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Mailed from: Brussels X

EUROFORUM

EUROBAROMETER POLL: European unification is progressing ...

... but not fast enough for Europeans.

For 69% of Europeans their country's membership of the European Community is "a good thing". For only 7% is it "a bad thing", according to the latest Eurobarometer survey of public opinion. The survey shows that public support for the European Community has never been higher: in fact it has not declined in any of the EC countries. Denmark has recorded the most spectacular growth in public support. A year ago 42% of Danes thought their country's membership of the EC to be a good thing. Six months later the figures had risen to 49% and last December it stood at 58%. What is more, those who find their country has benefitted from membership are even more numerous. On the whole, the Dutch are still the most enthusiastic at 82%, followed by the Italians (77%), Luxemburgers and Irish (76%) and Greeks (75%). The record nevertheless is held by the citizens of the former East Germany, 87% of whom are amply satisfied with Community membership. The fact is they helped raise the score of the united Germany from 62 to 73%.

As for progress towards unification, the percentage of those who feel the Community is advancing rapidly down this road rose to 57% last year, as compared to 39% in 1987. Even so, as many as 61% of the population would like progress to be even faster. Were the European Community to be scrapped tomorrow, 49% of citizens would be very sorry, against a mere 6% who would feel very relieved.

The quality of this massive support for the construction of Europe is confirmed by the backing given to proposals for Community reform. Thus 66% of Europeans would like the Community to be responsible for security and defence, as compared to the 15% opposed to it. 64% (against 14%) would like the European Parliament to have the right to decide on Community legislation, in

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cooperation with the Council of Ministers, representing the national governments. Over half of those polled (56%) favour a European Central Bank (with 18% opposed to it), as well as the right of the European Parliament to approve the nomination of the members of the European Commission. As for a single currency replacing the different national currencies in five or six years' time, 55% are in favour of such a move, while 23% remain faithful to national currencies.

Finally, a majority (51%) favours a Community with responsibility for foreign policy, compared to the 26% opposed to it.

This is not the United States of Europe as yet - but it is beginning to look very much like it.

SHOPS: It's up to Member States to decide whether they can open on Sundays

There is no Community legislation on this matter.

Two recent moves have led the European Community Court of Justice to turn its attention to the problem of the Sunday opening of shops. In several EC countries, and particularly France and Belgium, most shops cannot open for business on Sundays. But shopkeepers are regularly breaking the law - and are being taken to court for it in growing numbers. Two such cases have ended up before the EC Court of Justice.

In the first of them the French trade union confederation, the CGT, lodged a complaint with the Saint-Quentin high court against the French furniture chain, Conforama, Art et Meubles and Jima, which are open on Sundays. The high court asked the Court of

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Justice in Luxembourg if French legislation amounted to a restriction on trade between EC countries.

It noted that those shops did much of their business on Sundays and that a large part of their sales were of furniture imported from other EC countries. If they were unable to open on Sundays sales would fall off - as would the volume of its imports.

The Court recognized that national legislation banning shops from opening on Sundays could in fact have a restrictive effect on the free movement of goods. But imported goods were not affected more than those produced locally. The Court also thought it very unlikely refusing to purchase the same goods during the rest of the week.

The Court concluded that Sunday closing could not be regarded, therefore, as a major barrier to the free movement of goods. It amounted, rather, to a political and economic decision, based on national or regional considerations of a socio-cultural nature, whose assessment was a matter for the Member States and not Community legislation.

The second of the two cases referred to the Court of Justice involved a Belgian retailer, Trafitex. The firm had been found guilty of opening its shops on Sunday afternoon. The case came before the Court of Appeal in Mons, which referred it to the Court in Luxembourg. The Community's judges held that the Belgian law in question was neither an obstacle to the free movement of goods nor an infringement of the European Community's competition rules.

The battle between those who favour Sunday opening and its opponents will continue, but without the participation of the European Community.

TELEVISION: Coming soon - a European challenge to CNN

The Euronews project takes shape.

In less than a year's time television audiences throughout Europe, north Africa and the Near East will be able to watch news programmes, with a "Made in Europe" label, nine hours a day. The fact is a European news channel, Euronews, will start broadcasting at the beginning of 1992. It is being launched by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), whose members include the West European public service channels. Euronews programmes will be transmitted via satellite in five languages - English, French, German, Italian and Spanish.

The goal of Euronews' backers, who presented their project to the European Commission at the end of February, is a round-the-clock news service from 1993; this is something America's CNN has been doing for the last four years. Euronews will broadcast material - news, documentaries, etc. - provided by EBU members. The European Commission, for its part, is studying the Euronews project, in order to decide whether to back it with money.

TRANSPORT: More "European" money for the Channel tunnel

The European Commission gives the go-ahead to an ECU 285mn. loan for Eurotunnel.

The European Commission has decided to give the Channel tunnel a further helping hand; it approved a loan of some ECU 285mn.* at the end of February to the Franco-British group, Eurotunnel. The decision was taken as work on the tunnel entered its final phase, accompanied by talk that its opening might be delayed.

The loan, granted by the European Coal and Steel Community, will be used to finance the purchase of the huge amounts of steel required to build not only the tunnel but also the terminals at either end and the railway wagons which will carry cars between England and the continent. The ECSC loan is in addition to loans from the European Investment Bank and funds provided from the EC budget. The tunnel is expected to be in operation in 1993 in principle.

* 1 ECU = UK£0.70 or IR£0.77

RIGHT OF RESIDENCE: Restricted to six months for job seekers

The Twelve can restrict the right of residence to six months for unemployed Europeans, according to the EC Court of Justice.

The European Community's Court of Justice has ruled that Member States can restrict the right of residence to six months in the case of nationals of other EC countries who are looking for a job. It gave the ruling in a recent case, involving the British government and a Belgian national, Mr. Gustaff Antonissen.

A declaration annexed to a regulation adopted in 1968 stipulates that job seekers are entitled to the right of residence for a minimum of three months. Under British law, an unemployed person who is a national of another Member State can reside in the U.K. for six months while looking for a job.

But does this British law conform to Community law? This was the question which the High Court of Justice in London put to the EC Court of Justice in the case involving Mr. Antonissen.

Mr. Antonissen was found guilty of drug trafficking and an expulsion order issued "in the public interest". This was three years after his arrival in England, during which time he had failed to find a job. The Community Court held that the U.K. had violated neither the spirit of the Treaty nor the declaration of 1968.

Even so, the Court's ruling was not to be construed by the Member States as a licence to get rid of nationals of other EC countries who had failed to find a job within the period of time allowed them. The Court stressed that the persons in question had to be given an opportunity to show that they were actively engaged in looking for employment. If a national of another Member State was able to prove that he not only was looking for a job but also had reasonable hopes of obtaining one, his right of residence had to be extended.

With this ruling the Court of Justice in Luxembourg has both reaffirmed its attachment to the principle of the free movement of people and drawn a line between the right of European citizens and the prerogatives of Member States.

AIR TRAVEL: Fares will rise before coming down

The European Commission announces crisis measures.

European Community airlines will be able to raise fares more easily - until May 31, in any case. Certainly this will be the most obvious effect, as far as the travelling public is concerned, of the crisis measures announced by the European Commission at the end of February. As the airlines find themselves in a precarious financial situation because of the Gulf war, the Commission has considered it necessary to stretch the Community's competition rules and its air transport legislation.

Some of these "European laws" are in force since last November and are intended to allow airlines to reduce fares sharply, in the context of the 1992 single market. For the moment, however, the tendency is for fares to rise: the Gulf war has reduced earnings, even while adding to costs, so that last year's fares are no longer adequate to ensure normal operations. The fact is some airlines even risk going out of business altogether.

This has led the European Commission to look favourably on applications for fare increases in excess of 105% of the reference fare, although it has the right to prevent them coming into force. In the same way the Commission has asked the national authorities in the Member States to take into account the rise in airline operating costs when examining demands for tariff changes presented by the airlines.

The Commission announced at the same time that it will give sympathetic consideration to state aids granted by the Member States to "their" airlines to off-set the higher costs due to the Gulf war: higher insurance premia, additional expenses and delays linked to security checks.

At a time when price increases are on the agenda, the European Commission is asking the Member States to apply a VAT rate of no more than 9% on internal flights. This would make fare increases somewhat more bearable, even while advancing the 1992 programme. The fact is the Commission has already asked the Twelve to apply to air transport VAT rates in the range of 4 to 9%, as against the current rates of 0 to 19%.

Both the European Transport Commissioner, Karel Van Miert, and his colleague, Sir Leon Brittan, the Commissioner for competition policy, have stressed that the crisis measures will remain in force until May 31 only, and will not hold up the liberalization of air transport, aimed at benefitting passengers.

TELEVISION: Need for a more sporting spirit ...

... and European initiatives for 1991.

A television channel devoted to sport may yet be devoid of the sporting spirit. The agreement which Eurosport, the trans-national satellite sport television channel, concluded with Sky Channel, assured them preferential access to certain sporting events covered by members of the European Broadcasting Union. This prompted Screensport, which also specializes in sporting events, to lodge a complaint with the European Commission - which ruled on February 20 that the agreement in question was contrary to EC competition rules and did not benefit television viewers in any way.

The Commission clearly intends to make sure that the rules of the game are obeyed by a sector which is rapidly expanding - the audiovisual. These rules are drawn at present mainly from the Treaty of Rome, the European Community's "Constitution". But a "European law", baptized "television without frontiers", will come into force in October.

Mr. Jean Dondelinger, the European Commissioner with responsibility for the audiovisual sector, pointed out recently that the rules of the game are only one of the three pillars of Community policy in the field of television and the cinema. The other two are the promotion of European audiovisual programmes, thanks to the MEDIA programme launched at the beginning of this year, and the development of the technology for 1991, in preparation for "1992" and what follows.

AIDS: 9 million victims in the Third World between now and the year 2000?

The European Commission's progress report on its AIDS programme.

Some 10mn. people worldwide are currently infected with the AIDS virus and more than 600,000 have contracted the disease. Another 10mn. new infections could occur by the end of the century, 90% of them in the developing countries, according to the experts. However, a sustained, vigorous campaign against AIDS could reduce this figure by 50%.

The European Commission has been contributing to the fight against AIDS since 1987, under a programme which was reserved initially for the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries linked to the EC under the Lomé Convention but has since been extended to other developing countries.

The European Commission submitted a progress report on its AIDS control programme at the ACP/EEC Joint Assembly meeting in Kampala (Uganda) at the end of February. In July 1987, the Commission earmarked ECU 35mn.* to meet demands for help from the 68 ACP countries. It launched a similar programme for the other developing countries in 1988, with an annual budget of ECU 5mn. Nearly all the ACP countries have taken advantage of the Community's offer and the Commission has had to provide an additional ECU 4mn. for this year.

The help given by the Commission seeks mainly to prevent the transmission of the AIDS virus through sexual contacts, blood transfusions and from mother to child. An information programme has been launched, in order to encourage people to behave sexually in a way which reduces the risks of AIDS infection. The programme has already borne fruit in Zaire, Uganda and Kenya. The help given by the EC has also made it possible to screen blood donors as well as the blood used for transfusions. Finally, thanks to the Community's aid programme women who are seropositive are both counselled and provided with contraceptives, to prevent perinatal transmission of AIDS to babies. Since last year the Commission has also been providing help for the sick and their families, and in particular for children made orphans through the death from AIDS of their parents.

Unfortunately the programme is meeting with numerous obstacles: a shortage of funds, both in the EC and the countries in question; an inadequate political commitment by leaders in developing countries; administrative problems; ignorance and a relative indifference to the problem in Europe. The Commission believes aid to the developing countries must be strengthened and its coordination improved.

* 1 ECU = UK£0.70 or IR£0.77