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Mailed from: Brussels X

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EUROBAROMETER POLL: Manners maketh man

Today's parents want their children to be more polite and responsible.

What are the qualities which today's parents try to encourage in their children? It is unlikely that the findings of the latest Eurobarometer poll, conducted on behalf of the European Commission in all 12 EC countries, will come as a surprise to grandparents. Nearly two-thirds of parents (62% to be exact) want their children to develop a sense of responsibility and nearly half of them (49%) want their children to show tolerance and respect for others. Some 44% of parents look for good manners and politeness in their children and 32% the ability to communicate with others.

Even so, grandparents may be surprised to discover that only 9% of today's parents encourage obedience in their children and a mere 8% seek to develop their children's imagination. They would be pleased, however, to learn that young people are very much in tune with their parents. The fact is that the qualities which young people between 15 and 24 years of age want to see encouraged are roughly the same as those favoured by their parents: a sense of responsibility (64%), tolerance and respect for others (47%) and the ability to communicate with others (39%). But youngsters attached more importance to independence and imagination than their elders.

Religious faith is no longer considered important, except among the elderly and in certain countries, such as Ireland (24%), Greece (20%) and Italy (15%). The Danes are hardly aware of it (2%), along with the Belgians (5%), French (6%) and Germans and Dutch (7%).

The Eurobarometer poll also showed that not many parents expect their children to be thrifty and avoid waste: only 18% of those polled try to encourage thrift in their children. Nor did conscientiousness at work seem to be highly prized, except in Portugal (42%), Spain (41%) and Greece (37%), a finding very much at odds with the stereotype of lazy southerners. The fact is that those least attracted to the virtues of hard work would seem to be the Dutch (9%) and British (13%).

VAT: The EC Court of Justice finds that Italy, Spain and Greece
... have failed to prevent the double taxation of goods bought second-hand.

The European Community Court of Justice has ruled that Italy, Greece and Spain have failed to take the measures needed to protect individuals who import goods bought second-hand, or which already had been used in their country of origin, from being taxed twice over.

The fact is that in these three EC countries VAT is not levied on goods purchased second-hand within their national territories. Many of their nationals tend, however, to buy second-hand cars, for example, in those Member States in which they are cheaper, or VAT is levied at a lower rate. In order to limit such imports the three countries in question levy VAT on imports of second-hand goods. What is more, they do not take into account the amount already paid in VAT in the country of purchase but charge the full rate. As a result, the buyer is subject to double taxation.

In giving judgement the European Court referred to its 1985 ruling in the Gaston Shul case. This case had involved the purchase by a Mr. Gaston Shul of a second-hand yacht in France, on which he had paid VAT at the French rate. When he imported the yacht into Holland, the Dutch authorities claimed VAT at the full rate, rather than at a rate which represented the difference between the local and French rates - and were condemned by the Court of Justice for it.

The European Court held that individuals who import goods from another EC country, after having duly paid VAT in that country, must be able to deduct the amount already paid from the sum required of them by way of VAT in the country of import. Member States which require payment of VAT in full are in violation of Article 95 of the Treaty of Rome, which forbids them to discriminate against imported goods in tax matters.

The Court therefore held that the Italian, Spanish and Greek measures infringed this principle of non-discrimination, in that they favoured goods purchased locally. These measures, in addition, created uncertainty in the minds of buyers, who were unsure as to whether they would be able to invoke Article 95 on second-hand goods purchased abroad. At the same time the measures encouraged officials in the importing country to refrain from applying the principle that VAT must be levied at the residual rate.

The Court of Justice has once again come to the help of Europeans, to prevent them from becoming victims of tax discrimination, pending the approximation of VAT rates in the single market.

EUROBAROMETER POLL: How East and Central Europeans see the EC

A large majority favours a United States of Europe.

Eighty-one Hungarians, 79 Czechs and 68 Poles out of 100 favour European unification and would welcome the creation of a United States of Europe, with their country firmly inside it. The Soviet Union's progressive retreat from Central and Eastern Europe has left in its wake a political and economic vacuum. As a result, the Europeans living there have turned increasingly to the West, and more especially to the European Community, both for short-term aid and long-term ties.

Three Eurobarometer polls carried out in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, on behalf of the European Commission have just confirmed this. Virtually everywhere in the East people are convinced they have made the right choice, despite economic difficulties and the problems arising from the dramatic changes that have taken place in just under two years. Of course numerous countries are in the throes of major structural reforms as they try to set up a market economy. Their moves in this direction have resulted in a decline in economic production and, for the first time, in bankruptcies and unemployment.

Short-term economic prospects clearly are viewed with a good deal of pessimism, especially in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, where three-quarters of those polled felt the situation will worsen, both nationally and at the level of their own families, over the next 12 months. But this had affected neither their faith in the market economy nor their optimism in the future. Despite all the economic avatars, between 58 and 62% of the inhabitants of the three countries in question are determined to embrace the principles of free trade. Economic reform has been stimulated by the advent of a multiparty system, even though many people find the pace of democratic reform to be too slow.

And their gaze remains fixed on the European Community. Two Hungarians out of three think of themselves as Europeans "often" or "sometimes" - as do 53% of Czechs and 51% of Poles. Awareness of the European Community is very high everywhere - among 87% of Hungarians, 84% of Czechs and 75% of Poles. In these three countries roughly half the inhabitants have a positive impression of the Community, while a mere 1 to 3% have a negative impression.

Finally, 79% of Czechs, 77% of Hungarians and 65% of Poles have heard of the PHARE programme, under which they are being helped economically by the 24 most industrialized countries. A large majority of them feels this aid will improve their country's economic situation.

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Eight out of ten persons in the three countries taken together favour association treaties with the European Community; only 2 to 4% of the population is opposed to such treaties. The fact is that 55% of Poles, 51% of Hungarians and 25% of Czechs would like to see their country join the Community at once, while 78%, 81% and 79% respectively favour entry within 10 years. Those opposed to it amount to a mere 2%.

EDUCATION: Courses on European integration

45 new university chairs of European studies, thanks to the second Jean Monnet action programme.

Launched in 1990 by Mr. Jean Dondelinger, the European Commissioner responsible for cultural affairs, the Jean Monnet action programme seeks to develop rapidly specialist courses in European integration - that is to say, the construction of the European Community and its institutional, economic and social developments.

Following the creation of 46 "European university chairs", the European Commission has just given its financial backing to 242 university projects, including 45 new chairs, 19 of them in law, 12 in economics, 10 in political science and 4 in history; 128 permanent courses; 60 "European" units and 9 research grants.

The mobilization of European universities in favour of the Jean Monnet action programme reflects the concern of the academic community to accelerate the preparation of young graduates for the Europe of 1992 and political union. 1992 will be the third and last year of this action programme, when a similar number of European chairs and permanent courses should result.

SOCIETY: A little sunshine for the handicapped

A progress report on the HELIOS programme.

How can handicapped people be helped to lead as "normal" lives as possible, to receive education and training, find a job and manage on their own? This is the challenge facing all 12 European Community countries. In practice, each of them has its own way of dealing with the problem, which has proved more or less successful. However, since the mid-1990s Community countries share their experience under the HELIOS* programme.

The second part of this programme, which covered the period from 1 January 1988 to 30 June 1990, was marked by improved coordination between national institutes dealing with handicapped people and the setting up of a Community-wide system aimed at developing technical aids for the blind, deaf, dumb, spastics and the mentally handicapped.

The HELIOS programme continues until the end of this year and should be followed by HELIOS II, covering the period 1992 to 1996. The border-free Europe should also benefit the Community's 30 million handicapped people.

* The Greek word for "sun", HELIOS is also the acronym for "Handicapped people in the European Community Living Independently in an Open Society".

SMEs: Inter-company cooperation throughout Western Europe ...

... thanks to an extended BC-Net.

A company based in a European Community country will soon be able to use the EC's computerized business cooperation network, BC-NET, to look for a distributor in Switzerland, a financial partner in Sweden or a technical partner in Austria. This is because the European Commission entered into an agreement with EFTA* at the beginning of March, extending BC-NET to the six EFTA countries. This means that a small or medium-sized enterprise (SME) will be able to call on the services of a business consultant, in strict confidence, to find a business partner in another region of Western Europe. The number of consultants who are members of the network will soon be increased from 450 to 600.

* Austria, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland.

INTERNAL MARKET: "European" training courses for tax officials

The European Commission launches a training and exchange programme.

Tax officials from the 12 European Community countries are to follow in the footsteps of their colleagues from Customs and prepare themselves for the single market. Some 50 specialists in such esoteric matters as VAT and excise duties - the special taxes on tobacco, alcohol and petrol - will undergo training this year in another European Community country than their own. Some of their colleagues will follow training courses or work alongside officials from other Member States.

All these activities are part of a pilot programme launched at the beginning of March by the European Commission, in order to enable tax officials to get to know each other and, perhaps above all, learn to have confidence in each other. Such confidence in fact will be crucial after 31 December 1992, with the disappearance of checks at the Community's internal borders. Cooperation between national tax authorities will be necessary both in the fight against fraud and to make sure that the taxes needed to finance national and Community budgets are collected.

Like the exchange programme for customs officials, baptized MATTHAEUS, the pilot programme for tax officials will be put on a more durable basis.

TRADE: The poor relation in the single market?

The European Commission adopts a work programme for "1992".

With just 21 months to go before the single market becomes a reality, a large part of the wholesale and retail trade is still operating in terms of national markets. To enable this sector, which generates roughly 17% of the jobs and wealth of the 12-nation European Community, to profit fully from the single market, the European Commission is considering various measures, ranging from a more effective dissemination of information aimed at traders to help with modernizing trading methods in the Community's less well-off regions. The Commission has set out its ideas in a work programme presented in early March.

It wants to improve the quality and flow of information, by making available comparative trade statistics, ensuring that information on national and Community legislation concerning the sector is more widely available and keeping firms informed of the implications of the single market.

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The work programme also envisages help with training programmes, improvements to distribution networks and support for the modernization of management techniques, through the use of new technologies.

FOOTWEAR: The European industry has lost its bounce

Euro-MPs want the Community's R&D programme to come to its help.

European shoe production has been falling for the last 20 years, along with jobs and exports. Meanwhile imports, especially from the Far East and Brazil, have been growing by leaps and bounds. This alarming picture has been painted by the Euro-MP Manuel Porto, in a report which was the basis for a resolution adopted by the European Parliament at the end of February. The resolution calls for a more active European policy designed to allow the European footwear industry to take advantage of its trump cards.

The industry still provides employment for some 500,000 workers. It produced more than one billion pairs of shoes in 1988, representing some 25% of world production that year. The Euro-MPs believe the industry would be better placed to meet competition from imports if it were to modernize. It has therefore asked the European Commission to take steps to help the industry benefit more from the Community's research and development programmes.

The European Parliament also wants the European Community's regional and social funds to help the regions in which the footwear industry is located, even though they are not among the most disadvantaged in the Community. The regions in question include the East Midlands as well as parts of Portugal, Italy, France and Spain.

Finally, the European Parliament wants the Commission to deal firmly, in the context of the world trade negotiations, with countries which refuse to open up their markets to European footwear exports or refuse to supply leather to European footwear manufacturers.

URGENT

IMPORTANT

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