

a newssheet for journalists

Weekly n° 33/90

22 - 29 October 1990

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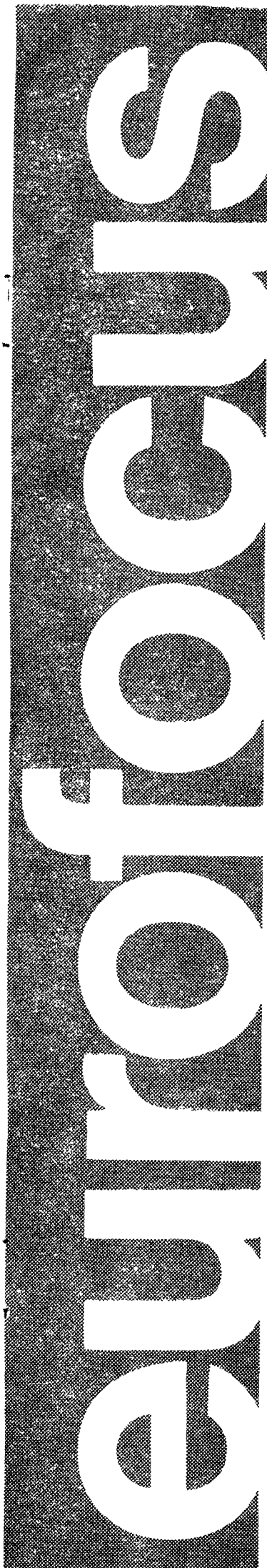
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Mailed from: Brussels X



ENVIRONMENT: Europe's forests are going up in flames

The European Parliament wants forests to be better protected and fires fought more effectively.

Each year hundreds of thousands of acres of forest go up in flames in the European Community, because of a veritable epidemic of fires, most of them criminal in origin. Some of the most beautiful regions of Europe, especially along the Mediterranean coast, have been devastated in this way. The damage, in terms of lives lost and trees burned to the ground, is incalculable. And yet the same tragic story repeats itself each summer.

This senseless waste prompted the European Parliament to debate the subject thoroughly and to invite the European Commission to adopt stronger Community-wide measures to prevent forest fires and to fight them more effectively when they do break out. To this end the Euro-MPs adopted two resolutions, the first of which calls for both emergency aid for regions devastated by fire and a reforestation programme. The second resolution calls for better training programmes and increased cooperation between the EC countries. The Euro-MPs want priority given to the creation of a Community-wide centralized information system and better coordination and joint use of methods of fighting forest fires from the air.

To this end Parliament has asked the Community institutions to earmark additional funds from the Community budget to meet these requirements. It has also called on Member States to replant burnt out forests in order to end speculation in the property market, which often is at the origin of forest fires.

The European Commission largely shares the views of the Euro-MPs, as the Commissioner for Mediterranean policy, Mr Abel Matutes, has made clear. He has pointed out that the standing committee on forests has already set up a working group to study both the causes of forest fires and the different means of fighting them. The Commission's efforts are currently directed towards fighting the causes of forest fires, one of the most important of which is property speculation. The Commission in fact wants forests destroyed by fire to be replanted, to ensure that these are not built on.

Improvement and prevention are also priority objectives. A 1987 regulation, which could be improved, allows the replanting of densely forested land within the framework of the development and use of forest resources.

TRANSPORT: Harmonizing technical standards for aircraft

The European Commission wants to ensure that high safety levels are maintained.

At the initiative of the European Transport Commissioner, Karel Van Miert, the European Commission has adopted a proposal for a directive (Community "law") aimed at harmonizing the technical standards regarding the classification, use and maintenance of aircraft, in order to maintain high safety standards in Europe and to ensure the free circulation of aircraft within the Community's frontiers.

The fact that these standards are not uniform makes it difficult, and certainly expensive, to transfer aircraft registered in one EC country to another. The European Commission therefore wants to make obligatory the adoption of common codes governing technical standards for aircraft. In order to avoid a waste of resources and duplication of efforts, the Commission suggests that the standards of the Joint Aviation Authority (JAA) be used as the basis for Community standards. The JAA is drafting, under the auspices of the European Civil Aviation Commission (ECAC) codes and technical procedures regarding the certification of aircraft, engines and other equipment used in aircraft.

UNEMPLOYMENT: On the rise for the first time in more than a year

The European Commission voices its concern.

Unemployment in the 12-nation European Community rose in August for the first time in more than a year, to stand at 8.4%, as against 8.3% the previous month. The rise, which comes after five months of stability in the level of unemployment, could raise serious doubts as to whether the downward trend, which began in 1986, will continue. For the experts at Eurostat, the EC's statistical office, this rise, which affects those under 25 more than their elders, is due to the massive arrival on the labour market of school-leavers. Even so it is seen as a matter for concern by the European Commissioner for economic affairs, Henning Christophersen.

He maintains that the threat of a rise in unemployment levels and the new oil shock should incite the EC governments to move more quickly towards economic and monetary union, which should lead to the introduction of a single currency.

INTERNAL MARKET: Customs formalities to be further reduced

... and to be done away with altogether on 1 January 1993.

Goods produced within the 12-nation European Community will be able to cross the EC's internal borders somewhat more easily after 1 March 1991. This is the date on which the regulation which effectively does away with loads of paperwork comes into force, following its adoption by the European Commission on 11 October. The complete elimination of all customs facilities has been set for 1 January 1993.

Under the new system a simple commercial document, such as a bill, will constitute proof of Community origin. The document will have to be presented to the customs authorities at the point of departure in the case of consignments valued at ECU 4,800* or more. Even this will not be necessary in the case of smaller consignments.

* 1 ECU = UK£0.70 or IR£0.77

RESEARCH: Treasures of the mind and body

More effective medicines and vaccines, robots that work to even more exacting tolerances and more powerful computers - these are the likely spin-offs from a vast programme of international research entitled the Human Frontier Science Programme. The result of a Japanese initiative in 1987, the programme aims to promote basic research into the human organism, in particular the higher brain functions. It was launched last year with the participation of seven major Western industrialized countries: Britain, France, Germany, Italy, the United States, Canada and Japan itself. At the end of last month the European Commission decided to take part in the experimental stage of the programme, which is set to end on 31 March 1992.

In practice, the Commission's participation will enable scientists from all 12 Community countries to join international research teams and to work in other participating countries. The Commission feels it is in the Community's interest to maintain links with advanced research throughout the world in fields such as biotechnology, computers and genetics, fields in which the EC has its own research programmes.

As industrial applications tend to follow scientific discoveries ever more closely, the Commission believes that the research under the Human Frontier's programme into the mechanisms of knowledge, memory and language can lead rather quickly to saleable products. In any case, at the end of the experimental stage the Commission will assess the results to see if continuing participation in the programme is justified.

EDUCATION: ERASMUS prizes for the most enterprising universities

They crown the first three years of European exchanges.

Since 1987 the European inter-university exchange programme, ERASMUS, has enabled 40,000 students to spend some months in another European Community country and 8,000 teachers to work in another EC country. Some 1,000 institutions of higher education in the 12-nation Community have taken part in these exchanges. To reward the most brilliant participants and encourage more of them to take part in these inter-university exchanges, the Commission has decided to award 27 "ERASMUS prizes". Twelve of

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them will go to students, one from each EC country; twelve to teachers - again to one from each country, and three to groups of universities from different EC countries which have implemented cooperation programmes. The prizes were awarded on October 2 at the ERASMUS house in Brussels. The jury was made up of five scholars from five different countries and was presided by Enrique Barón Crespo, President of the European Parliament.

Manuel Salto Tellez was one of the prize winners. A medical student in Oviedo, Spain, his country of origin, he had studied at various times in Bochum (Germany) and Leiden (Holland), picking up German and Dutch at the same time. Back in Oviedo he set up an association of European medical students, with the aim of helping students from other European countries who come to Oviedo for their studies to find accommodation and become part of local life.

Another prizewinner, Helle Pedersen, a geology student in the Danish town of Aarhus, won an ERASMUS training scholarship at the University of Strasbourg. His achievement was all the more remarkable as there was no association agreement between his own university and the university in which he wanted to study for a year. Having persuaded the professors at the two universities to grant mutual recognition to his studies, Helle Pedersen obtained degrees from both Aarhus and Strasbourg. His example has since been followed by other students from Aarhus.

Prof. Basil Proimos was one of the teachers to win an ERASMUS prize. He organized a course in medical physics, open to students from 16 European institutions, at his own university of Patras, in Greece.

The jury also awarded prizes to three inter-university cooperation programmes. Under one of them 12 universities, located in seven EC countries, regularly organize exchanges between students and teachers in management. Clearly the 12-nation Community contains many students and professors every bit as European as Erasmus himself.

SOCIETY: Make way for the young!

The European Commission's latest proposals for vocational training.

The 100,000 or so young people from the 12 EC countries enrolled in training programmes should enjoy as many scholarships between now and 1992, provided the European Commission's proposals to strengthen the PETRA programme are accepted by the Member States. The scholarships would enable the youngsters to work or undergo training in another Community country than their own.

The Commission has also asked that the budget for the "Youth for Europe" programme be increased from ECU 6.5mn.* to ECU 10mn. for 1992, making a total of ECU 16.5mn. for the period 1991-92. This programme helps finance exchange programmes for youngsters who have left school. Operating through a network of agencies in all EC countries, it last year helped some 20,000 of them to pay brief visits to other Member States.

PETRA and "Youth for Europe" are the two main instruments through which the Community can try to improve the quality of vocational training programmes for young people. The latest proposals, presented by Mrs. Vasso Papandreou, the Commissioner for social affairs, involve a number of important changes to the PETRA programme. The modified programme would give youngsters the possibility, during the early stages of their training programme, to take part in student exchanges and work in another Member State, thus complementing the ERASMUS exchange programme for institutions of higher education. The proposed changes also put the emphasis on providing vocational guidance within a Community context. This is essential for preparing young people for work in a single European market.

As for the "Youth for Europe" programme, the Commission both favours increased funding for it and at the same time wants to extend it by supporting in particular the cultural, social and educational activities to be undertaken by young people, through voluntary organizations, in another Member State. One of the aims of this programme is to help youngsters who are disadvantaged, whether it be physically, mentally, socially, economically or geographically.

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A third aspect of the Commission's activities in favour of young people is set out in the "Memorandum" to be presented jointly by Mrs. Papandreou and Mr. Jean Dondelinger, the Commissioner for cultural affairs, in Rome on November 9. The Memorandum contains no proposals as such; it must be viewed, rather, as a basis for discussion, with a view to adopting, as the main objective of a youth policy, exchanges of experiences between the relevant departments of the various governments. The aim would be to enable young people to take part in joint or cooperative projects, especially those which encourage their creativity and initiative. It is especially important, in addition, to improve the training of young people by meeting their need for information on the Community and its development, and by encouraging cooperation with the Youth Forum and, through it, with all youth associations and movements.

Giving young people a greater part to play in the building of Europe is not only the avowed goal of these activities but also a vital necessity for the Community.

* 1 ECU = UK£0.70 or IR£0.77

LANGUAGES: The second EXPOLINGUA fair is held in Lisbon

EC countries must ensure that young people and the general public are multilingual.

The multilingual European Commission took part in the second International Languages and Culture Fair - EXPOLINGUA - held in Lisbon from 2 to 4 October. During the 3-day Fair the Commission as well as the more than 120 exhibitors, representing ministries; universities and language schools; professional and cultural bodies; firms of translators and interpreters; youth organizations; chambers of commerce and industry and publishing houses specializing in language teaching materials tried to encourage both the young and the public in general to practice the gift of tongues.

The European Community needs a multilingual population, especially in the light of the single European market and in order to work together with our new partners in Eastern and Central Europe.

BRIEFLY:**200,000 "European" housing units since 1954 for miners and steelworkers**

The European Commission and the authorities of the Lorraine region celebrated on October 4 the construction of the 200,000 low-cost "European" housing unit. Located in Longwy, in north-eastern France, the accommodation was partly financed by a loan at 1% from the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). Such loans have made it possible to house thousands of coal miners and steelworkers in all EC countries since 1954, in both blocks of flats and houses. Much of this "European" housing is to be found in Germany (105,000) and France (46,000). But it is also to be found in Britain (18,000), Italy (11,000), Belgium (9,000) and the Netherlands (4,500). There are less than 2,000 units in each of the other EC countries.

Training programmes for East German consumers

Discerning consumers are made, not born. To help the new consumer organizations set up in the five new German "lander" find their way around the new products and services which have come in the wake of unification, the European Commission decided on October 1 to finance training programmes for them. Those heading these organizations will thus be able to learn from their counterparts elsewhere in Germany, who have long experience of dealing with the consumer society.

It's the turn of Rotterdam to get a helping hand, after London and Marseille

The European Commission is pressing ahead with its new policy of helping major European cities renovate their run-down areas. After helping London and Marseille, the Commission announced end September that the European Regional Fund would provide the great port city of Rotterdam ECU 2,6mn.*, over a 2-year period, for the renovation of the area of the old port (Kop van Zuid) and the creation of centres of activity at Feyenoord and Afrikaanderwijk. The funds will be used initially to stimulate the creation and development of small and medium-sized businesses, as a means of fighting unemployment. The Commission hopes that this action, like that undertaken in London and Marseilles, following a decision of February 1990, will provide lessons that could be put to good use in other European Community cities, which are located outside the Community's most disadvantaged regions.

* 1 ECU = UK£0.70 or IR£0.77