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SOCIETY: Surplus oranges, lemons and apples for charity

A European Commission initiative to prevent fruit from being destroyed.

Each year fruit which is surplus to the European Community's needs - and the quantities involved can be very large - is destroyed, in order to prevent a fall in both prices and farm incomes. Producers are compensated for the quantities "withdrawn from the market", in EC jargon, by the Community. The produce has been sharply criticized, both in the European Parliament and elsewhere. Hence the European Commission's plan to distribute surplus apples, oranges and lemons among the poor.

The Commission took the necessary steps at the end of July, putting organizations representing fruit growers in touch with charities. The latter will distribute among the poor the apples and citrus fruit that would otherwise be destroyed. The Community will meet the cost of sorting and packaging the fruit for distribution.

ENERGY: Security of supplies at the Community level

The EC's energy ministers opt for a common policy.

After having failed to deal with two oil shocks as a Community, the Twelve have now decided to treat the problem of meeting the energy requirements of individual Member States on a Community basis. Their energy ministers adopted the idea of a common policy, which the European Commission advocates, at a meeting in Rome on July 17..

The EC, which had reduced its dependence on energy imports from 57% of total consumption in 1979 to 44.2% in 1986, allowed it to rise to 49% last year. The fact is that in spite of everything the Twelve have so far dealt with the problem of security of energy supplies on a purely national basis. But such an approach seems outdated as the Twelve work for a single market, an economic and monetary union and a measure of political union. The Twelve have got the message; they must now take the necessary steps.

A PEOPLE'S EUROPE: Is an end to baggage checks in sight?

The European Commission wants ports and airports to think "1992".

For travellers within the 12-nation European Community the brusque command by customs officials to open a suitcase or a handbag could be a thing of the past ... if the EC Council of Ministers adopts the regulation - "European law" - proposed by the European Commission at the beginning of August.

It provides for the elimination of all baggage checks for everyone travelling within the Community itself by air or boat. The measure would come into force on 1 January 1993, the date set for the opening of the single market.

However, in order to keep checks as simple as possible, the Commission has provided for a number of exceptions. Thus someone travelling from Athens to Rome on a flight arriving from Cairo - or vice versa - would nevertheless have his baggage checked. So would a traveller from Britain to Denmark, on a boat which stopped off at a Swedish - non-EC - port. Finally, those using pleasure boats would remain subject to the present controls.

ENVIRONMENT: Mediterranean fish under threat

The European Commission proposes a "freeze" on fishing in the EC's southern waters.

Scorpion and swordfish, along with other Mediterranean varieties of fish, are not as lucky as their Northern cousins. They are threatened not only by marine pollution but also the unrestricted fishing which is common practice in their waters. The European Commission sounded the alarm at the beginning of July, when it warned the Twelve that the survival of both the fish and fishermen was at stake.

The Commission wants to regulate fishing in the Community's Mediterranean waters, but on a different basis than in its northern waters. Rather than limit catches it wants to introduce a system of Community licenses for fishermen, and to replace nets which sweep the waters with equipment which would limit catches to certain species.

ENVIRONMENT: Improving the safety of nuclear installations

The European Commission proposes a new programme of research.

Chernobyl remains firmly engraved in everyone's memory. Closer to home are the incidents which have occurred on several occasions in nuclear installations within the European Community. Clearly more work has to be done to ensure a satisfactory level of safety. The European Commission therefore proposed to the Twelve in early August a new research programme, aimed at extending through 1994 the work that has been undertaken since more than 15 years, by concentrating it on the immediate problem of exposure to radiation and safety in the event of an accident.

The British authorities were recently obliged to advise past and present employees of the country's nuclear installations to refrain from having children, because of the high level of radiation they had absorbed at work. This one example is enough to demonstrate the usefulness of a study into the effects and risks of exposure to radiation. The Commission is of the view that such studies would make it possible to draw up European safety standards and regulations.

The programme it has proposed would cost the Community budget ECU 200mn.*. But it also covers a study of the safety of nuclear installations in the event of an accident and the best ways of remedying eventual human errors.

INFLATION: A moderate price rise in June

Up by 0.3% in the 12-nation European Community as a whole.

After rising rather sharply during the first five months of the year, prices rose by a more moderate 0.3% in June, in the 12-nation European Community as a whole. Only Greece recorded a sharp rise (2.2%), while prices even fell slightly in Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Denmark.

The inflation rate over 12 months remained relatively high at 5.4%, as compared to 4.7% for the United States and only 2.2% for Japan. When these figures were released by the EC's statisticians at the end of July, the European Commissioner for economic affairs, Henning Christophersen, warned the Twelve that monetary union required price stability.

* 1 ECU = UK£0.70 or IR£0.77

VOCATIONAL TRAINING: Three initiatives for "1992"

ECU 600mn. for new qualifications, women and handicapped people.

The European Community will spend ECU 600mn.* over the period 1990 to 1993 to give a European dimension to vocational training in three areas: the development of new qualifications, born of technological progress; better employment opportunities for women in the integration of handicapped and other disadvantaged people into the labour market. End July, the European Commission launched three initiatives to these ends.

The first, EUROFORM, is to receive ECU 300mn. It will help companies and interested bodies draw up European training programmes to meet the new needs created by the forthcoming single market and the technological revolution.

The second initiative, baptized NOW, will have a budget of ECU 120mn. Its aim is to improve the vocational training of women, in order to guarantee sex equality in practice in the area of jobs. The third initiative, HORIZON, will receive ECU 180mn. from Community funds. It will facilitate the access to the labour market of the handicapped and disadvantaged in depressed areas of the Community, by helping Member States do more for them, to prevent their being marginalized.

VOCATIONAL TRAINING: Exchanges between universities and businesses are doing well

A major success for the European COMETT programme in 1990.

The success of the COMETT programme of cross-border technological exchanges between universities and businesses has exceeded the hopes of the European Commission, which launched it four years ago. The programme has received more than 2,300 requests for funds, and has selected 845 of them. As a result, 3,777 students will be able to undergo training in a company located in another European country and 158 university/enterprise training partnerships will be launched.

COMETT encourages cooperation between universities and companies, bodies which generally tend to ignore each other in Europe. At the same time, the programme makes it possible to overcome national frontiers. This year universities and companies located in the European Free Trade Association (Austria, Switzerland and the Nordic countries) have shown that they, too, are interested in COMETT. During their first year they have submitted 155 projects.

* 1 ECU = UK£0.70 or IR£0.77