

Journalists



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Mailed from: Brussels X

**TRANSPORT: Community funding for high-speed trains ...**  
... and other major transport infrastructure projects.

The European Community will contribute financially to the construction of several high-speed lines, the starting point for a major cross-border network of high-speed trains. Such trains are among the top priorities under the transport action programme adopted by the EC Council of Ministers at the end of November. Community funds will stimulate the construction of high-speed rail links between such northern cities as London, Paris, Brussels and Cologne as well as between the Community's southern cities - Madrid, Barcelona, Lyon, Milan and Venice.

The programme, envisaged for the financial years 1990 to 1992, has received some ECU 60mn.\* for 1990, while ECU 105mn. have been set aside for it in the 1991 budget. The European Parliament is hopeful, however, of raising this amount to ECU 118mn.

In addition to these high-speed rail links the Twelve are also giving priority to improving the flow of traffic through the Brenner, which links Germany to Italy; making it easier to cross the Pyrenees by road; strengthening road and rail transport in Greece and developing the combined road-rail network for the transport of goods. The programme also includes the modernization of the railway line between Belfast and Dublin, the transport links between the Scandinavian countries and their neighbours and the access to the port of Holyhead, serving Ireland.

\* 1 ECU = UK£0.70 or IR£0.77

**HEALTH: Better protection against asbestos and biological agents**  
The Twelve agree to strengthen the protection of workers.

There were more timid moves towards improving the protection of workers at the workplace at the end of November. The Twelve agreed to reduce the maximum authorized levels of exposure to asbestos, for both those who mine asbestos and those who use it professionally.

The Twelve also adopted a directive ("European law") aimed at protecting workers who are exposed to bacteria, virus or other biological agents at work. The law requires employers to avoid the use of dangerous biological agents and to take sanitary measures as well as other steps to protect workers individually, even while keeping them informed and under medical observation.

**CIVIL PROTECTION: A major theme for the Europe of 1993**

1993 will be the European Year of Civil Protection, 1996 the Year of the Single Emergency Number - 112.

The 12 EC countries have just agreed to introduce a single Community-wide emergency number from 31 December 1996 at the latest. The Member States thus have six years in which to overcome the various technical problems that are bound to arise; after that the number - 112 - will be available alongside the numbers already in use in the various EC countries. This initiative by the Twelve could eventually save lives, at times when moments count. Suppose you are travelling abroad and must call an ambulance or the police. At present you must hunt up the right numbers in the local telephone directory - which may be in a language you don't know. After 1997 all you will have to do is dial 112 - anywhere in the Community - to be put in touch with emergency services.

The move is one of several made by the Twelve in order to bring about closer cooperation among the Member States in the fight against both natural and man-made disasters, such as Chernobyl. The EC Council of Ministers adopted two resolutions designed to lay the foundations of Community cooperation in the field of civil protection, on the one hand, and to improve mutual assistance in the event of disasters, on the other.

The Council also decided to support the European Commission in its attempts to set up a computerized information system on civil protection and to create a database, specially devoted to the resources for civil protection, in men and material, available in the Member States.

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The Council also envisaged the publication, before June 1993, of a multilingual technical lexicon devoted to civil protection.

As for mutual assistance in the event of disaster, the Council asked national experts to prepare, under the guidance of the Commission, a draft convention of intergovernmental cooperation, covering both the material (preventive measures, the repair of environmental damage, etc.) and legal (aid to disaster victims) aspects.

At Portugal's request the Twelve decided to include specifically the protection of forests (coordination of both the firefighting services and of attempts to fight forest fires from the air). This will be in the context of joint action undertaken in the same way as civil protection or disaster relief. A seminar on this subject will be held during the first quarter of 1991.

The European Year of Civil Protection, which will run from mid-1993 to mid-1994 will provide an opportunity to create public awareness of the measures as a whole.

**ELDERLY PEOPLE: A European action programme is adopted**

The Twelve give the green light to a programme covering the years 1991 to 1993.

The European Community's population is "greying". A sharp fall in birth rates and increased life expectancy has meant that the Community's population now includes some 100mn. elderly people. The European Commission has therefore proposed to the Member States an action plan designed to identify strategies and encourage solidarity between generations as well as the active participation of the elderly in socio-economic life. This programme, with a budget of ECU 2.4mn.\* for the first two years, has just been given the go-ahead by the Twelve.

To begin with the Commission will conduct a series of studies in order to have a better grasp of the economic problems posed by an ageing population (social costs, effects on the labour market and the practical problems of the elderly in their daily lives - housing, transport, tourism, home health care, etc.). The Commission will also look at the action undertaken, at the level of Member States, to strengthen the solidarity between generations (youth training) and provide new services to the elderly, such as meals on wheels, home help and company.

All the information gathered will be centralized in a database, which will be accessible to not only the public services but also to organizations representing elderly people. In this way it will be possible to keep up with actions taken in favour of the elderly in the various Member States and to exchange information on those which are the most interesting. In time there will be a veritable European learning network built around the most innovative experiences.

The Commission has also undertaken to support the organization of conferences and seminars in the Member States, on subjects as varied as the participation of elderly people in active life, the effects of population ageing on the labour market, the physical independence of elderly people or the prevention of accidents. It will also encourage the launch of an information campaign on the food and dietary needs of the elderly.

These activities will culminate with the launch, in 1993, of the "European Year of Elderly People and Solidarity of Generations". Major events will be organized and awareness campaigns launched in connection with this Year.

\* 1 ECU = UK£0.70 or IR£0.77

**ENVIRONMENT: Coming shortly - a green Community label?**

The European Commission favours following the example of Germany's "Blue angel".

A label that is easily recognized and guarantees that the product is environmentally harmless exists in Germany since 1978, under the name "Blue angel". A similar label may soon make its appearance throughout the European Community, with the emblem of the European Year of the Environment (1987): a blend of flower, cogwheel and the dark blue European flag with its twelve gold stars. The European Commission decided end November to propose this to the Twelve, in order to keep consumers better informed of the "green" characteristics of the products available to them, and to prevent the fragmentation of the emergent single European market.

The fact is the success of Germany's Blue angel - some 3,500 products were chosen in 1990 - has set a trend. Five other EC countries are planning a label of their own (Britain, Denmark, France, the Netherlands and Portugal). The Commission has therefore thought it preferable to introduce a Community label. It would co-exist with national labels for a 5-year period, after which it would replace them, as it would offer more of a guarantee than the most demanding of the national systems.

Under the terms of the project, prepared by the European Environment Commissioner, Carlo Ripa di Meana, the label would be awarded by an independent jury made up of representatives of the 12 EC countries, businessmen, consumers and the media. It would be awarded on the basis of European criteria, established by scientists, in the light of the life of the product in question, from manufacture to elimination after use.

While all sorts of products could receive the label, the European Commission is thinking of excluding both food and pharmaceutical products as well as dangerous chemical substances. The label would reward products whose manufacture does not require large amounts of natural resources, particularly energy; which result in almost no pollution; are not very noisy and do not generate hazardous waste. The jury would also take into account the life of the product and, if possible, how far the technology used to make it was "clean". The proposed European Environment Agency should help the jury in its task ... provided the Twelve can agree on the Agency's headquarters.

**FISHERIES: A hard time keeping afloat**

The European Commission seeks to safeguard both fisheries and fish.

At the end of seven years of a European Community fisheries policy, fish are an endangered species in the waters of the North Atlantic, the North Sea and the Baltic. A report drawn up by experts for the European Commission points to very high mortality rates, which threaten both the fishing industry and fish consumption in the 12-nation Community. To deal with this grave development the Commission envisages payments to fishermen to remain in port as well as better control over fishing activities and the use of nets with bigger mesh, which allow young fish to escape.

The common fisheries policy was introduced in 1983. It provides for the conservation of stocks through total allowable catches, divided up between the Member States in the form of annual quotas. The latter unfortunately have been exceeded, resulting in large-scale overfishing. There are several reasons for this, according to the experts. They include a Community fishing fleet that is much too big in relation to fish stocks. The experts, not surprisingly, have recommended cuts of 40% on average in the fishing fleet. The Commission meanwhile has stressed that control of the quantities fished is the sole responsibility of the Member States who often do not keep as close a watch on "their" fishermen as they should.

As the present Community regulation runs out in 1992, the Commission wants to take the opportunity to bring legislation into line with reality. It will submit its proposals to the Twelve towards the end of next year; but the European Fisheries Commissioner, Manuel Marin, has already sent them a number of guidelines to encourage them to reflect on the problem as from now.

The Commission is thinking of using satellite tracking, and the sea-going equivalent of the "black boxes" used in aircraft, to conserve stocks. This advanced technology would also make it possible to find ships lost at sea. The Commission is also attracted by a system in use in Scotland, under which fishing licences are granted for only three weeks out of four, for example. The income lost through these enforced rest periods would be made good by the Community. Such a system would give the fish a breathing space as well ... .

**COURT OF JUSTICE: France is found guilty of importing animal skins**

It allowed imports of more than 6,000 skins of wild cats in violation of EC rules.

The European Commission has just won its case against France, which it took to the EC Court of Justice for allowing the import of more than 6,000 skins of wild cats from Bolivia, in flagrant violation of a Community regulation requiring all Member States to respect the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).

Wild cats are protected under CITES. In 1982 the Twelve adopted a regulation in order to ensure its implementation throughout the Community. Under the terms of this regulation France should have obtained a special import permit, proving that the capture of these animals had not endangered the survival of the species. But the fact is that Bolivia's wild cats are under threat of extinction, which can only be hastened by any trade in their skins.

The European Commission reacted swiftly by bringing the case to the EC Court of Justice. The Court has now found France guilty of having failed to meet its obligations under the 1982 EC regulation.

**PROTECTION OF ANIMALS: The European Parliament raises a cry of alarm**

It wants urgent action to save hooded seals.

The European Parliament has raised a cry of alarm. The virus which decimated nearly half the population of sea cows is now attacking hooded seals. During the last six months six bodies were found along west Mediterranean and north Atlantic coasts. Scientists fear that the virus may spread very rapidly to the last colonies of hooded seals which exist in Madeira, Sardinia, Greece and Turkey.

Of all seals, the hooded seal is rarest in the Community and one of the twelve species most threatened with extinction in the world. No more than 300 of them are believed to exist today.

In order to save the hooded seal Parliament has asked the European Commission to take a number of measures urgently. They include the vaccination of hooded seals, the setting up of biological stations to look after sick animals and the creation of a scientific body, charged with the task of studying the situation and planning the release of the seals once the threat is over.



**INFLATION: Sharp rise in October in the 12-nation Community**  
Prices have risen by 2% since the start of the Gulf crisis.

As was to be expected, the Gulf crisis is having a continuing impact on prices in the shops. They rose by 0.7% in October for the 12-nation European Community as a whole, and in the three months since Iraq invaded Kuwait have gone up by 2%. The only consolation for Europeans is that prices in the United States and Japan have risen even faster - by 2.4% over the same period. Even so, the present bout of inflation must be taken as a warning, according to Henning Christophersen, the European Commissioner for Economic Affairs, and he has called on the Twelve to be vigilant.

For the Community as a whole the rate of inflation reached 6.3% in October, on a 12-month basis. This was exactly the same rate as the American but nearly twice the Japanese (3.2%). Prices rose in all Community countries, pushing Greece's inflation rate to over 22%, Portugal's to over 14% and Britain's to 10.9%. In Italy and Spain inflation was at around 7%; it exceeded 4% in Belgium and Luxembourg and stood at 3.8% in France, 3.5% in Ireland, 3.3% in Germany (without East Germany), 2.9% in the Netherlands and 2.7% in Denmark.

**POLLS: Poles, Hungarians and Czechs favour joining the EC**

In all three former "East European" countries a very "European" public opinion.

Fifty-five percent of Poles would like their country to join the European Community without further delay, as would 51% of Hungarians. The Czechs are more prudent: 25% of them favour immediate entry and 37% entry within five years. That the nationals of these three former "East European" countries have "Europe" in their blood is clear from the results of the Eurobarometer poll carried out end October/beginning November for the European Commission. A mere 2% of those polled in each of the three countries wanted their country to remain outside the Community permanently.

The association treaties, currently in preparation between their countries and the EC, are favoured by around 80% of Hungarians, Poles and Czechs. As for the United States of Europe, to which their countries would belong, 81% of Hungarians are in favour of it, as are 79% of Czechs and 68% of Poles.