



a newssheet for journalists

Weekly n° 37/90

26 November - 3 December 1990

S U M M A R Y

P. 2 CONSUMERS: No more hormones in meat
The Community's judges confirm the current ban.

P. 3 TELECOMMUNICATIONS: Dishes within everyone's reach in the near future?
The European Commission proposes satellites for cross-border networks.

P. 4 INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY: Strengthening the ESPRIT programme
For the annual conference, a favourable balance sheet and calls for stronger action.

P. 6 COURT OF JUSTICE: No discrimination in the award of training grants
The children of Community workers have the right to such grants throughout the EC.

CARS: Seat-belts for children

The European Commission asks the Twelve to make suitably adapted seat-belts obligatory for children under 12 years of age.

P. 7 CONSUMERS: Meat products can circulate within the EC without a change in name
The European Community's judges rule in favour of a Dutch importer.

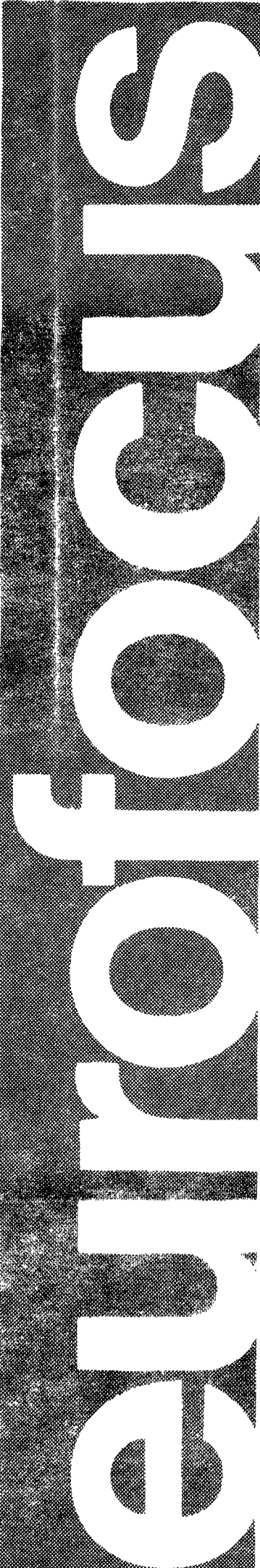
P. 8 UNEMPLOYMENT: Unchanged in September
8.3% of the labour force in the 12-nation Community is jobless.

RESEARCH: Personal worth is not simply a matter of years

Fifteen prizes awarded in the second European competition for young scientists.

P. 9 COURT OF JUSTICE: Don't touch family allowance!
The Community reaffirms the right to family allowances for all.

Mailed from: Brussels X



CONSUMERS: No more hormones in meat

The Community's judges confirm the current ban.

Meat treated with hormones will not reappear on our plates; that's final! The 1988 directive (Community "1- ") which banned the use of growth hormones in the rearing of animals for human consumption will remain in force. The first directive on this subject to be adopted by the EC Council of Ministers was in 1985; it was declared void by the European Community Court of Justice because of procedural defects in February 1988. The following month the Council adopted an identical text. Several pharmaceutical companies which manufacture hormones then sought to challenge the directive in court but lost when the Community's judges unreservedly confirmed on November 13 the ban introduced in 1988.

The pharmaceutical companies have always attacked the ban on the use of hormones to treat meat. Having failed to prevent the adoption of the European directive, they have done everything in their power to obtain its annulment. As from 1988 they challenged in the British courts the legislation implementing the Community directive voted by Parliament in London. When the case came before the High Court, the latter consulted the Community Court in Luxembourg over the legality of the directive in question.

The pharmaceutical companies put forward seven arguments against the directive. Their two main arguments were (1) that the harmful nature of the hormones had never been proved and (2) the ban had resulted in substantial losses for the manufacturers. This, in fact, was at the heart of the problem for them.

The EC Court of Justice held that the Council of Ministers had the right to opt for the solution of its own choice in order to harmonize the national regulations on hormones. Given the differing assessments by the Member States as to the danger to health posed by hormones, there was nothing to prevent the ministers from agreeing to provide consumers the maximum protection - in the shape of the ban sought by the European Parliament and European consumer organizations.

Finally, as for the losses suffered by the manufacturers, the Court held them to be justified, because of the "importance of the objectives pursued".

TELECOMMUNICATIONS: Dishes within everyone's reach in the near future?

The European Commission proposes satellites for cross-border networks.

In the single European market direct-to-home television by satellite will perhaps be within everyone's reach thanks to satellite dishes twice or three times as cheap as those currently available. In this sector, as in others, the European Commission finds it necessary to create a large, border-free area for individuals as for businesses. It set out its reflections on this question in a Green Paper it sent to the Twelve in mid-November.

Although the word "satellite" conjures up images of a star-lit sky without frontiers, communications which pass through space are often subject to all kinds of obstacles on the ground. In most European Community countries the regulations in force date from the 1960s or 1970s, although the technologies at stake have been in existence only a few years. As a result, European consumers do not have the choice available to their American counterparts, for example, and manufacturers do not have a market sufficiently large to allow economies of scale.

The Commission favours four different measures. To begin with, it wants every European to have the right to buy and use a dish antenna to communicate via satellite. This implies the elimination of restrictive national regulations. In 1989 the 12-nation Community had only 840,000 dish antennas for receiving television programmes, some 90% of which were in homes and the remainder in cable companies. That same year a mere 9,000 business terminals were in use. But already banks, car manufacturers and the tourist industry are taking a keen interest in these new forms of communication.

The Commission's second proposal is that all interested bodies or companies be able to conclude contracts with satellite providers in order to obtain the transmission capacity they need. The third type of measures it envisages would make possible the direct marketing of these services by satellite providers; at present this generally takes place through public bodies. Finally, the Commission sees a need for the technical harmonization, at Community level, of standards, frequencies and equipment.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY: Strengthening the ESPRIT programme

For the annual conference, a favourable balance sheet and calls for stronger action.

The difficulties faced by the European information technology industry (microelectronics, information science) were at the centre of the discussions between experts, manufacturers and members of the European Commission who met in Brussels on November 15, on the occasion of the 7th annual ESPRIT conference. This Community programme, launched in 1984, seeks to strengthen the competitiveness of the European information technology (IT) industry at the international level, by encouraging firms to work together on projects on a shared-cost basis (with 50% of the costs being met by the EC).

The European IT industry is currently in a state of crisis. Some European companies have had to restructure themselves on a massive scale; this is the case of Europe's leading electronic company, the Dutch Philips. Others have been acquired by their competitors, as has happened to the British company ICL, acquired by Japan's Fujitsu. To remedy this situation the ESPRIT programme is to be strengthened and new actions proposed as from January 1991, according to the European Commissioner responsible for Community research, Filippo Maria Pandolfi.

Concretely Mr Pandolfi proposes encouraging European manufacturers to regroup themselves in order to provide a link between the various links in the production chain; stimulate manufacturers to collaborate more closely with users; pay greater attention to the international set-up when applying the EC's competition rules to company mergers and develop major trans-European networks in order to relaunch the demand for information technology. It is also necessary, Mr Pandolfi indicated, that European information technology industries restructure themselves. While the Commission is ready to make such restructuring easier by means of accompanying measures, he made it clear there can be no question of "interventionism from Brussels". The responsibility for choosing the right strategy rests firmly with companies.

Finally, it is necessary to keep a closer watch on international trade. A "somewhat tougher" trade policy should be conducted by the European Commission in order to avoid distortions due to competition, Mr Carpentier, Director-General in the European Commission, pointed out in a warning to the Japanese.

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For Mr Pandolfi the ESPRIT programme's balance sheet is favourable. A total of 645 projects have been launched since 1984 (ECU 4,700mn.*), 313 of which have produced concrete results: 152 have contributed to the development of new products or services, 118 represent information science instruments or methods with industrial application while 43 have played a part in the introduction of international standards.

Some one hundred of these projects were presented in an exhibition which was held alongside the ESPRIT conference. A project of interest to doctors is one example of them. Software has been developed to help doctors choose more quickly the appropriate treatment for cancer patients. Information regarding the patient (age, antecedents, symptoms, results of laboratory tests, etc.) are fed into the programme, which then proposes the appropriate treatment, taking into account these different factors. A prototype for lung cancer has been tested at the University of Montpellier in France.

A multimedia communication project (MIAS) was also on display. It allows users (notably companies) to communicate simultaneously with several interlocutors (see, talk, send fax messages, present charts, etc.) via personal computers. This project can be exploited via the integrated services digital network (ISDN), which ensures a better quality of transmission than the telephone network.

In the electronic field mention can be made of the SMILE project, aimed at producing lamps which use less energy. By integrating microelectronic circuits in the lamps, energy consumption can be regulated, with the result that lamps last longer and cost less to run. This project is of interest to both domestic and professional users.

Mr Carpentier has the last word: "The present crisis in the European information technology industries has come about despite the positive results achieved by ESPRIT. But for ESPRIT the situation would have been worse."

* 1 ECU = UK£0.69 or IR£0.77

COURT OF JUSTICE: No discrimination in the award of training grants

The children of Community workers have the right to such grants throughout the EC.

Carmina di Leo, the daughter of an Italian working in Germany, decided to continue her medical studies at a university of her country of origin, Italy, because of the restrictions on admissions to medical schools in force in Germany.

Her father nevertheless applied to the German Government for a students' grant. When this was refused, Mr di Leo turned to the German courts. Here, too, he met with a refusal. The court held that one of the aims of training grants is to encourage the integration of the worker and his family in the host country. Children who decided to study in another Member State were not entitled, therefore, to such grants.

Mr di Leo refused to give up the fight and lodged an appeal against the Court's decision. The appeal court decided to seek the advice of the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg. The latter rejected the arguments invoked by the German court. It held that children of Community workers have the right to grants for training purposes in the same way as nationals, even if they chose to continue their studies in a Member State other than the one in which their family resided. This, too, is the frontier-free Europe.

CARS: Seat-belts for children

The European Commission asks the Twelve to make suitably adapted seat-belts obligatory for children under 12 years of age.

In 1988 the European Commission asked the Member States to make the use of seat-belts in cars obligatory. This proposed "law", which has yet to be adopted by the Twelve, excluded children under 12 years of age, as the equipment which had been accepted was not suitable for small children.

Thanks to improvements in seat-belts the Commission has decided to modify its earlier proposal, which now requires children under 12 years to be fitted with seat-belts adapted to their size and weight.

This measure should add substantially to the safety of children, who are especially vulnerable in the event of a car accident.

CONSUMERS: Meat products can circulate within the EC without a change in name

The European Community's judges rule in favour of a Dutch importer.

Can German patés and sausages be described as "meat products" in their country of origin and not in the Netherlands? As a matter of fact, no, according to the European Community Court of Justice, in a ruling handed down on November 13. After the widely publicized disputes over beer, patés and, yes, sausages, the judges have once again emphasized that food products must circulate freely between Community countries, but for exceptional measures aimed at protecting consumers and public health.

The Court thus ruled in favour of a Dutch company, Bonfait, which had the misfortune to import from Germany, two years ago, patés and sausages described as "meat products" but with a higher water content than is authorized under Dutch law for "meat products".

The Dutch authorities had tried to have the company ^{declared} guilty of violating Dutch law, and by the same token obtained a ban on sales of the German "meat products" in question. But the Dutch judge wanted to consult the European Court of Justice before giving his verdict. The Court noted that the patés and sausages in question were sold legally under the label "meat products" in Germany, where the authorized water content exceeded the level set under Dutch law. The Court therefore held that the Dutch authorities did not have the right to ban these products from their home market, except for overriding reasons of consumer protection and public health.

But this was not the case, in the judges' view. Consumers can easily find out what they are buying by consulting the label, which gives the composition of the product. Nor was it a question of health, given that the Dutch authorities would have accepted the sale on their home market of the patés and sausages in question, provided the term "meat products" was not used. Clearly the Community's internal borders are disappearing as regards "meat products" also. Consumers are requested, however, to read the labels carefully, as they are the ones who choose, in the last analysis.

UNEMPLOYMENT: Unchanged in September

8.3% of the labour force in the 12-nation Community is jobless.

The level of unemployment was unchanged in September at 8.3% in the 12-nation European Community, according to Eurostat, the EC's statistical office. This seasonally adjusted rate is based on the International Labour Office (ILO) definition, which allows comparisons to be made with non-EC countries. The Community rate, unchanged since April, is higher than the American: in the United States the unemployment rate stood at 5.7%, an increase of 0.5% since June.

In most EC countries unemployment rates have remained stable since June. However, it fell slightly in Germany, Spain and Portugal and rose somewhat in Belgium, the United Kingdom and Denmark. EC unemployment rates vary greatly from one Member State to another; they currently range from 1.5% in Luxembourg to 16.5% in Ireland.

RESEARCH: Personal worth is not simply a matter of years

Fifteen prizes awarded in the second European competition for young scientists.

One can be as young as 16 and yet have carried out an in-depth study of a certain variety of seaweed; or be no more than 20 or 21 years of age and yet have successfully built an automatically operated observation station for meteorites. These two examples of prizewinners in the second European competition for young scientists are proof that one can be of tender age and yet make his mark.

The first six prizewinners each received ECU 5,000*, the nine others ECU 3,000 each. The European Commission, which organizes the competition, hopes to encourage by this means scientific creativity among the young and to make cooperation between the various European countries easier.

Some 10,000 young people, from not only the Community countries but also Austria, Switzerland and the Nordic countries, took part in competitions organized at the national level. They were open to young people between the ages of 15 and 21. With 52 finalists competing for the 15 prizes, the winners clearly merited their awards.

* 1 ECU = UK£0.69 or IR£0.77

COURT OF JUSTICE: Don't touch family allowances!

The Community reaffirms the right to family allowances for all.

A Spanish worker, employed in Germany, had asked the German social security office for child benefit payments for his two children living in Spain. His request was turned down, on the grounds that the allowance in question should be paid by Spain, under the terms of a 1973 social security convention concluded between Germany and Spain.

The system provided for under this convention was less favourable (smaller payments), and Mr Yañez-Campoy sought the help of a German court in his efforts to obtain child benefit payments from Germany. But the Court held that Spanish workers were not entitled to allowances from the country in which they worked if the members of their family were resident in another Member State. It invoked the transitional system of family allowances introduced by Spain's accession to the EC (January 1986).

This act effectively stated that as long as the social security systems of all the Member States were not uniform, the families of Spanish workers were covered by the system of child benefit in force in the country in which these families were resident, under the terms of the German-Spanish social security convention.

Mr Yañez-Campoy decided to lodge an appeal. The German court which heard his case decided to ask the European Community Court of Justice to get to the bottom of the matter.

The European Court recognized that the transitional system effectively excluded, at first sight, the families of Spanish workers from benefitting from family allowances in the country in which the head of the household is employed. It nevertheless referred to a judgement rendered in 1986, in the course of which the Court had indicated that a decision should have been taken to make uniform the various social security systems. In the absence of this decision, the Court took the view that all workers should be able to enjoy the same rights to child benefits from the date of this judgement.

The Court of Justice therefore invited the German government to make child benefit payments to Mr Yañez-Campoy for his two children, living in Spain. It thus demonstrated once again the vigilance shown by European judges in connection with the right to family allowances.