

S U M M A R Y

- P. 2 RESEARCH: For transborder technologies at the Community's service
The European Commission updates its own research centre.
- P. 3 OIL: No immediate threat from the Gulf
The present situation as regards Community supplies.
- P. 4 TRANSPORT: Railways are cheaper and more "ecological" than motorways
Figures which provide food for thought.
- P. 5 SOCIAL SECURITY: Equal treatment for men and women
The European Commission adopts a draft directive.
- P. 6 EDUCATION: The environment, education's poor relation
The inadequacies of environmental training courses in the EC.
- P. 7 NATURAL DISASTERS: Europe battered by storms
Emergency aid for disaster victims and their families.
- P. 8 BIOTECHNOLOGY: Try a little harder, please
The European Commission asks the Twelve to step up Community R & D.
- P. 9 INFLATION: Moderate in September ...
... but prices are rising faster than last year.
- CULTURE: From factory walls to ramparts and monasteries
Twenty-one European monuments get ECU 2.1m. in protection money.



RESEARCH: For transborder technologies at the Community's service

The European Commission updates its own research centre.

From next year the European Commission's scientists and research workers will devote more of their time to helping make European industry more competitive and its factories safer and to protecting the environment, even while playing their part in the preparations for the single market, foreseen for 1992. This, in broad outline, is the reform adopted recently by the Commission for its Joint Research Centre (JRC).

Four genuinely European research establishments make up the JRC, which is directly responsible to the European Commission. Those who are permanently employed at these establishments in fact have the status of European civil servants. The largest of the four establishments is located at Ispra, in northern Italy. The others are in Geel (Belgium), Karlsruhe (Germany), and Petten (the Netherlands).

Under the provisions of the EURATOM treaty, which set up the European Atomic Energy Community, the JRC was expected to engage in nuclear research only. But its activities were later extended to other fields. The Commission has now undertaken to reorganize the four establishments into eight research institutes, specializing in fields ranging from nuclear measurements to the environment and electronics.

The Commission proposes, moreover, to set up at Ispra a ninth JRC institute, which would devote itself to studying and forecasting future developments in technology. It would do this at the request of European industrialists, public or private agencies in the Community countries and the Commission itself.

The updated JRC will continue to carry out the research allocated to it under the Community's framework programme. But it will give priority to three tasks: the preparation of the single market for 1992, improving safety in nuclear and industrial installations and safeguarding the environment. The JRC in particular must draw up new technical standards which meet the requirements of consumers and overseas customers.

The European Commission has also decided to allow the JRC to cooperate with public bodies in the Community countries and with private firms. Such activities, which did not account for even one-tenth of the Centre's budget during the period from 1984 to 1987, will account for 15% of it in 1991 and 30% in the year 2000. According to the Commission, no national research centre in Europe is open to outside collaboration to the same extent.

OIL: No immediate threat from the Gulf

The present situation as regards Community supplies.

The 12-nation European Community will not run short of oil, even if the Persian Gulf were to be closed to Western shipping, according to the European Commission's experts, who have just been looking at the supply situation in the Community.

The Gulf states* export nearly 10m. barrels a day, which is roughly 45% of the oil traded internationally. Since September 1987, nearly half this oil (4.8m. barrels) is sent through pipelines to Red Sea and Mediterranean ports. The closure of the Gulf could, therefore, result in a shortfall of 5.2m. barrels a day for the West.

But the level of stocks on 1 October 1987 was sufficient to meet the shortfall for more than 600 days, according to Commission estimates. Its experts believe that the West could obtain another 3 to 4 million barrels a day from increased production in countries such as Norway, Gabon, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria, the Soviet Union and Venezuela.

But an extension of the Iran-Irak war would mean a sharp rise in oil prices, according to the Commission. The increase would be short-lived, however, in the view of European experts. They believe that the conditions which led to the sharp and durable price rises of 1973 and 1979 no longer exist. World oil production today exceeds consumption by a large margin. The prices set by OPEC appear to reflect market conditions rather well, the experts claim.

Besides, the latest figures show a 5% fall in Community oil production during the first six months of the year as compared to the same period in 1986. Community imports have also fallen - by 2.5% during the first five months of this year, as compared to the same period in 1986.

* Bahrein, Irak, Iran, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

TRANSPORT: Railways are cheaper and more "ecological" than motorways

Figures which provide food for thought.

To move a given number of people trains are more economical than cars and busses in terms of space and energy consumption. While this may be evident to some, it is not always taken into account by the national or regional authorities entrusted with organizing transport. During a recent international symposium on Europe's railways, held in Mannheim (Germany), Stanley Clinton Davis, the European Community's Transport Commissioner, cited figures which provide food for thought.

According to the International Road Transport Union, some 40,000 passengers can be carried per hour by a double-track railway line 10 metres wide. But a motorway 35 metres wide would be needed to carry the same number of passengers by bus, and a highway some 135 metres wide to carry them in private cars.

The conclusion seems clear: in urban areas railways minimize congestion, maximize land use - and limit environmental damage.

Trains are the ecologically sounder solution for another reason: they are relatively more economic on fuel than motor vehicles. Railways consume only 3% of the total amount of energy used by all forms of transport within the 12-nation Community, according to Eurostat, the Community's statistical office. And yet they account for 23% of the freight and 9% of the passengers transported in the EC.

The same can hardly be said of road transport. It uses 85% of the energy while accounting for 85% of the passengers and 61% of the freight.

The railways are also safer. Not surprisingly, Stanley Clinton Davis believes that new initiatives should be taken at the European level to build on the many advantages which railways offer.

The Transport Commissioner however underlined the fact that most European railway systems are heavily in debt, which jeopardizes the development of rail transport. They are carrying somewhat less freight than before, because of the decline of the coal and steel industries and the steady expansion in oil and gas pipelines and motorways. Railways therefore need public funds, perhaps even Community funds.

SOCIAL SECURITY: Equal treatment for men and women

The European Commission adopts a draft directive.

The programme of equal treatment for men and women in matters of social security is on the point of reaching its legislative goal. The proposal for a Community directive which the European Commission has just adopted completes the legal mechanism represented by the two earlier directives which the European Community Council of Ministers approved in December 1978 and in July 1986. They dealt with the legal and professional systems of social security. The third directive covers the problems which remain outstanding, in accordance with the 1986-1990 Community action programme on the equality of opportunity for women.

The earlier directives in fact contained numerous exceptions and formally excluded allowances to survivors and family allowances. Moreover, the Community's member states kept their hands free in the case of certain other forms of unequal treatment, notably as regards the retirement age. With the new text the coverage extends, on the one hand, to benefits excluded from the earlier directives and exceptions which have been temporarily authorized and, on the other, to the entire working population.

The new directive reflects, above all, a concern to ensure the actualization of the principle of equality of treatment, even while respecting the choice of member states as regards the means to be employed. It seeks equally to guarantee the rights of the persons concerned by excluding egalitarian solutions which could turn out to be prejudicial.

Finally, the European Commission wishes to promote the personalization of rights as an alternative to the extension of derived rights. Thus welfare benefits will no longer depend on the legal relationship between husband and wife and will no longer be subject to the risks such relationships can encounter.

EDUCATION: The environment, education's poor relation

The inadequacies of environmental training courses in the EC.

Environmental protection cannot be studied in the same way as mathematics, history or chemistry. Special courses on the environment are on offer nevertheless, in most European Community countries to young people and adults alike. But if opportunities for pursuing environmental studies are numerous, they remain largely insufficient, according to a recent European Commission report.

Replying to a question from the Irish Euro-MP, Mary Banotti, the Commission pointed out that it has given its support to a series of schemes which seek to make the environment and its needs better known.

The Commission takes the view that effective environmental protection requires those in positions of responsibility in industry and the civil service to have adequate knowledge. With this as its starting point the Commission has tried to find out whether the existing courses can provide the necessary training in such fields as waste management, urban renewal and water resources.

The results of 25 detailed studies, carried out for the Commission, reveal the inadequacies in the possibilities for training in the environmental field and a considerable lack of information on what is available. Only the training provided by private firms for their own personnel seems adequate, at least as regards the handling of hazardous wastes.

The Report stresses the fact that the present higher education system tends to concentrate on specific disciplines, so that the teaching of environmental subjects does not readily fit into it. The shortage of qualified teachers and matter adds to the difficulties, which are further aggravated by conflicts of responsibility between the teachers of the various subjects involved.

Even when adequate training courses exist, potential students are not properly informed. In the same way some firms and local authorities lack information about the existence of "ecological" techniques that could be of interest to them.

To help remedy the situation the European Commission has launched pilot training schemes, in selected subjects. The schemes, which are aimed at technical staff and local government officials, enjoy the financial support of the European Social Fund.

The Commission, moreover, is also supporting the training schemes in the environmental sciences prepared jointly by universities in two or more Community countries. The student and teacher exchange programmes initiated under ERASMUS should make it possible to expand such activities.

NATURAL DISASTERS: Europe battered by storms

Emergency aid for disaster victims and their families.

For months now nature seems to have wreaked havoc in one region of the European Community after another. Torrential rains nearly dealt a death blow to the Valtellina region in Italy, which had already been buried in mud following landslides in July.

In the beginning of October it was the turn of the Mediterranean coast and Spain; they were ravaged by a series of storms. A few days later a tornado battered Western Europe, from Portugal to Britain, leaving death and destruction in its wake.

The European Commission has therefore decided to give ECU 250,000* in emergency aid to the Mediterranean regions of Spain, ECU 300,000 to Britain and ECU 200,000 each to France, Spain and Portugal.

The European Commission decided that its aid would be given as quickly as possible to those directly affected by this series of natural disasters. It will therefore be quickly disbursed, preferably in cash or in the form of essential supplies, in agreement with the local authorities.

The Commission President, Jacques Delors, accompanied by the two Italian Commissioners, MM Natali and Ripa di Meana, visited Valtellina, together with the Italian prime minister, Mr Gorla. It is clear that the rebuilding of this hard-hit valley will require more than emergency aid. But the purpose of the visit was to find out at first hand the needs of the local population and to give it an assurance of Community solidarity.

The damage has been estimated at more than ECU 4,000m. While it is impossible to quantify the level of Community aid just now, President Delors made it clear that the Commission would use all the means at its disposal to help Valtellina - as it has always done whenever disaster has struck a region of the Community.

* 1 ECU = UK£ 0.70 or IR£ 0.77.

BIOTECHNOLOGY: Try a little harder, please

The European Commission asks the Twelve to step up Community R & D.

The European Commission has asked the twelve European Community governments to add ECU 20m.* to the ECU 55m. they have already provided for Community research into biotechnology for the years 1985 to 1989. The extra funds are needed to remedy shortcomings in the Community's research programme and allow Spain and Portugal to take part in current research programmes.

The Community must do more to train research scientists in the field of bio-informatics, according to the Commission, if it wishes to remain competitive. In addition, it must make a greater effort if it wishes to ensure a maximum of security for this new technology.

The fact is the European biotechnology industry is very short of specialists - which is why the Commission is asking the Twelve for an additional ECU 4m., as this would make it possible to increase sharply the number of training contracts financed from the Community budget.

The Commission believes that research into biotechnology requires the intensive use of computers; known as bio-informatics, its applications include data banks for genetic information and computer-aided design for protein modelling. An additional ECU 4.3m. are needed if Community research in this field is to make a significant impact, according to the Commission.

The risks to health and to the environment from some of the agricultural applications of biotechnology are among the Commission's major preoccupations. It has therefore proposed that the Twelve assess jointly the risks associated with the use of genetically engineered microorganisms in agriculture. This research would provide a scientific basis for efficient regulation. The Commission is seeking ECU 4.4m. for research into risk assessment.

The balance would allow Spanish and Portuguese laboratories to take part in research programmes launched before they joined the Community. It would also enable the European Commission to publicize the results of Community research within industry.

The Commission is also seeking funds to conduct the studies needed in the preparation of the programme for 1990-94.

* 1 ECU = UK£ 0.70 or IR£ 0.77.

INFLATION: Moderate in September ...

... but prices are rising faster than last year.

Prices rose by only 0.2% for the European Community as a whole in September. But inflation is picking up slightly in most member countries in relation to last year, according to Eurostat, the Community's statistical office.

Prices declined in Germany and Belgium in September, rose slightly in Britain, France, Luxembourg and Portugal, and strongly in Greece, Spain, Italy, Denmark and the Netherlands.

Prices rose 3.2% in the 12-nation Community over the 12 months to this September. Eurostat sees this as a sign of stability; it points out that since nearly a year and a half the rate of inflation has ranged between 3% and 3.5% on a 12-monthly basis.

Prices rose 2.5% in the Community during the first 9 months of the year, as against 2.2% during the same period in 1986. But prices have been rising much faster in the Community's two main competitors. In the United States inflation is now running at 3.6% as compared to 0.6% earlier and in Japan at 1.3% instead of 0.3%.

CULTURE: From factory walls to ramparts and monasteries

Twenty-two European monuments get ECU 2.1m* in protection money.

The European Commission is again providing funds to help restore and protect European monuments. ECU 2.1m. is being made available this year, to safeguard 22 monuments, scattered through all 12 European Community countries.

The 22 monuments were chosen out of some 130 applications to the European Commission. They include the medieval monastery in Skelling (Ireland); the ramparts in Salonika (Greece), the earliest of which date back to ancient times; the 17th century garden in Enghien (Belgium) and the Royal Salt Works at Arc-et-Senans (France).

Only sites and monuments open to the public are eligible for Community aid. The European Commission also insists that national, regional or local bodies meet part of the costs.

The final selection was made by the Commission with the help of an international group of experts.

* 1 ECU = UK£ 0.70 or IR£ 0.77.