARS: "European" civil liability insurance

The Twelve decide to secure better guarantees for accident victims.

From 1 January 1993* motorists will be offered more extensive guarantees under the civil liability provisions of their insurance policy, thanks to an approximation upwards agreed on by the European Community's ministers on May 14.

Thus passengers will be automatically covered, which is not the case throughout the 12-nation European Community at present, even when the passenger in question is in fact the owner of the car, being driven by someone else. In addition, the victims of an accident caused by a driver who cannot be traced or is not insured, will be compensated without having to prove that the person responsible for the accident either cannot or does not want to compensate them.

What is more, civil liability insurance contracted in one EC country will be valid throughout all 12 Member States, and will entitle the policy holder to a green card, without any additional payment. Finally, should an accident occur in an EC country other than the one for which the policy was issued, the victim will be covered by the provisions of the more generous of the two countries.

* as from 1 January 1996 in Ireland, Greece, Portugal and Spain, from 1 January 1999 in the case of Irish motorcyclists.

AIR TRAVEL: Interline tickets for tailor-made journeys

The European Commission secures facilities for consumers.

Passengers flying between London and either of the two German cities of Munich and Düsseldorf are the first to profit from moves by the European Commission, aimed at maintaining interline facilities for flights between the 12 European Community countries. Under these facilities a travel agent can sell a passenger a single ticket, valid for travel by a number of airlines. He can thus fly to his destination by the airline mentioned on the ticket and return by another airline flying the same route. He can even continue his journey to destinations not served by the company which issued the ticket, and change his reservations, travel plans and airlines after having obtained his ticket.

(Contd.)

(Contd.)

Such facilities can be of interest to both businessmen and tourists. In any case, the system was made possible by an agreement between most of the world's airlines, within the framework of the International Air Transport Association (IATA). It has practically disappeared from the United States, but the European Commission is determined to see that it is maintained within the Community, given its advantages for travellers and its stimulating effect on competition between airlines.

The Commission's intervention followed a complaint from a small airline, Air Europe, after Lufthansa had withdrawn the authorization which allowed Air Europe to issue tickets for routes flown by the German airline. The former had been "guilty" in fact of charging less than Lufthansa on the London-Munich route.

The Commission took the view that Lufthansa's attitude looked very much like an attempt to take advantage of a monopoly position, which clearly is contrary to the Treaty of Rome, the "European Constitution". The Commission nevertheless held that a passenger holding a ticket issued by Air Europe cannot board a Lufthansa flight without paying a supplement in the event of differences in the fares charged by the two airlines. The two have now concluded an agreement on this basis; this allows them to reintroduce interline facilities.

The Commission wrote in mid-May to all the major airlines explaining its policy in the matter. It announced at the same time its decision to act against other refusals to apply the interline formula.

ENVIRONMENT: The Euro-MPs favour help for the victims of Chernobyl

Some 4mn. Soviet citizens live in zones contaminated by radioactivity.

To help improve the lot of some four million people living in areas of the Soviet Union contaminated by the nuclear accident at Chernobyl, the European Parliament has asked the European Commission and Council of Ministers to organize emergency medical and food aid. The request is contained in a resolution voted on May 17. The areas in question are in the Ukraine, Byelorussia and Russia. The Euro-MPs have also proposed that the Community offer holidays in its Member States to Soviet children from the areas hit by the disaster. Although Chernobyl occurred four years ago, the West did not learn of the extent of the human tragedy until this year.

SOCIETY: Sexual harassment at work in the dock

For the Twelve it is contrary to Community legislation.

If the boss of a company or a department head makes pressing advances to one of his female employees, accompanied by promises of career advancement, or the threat of dismissal, he is violating one of the "Community laws" designed to put into practice the principle of sexual equality at work, embodied in the Treaty of Rome, the European Community's "Constitution". This was reaffirmed by the EC's employment ministers in a resolution they adopted at the end of May. The ministers at the same time asked their respective civil services to launch information campaigns on this theme, in order to alert both employers and employees.

The ministers also asked the European Commission to continue its information activities, aimed at the workplace, on the one hand, and judges, lawyers and other members of the legal profession on the other. The fact is that victims of sexual harassment at work will be the better able to defend their rights, and obtain compensation, if they are better informed, advised and protected.

Finally, the employment ministers asked the Commission to prepare by 1 July 1991 a code of good conduct, setting out the broad outlines of measures likely to create a climate of "mutual respect" at work. The code will draw inspiration from effective national initiatives in this field.

EDUCATION: How are 15mn. handicapped young persons to be trained?

The Twelve want to integrate them into the regular educational system.

Nearly one European in 10 is handicapped. Together they number some 30mn. in all and half of them are young people. The 12 EC countries believe that in order to train these 15mn. handicapped young people an attempt must be made to integrate them into the regular educational system; the role of special establishments for the handicapped can only be a supplementary one. The EC's education ministers made just this point in a resolution adopted at the end of May. They consider it necessary, therefore, to devote fresh resources to the teaching of the handicapped, to give special training to teachers and to make better use of the new technologies. The European Commission, for its part, is undertaking to facilitate the participation of the handicapped in all programmes organized by it in the fields of education, vocational training and youth activities.

ENVIRONMENT: A list and a label to protect animals

Two possible ways of saving "guinea pigs".

Consumer protection is often at the expense of our four-footed friends. Hence the forthcoming preparation of a new "European law" guaranteeing the safety of cosmetics will require the verification of a series of substances and ingredients used in the preparation of soaps, toothpastes and sun-tan lotions. There is a need, in fact, to up-date existing Community rules in the light of "1992", even while taking into account both scientific progress and the birth of new products.

In order to prevent verification from leading to unnecessary laboratory tests on animals, the European Commissioner for consumer protection, Karel Van Miert, is thinking of having drawn up a list of all harmless substances that can be used in the manufacture of cosmetics within the 12-nation European Community. These substances at least would not require laboratory tests by the industry. Mr Van Miert also intends to have studies made of the idea for a label telling consumers that the product in question did not involve tests on animals.

EASTERN EUROPE: Attitudes towards German unification seem more reserved ...

... although there is a majority in favour of it in all 12 EC countries.

European public opinion seemed to show less enthusiasm for German unification this spring than last autumn, when the Berlin Wall came down, according to a Eurobarometer poll carried out in March and April of this year for the European Commission. Those in favour, in the 12-nation European Community as a whole, dropped by 71%, as against 78% of those polled last October and November. The European Commission has stressed that the results of the two polls are not altogether comparable, because of differences in polling methods.

The Commission nevertheless notes that the more lukewarm response to German unification is especially evident in the countries bordering Germany - Belgium, France, Luxembourg and the Netherlands - and could point to a shift in public opinion. At the same time support for unification has declined only marginally in the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy and Spain.

(Contd.)

(Contd.)

Despite these shifts, some 70% of Europeans consider that, given the changes in Central and Eastern Europe, the Community ought to speed up its economic, political and monetary integration. This view was most strongly advocated by the Italians and Spanish, with the Danes at the opposite end of the spectrum. Those polled chose this option from a list of seven possible reactions. More than 60% were also ready to allow the countries of Central and Eastern Europe to benefit from Community research and student exchange programmes and to conclude with them association agreements based on close economic cooperation. But only 30% of those polled thought the Community should reduce its subsidies to the less developed regions of the EC in order to help the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe.

The Eurobarometer poll also showed that more than 80% want most social rights to be regulated by the Community, including health and safety protection at work; protection of the social rights of the elderly; protection of young workers; integration of the disabled into working life; protection of women at work; job-related training; workers' participation in decisions affecting the life of the company; hours of work and holidays and the setting of minimum wages. These results support the social action programme presented by the European Commission.

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: The Autant-Lara incident will not be repeated

Euro-MPs do away with an inaugural address by the oldest member of the House.

The inaugural address which marks the opening of the first session of a newly elected European Parliament will be delivered hereafter by its President, and not its oldest member, as has been the case so far. The Euro-MPs decided on May 16 to avoid any repetition of the incident which occurred last July, when the aged French film director, Claude Autant-Lara, representing the National Front, made remarks which were hardly representative of Parliament as a whole.

DRUGS: The European Commission proposes to fight drugs ...

... by keeping a close watch on trade in the chemicals used to process them.

Europeans tend to point an accusing finger at the developing countries that tolerate the production of opium poppy, Indian hemp, coca and similar plants on their soil. But they often forget that but for certain chemical substances manufactured in the West, including the 12-nation European Community, there would be no cocaine or heroin of a quality suitable for human "consumption", nor LSD and amphetamines. In order to prevent these chemicals from entering the international drug chain, at a time when the developing countries are making a considerable effort to reduce their own "production", the European Commission proposed to the Twelve at the end of May that a close watch be kept on trade in these chemicals between the Community and the rest of the world.

The fact is the substances in question are not made in underground laboratories run by drug traffickers. On the contrary, they are turned out by perfectly respectable companies. They include acids and solvents, whose manufacture cannot be banned as they are used to produce paints and varnishes and glues, for example.

The European Commission fears, however, that drug traffickers will turn to European suppliers for their requirements, now that their main source of supply, the United States, is drying up. The fact is that Washington recently introduced very strict laws in this area. The Commission, not surprisingly, would like the Twelve to adopt common regulations, in view of the scale of the problem and the emerging 1992 single market.

It is proposing, therefore, to keep a close watch on 12 chemical substances through four types of measures: manufacturers, traders and others with a professional interest in these substances would be required to maintain special registers; shipments of certain substances would have to be notified in advance; the competent authorities would have the possibility of delaying, or even blocking, these shipments if they had doubts as to their final destination and an obligation to the Twelve to provide for rather severe penalties. In addition, this surveillance would be accompanied by an effective exchange of information among the Twelve.

TECHNOLOGY: European achievements on display

Successes of the BRITE/EURAM* programme.

Making the main components of a car engine from a mixture of plastics and fibres, rather than metal, as at present, can result in reduced petrol consumption and a shorter warm-up time. The Ford Company's plants in Britain and Germany have proved this at the experimental level, in a project involving researchers from other companies, a research institute and a university, representing four European countries in all. Their project was among the 10 presented during the third BRITE/EURAM Technological Days, held in Brussels at the end of May.

The BRITE/EURAM programme, which seeks to reinvigorate traditional industries through the injection of advanced technologies, has a number of other achievements to its credit. They include artificial blood vessels made from synthetic polymers which can co-exist with human blood; "machines which see" and can automatically control quality in factories; a sheet-metal welding laser for use in the automobile and aircraft industries and a flexible unit capable of taking pieces of fabric from two piles of pre-cut material and superimposing them so they can be quickly assembled.

According to the European Commissioner for research, Filippo Maria Pandolfi, the particular specialization of the 12-nation Community is in the application of advanced technologies to traditional sectors; and it should help the Twelve compete successfully on world markets.

TECHNOLOGY: 107 new projects in the ESPRIT programme**

... to help the EC keep up in the information technology race.

As many as 107 new research projects in the field of information technology should be launched before the summer of 1990. They were selected by the European Commission on May 18, with the help of more than 200 independent experts, and will receive aid amounting to ECU 345mn.*** in all from the Community budget under the ESPRIT programme. This brings to 500 the number of ESPRIT projects and to 6,000 the number of researchers working full time on the development of new technologies - including new electronic chips - and European standards, thanks to ESPRIT.

* Basic Research in Industrial Technologies for Europe/Euram
Research in Advanced Materials

** European Strategic Programme for research and development
in Information Technologies

*** 1 ECU = UK£0.74 or IR£0.76

ENERGY: The EC's balance sheet for 1989

The EC is more economic in its use of energy - but also more dependent on outside suppliers.

The 12-nation European Community was relatively more economic in its use of energy last year. Energy consumption rose by 1.9% as compared to 1988, while industrial production increased by 3.8% and GDP, or Gross Domestic Product, by 3.4%, according to figures published in mid-May by Eurostat, the EC's statistical office in Luxembourg. Exceptionally mild weather conditions helped the Community turn in such good results.

The situation varied from one Member State to another, of course. Energy consumption rose by more than 9% in Greece and Spain, by 7% in Portugal and 6.1% in Luxembourg. More moderate rises were recorded in France (4.2%), Italy (3.1%) and Britain (1.2%), while the rise was negligible in Belgium and the Netherlands. Energy consumption was unchanged in Ireland and even fell in Germany (1.7%) and Denmark (3.9%).

Nuclear energy recorded the largest rise in consumption - 7.9%, as against 5.5% for lignite (brown coal), 4.5% for natural gas and less than 1% for coal and oil. Consumption of hydroelectric power declined because of a sharp fall in production. Production of coal and oil fared little better, so that the Community's total energy production fell by 2.3% last year as compared to 1988. Only nuclear energy recorded a rise in production - by more than 10% in Spain and France and more than 9% in Britain and the Netherlands.

The fall in production led to a 7.9% rise in net imports. The Community had to buy more oil, coal and natural gas from outside suppliers. As a result, its external energy dependence rose from 46% in 1988 to nearly 49% last year. Net imports into some Member States even jumped - by some 10% in the case of Spain and Italy and over 20% in that of Portugal. Even Britain, a net energy exporter until recently, became a net importer last year, along with the rest of the Community.