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CULTURE: A 5-year plan to relaunch the EC's cultural action

EC ministers welcome the Commission's proposals in Copenhagen.

The European Commission's plan to relaunch cultural action in the European Community, which was put forward by the Cultural Commissioner, Carlo Ripa di Meana, was examined by EC ministers at their informal meeting in Copenhagen on December 10 and 11. Even though the EC Treaties do not give the Community competence in cultural matters, the ministers were all agreed, as their Danish President, Mr Clausen, pointed out, on the importance of the Commission's initiative. They recognized there was an urgent need to promote the audio-visual industry, in order to meet the danger which the invasion of American and Japanese programmes represents for Europe's cultural identity.

The Twelve decided to set up a study group to examine how cooperation among the member states is to be organized, in the light of the programme proposed by the Commission, and how financed. They will return to the subject when they meet in West Berlin on 29 April 1988.

After having expressed his satisfaction at the fact that the ministers were aware of the problem and welcomed his action programme, Commissioner Ripa di Meana reaffirmed the need for a joint effort at clarification, if there was to be a clear and solid basis for relaunching culture in Europe. The European Commission's text seeks, in fact, to encourage a thorough-going debate on the objectives and means of such an action, and proposes a framework programme for a concerted and coordinated relaunching of culture in the European Community and the world.

This programme aims at formulating and presenting a limited number of significant actions, in five key areas, for the period 1988-92. The first objective is the creation of a European cultural area: in the context of the advent of the single market, it is essential to ensure in the cultural field, as in the others, the free movement of goods and services, as well as a deeper knowledge of the cultural Europe, through the development of tourism and the dawn of a competitive cultural industry through the patronage of companies and a policy of book publishing.

The second element is represented by the promotion of the audio-visual industry. This is an action which the ministers regarded as having priority, in order to prevent both the European industry from being edged out and Europe's cultural dependence. What is urgently needed, to this end, is the unification of the technical standards of broadcasting and direct broadcasting by satellite, the free movement of programmes and the promotion of European television productions. The action taken in the framework of the MEDIA programme (measures to encourage the development of the audio-visual industry), and the European Year of the Cinema and Television, must also be viewed in this context.

A third element of the programme is devoted to the issue of better access to cultural resources. The action proposed aimed at enhancing Europe's cultural potential through a better knowledge of languages, the preservation of the cultural heritage and European "Youth Cards", designed to give young people easier access to culture.

The fourth field is that of cultural training. The action envisaged concerns cultural administrators; those in radio and television; journalists; those in charge of programmes; translators and interpreters; and those engaged in restoring works of art. The aim: simply to make sure that everyone, in all fields, has access to cultural training.

Last on the list, but not because it is less important, is the intercultural dialogue with the rest of the world. Europe has a tradition of conducting such dialogues, for its own cultural wealth has always been based on an interaction and exchange with the other major cultures. This dialogue today includes economic and commercial relations and constitutes, moreover, a powerful factor for peace and balance.

This programme follows the indications and suggestions of the Conference of Florence in March 1987 on the scheme of the cultural challenge of a Europe in mutation. In the Tuscan capital intellectuals and politicians, economists and industrialists, civil servants, heads of television channels, representatives of the cinema and yet other fields of artistic endeavour, met for four days. They examined together the problems of culture from a fresh angle, thanks to the preliminary studies which were the Conference's working papers.

The Conference confirmed the economic importance of culture and its growing role; the stimulus provided by the interaction between culture, the economy and the new technologies and both the challenge and the problems arising out of this interaction. A challenge which Europe must meet.

### A CITIZEN'S EUROPE: A case of unequal treatment

A Belgian aircraft is refused permission to land in French territory: too many Frenchmen on board.

Some Community citizens are more equal than others. Those discriminated against are usually nationals of a member state other than the one in which they reside - or are simply visiting. But not always.

Consider the case of a Belgian charter airline, Sobelair. A few months ago one of its aircraft was unable to leave Brussels airport because it had been refused permission to land at its destination, in the French Antilles. The reason? More than one-fifth of the passengers were of French nationality, who had tried to take advantage of the Belgian company's cheaper fares.

The French government did not hesitate to discriminate against its own citizens, by refusing them the opportunity to profit from the competition generated by the Community's existence. Hence the European Commission's decision of 9 December 1987 to take the matter to the EC Court of Justice in Luxembourg.

In cross-border areas discrimination of one kind or another is common. The majority of the victims are workers who cross one of the Community's internal frontiers daily to work in a neighbouring country.

A French mail order house, based in the French town of Lille, Redoute Catalogue, had concluded an agreement with the local authorities, under which workers who were over 55 years of age could switch from full-time to part-time work. Those who did so, would receive 30% of their basic wage as an allowance under the country's social welfare system.

However, only French nationals could take advantage of the company's offer. Belgian cross-border workers were automatically excluded from it.

The European Commission took the view that the company, and French authorities, must treat both French and Belgian workers alike. It has therefore taken up the matter with the French government.

A genuine People's Europe can only come about if all its citizens receive equal treatment. The European Commission, which sees itself as the guardian of the EC Treaties, and therefore of Community law, is ready to take up the cudgels on behalf of the Community's citizens, at their request and with their help.

### A PEOPLE'S EUROPE: An end to discrimination in the public services

The European Commission wants to ensure that the EC "Constitution" is respected.

To ensure that a Briton can work for the German post office on a permanent basis, an Italian for a Greek airline, and a Frenchman teach in a state-run school in Belgium (to give only a few examples), the European Commission has decided to take up the matter systematically with not only the governments and civil services of the 12 European Community countries but also employer's organizations, the trade unions and all other interested bodies.

The Treaty of Rome, the EC's "Constitution", enshrines the principle that workers are free to seek employment in any member state. This freedom does not extend to jobs in the civil services, however. Governments have taken advantage of this one exception to see to it that all jobs in the public sector are reserved for their own nationals.

The European Court of Justice in Luxembourg has ruled on several occasions that member states can limit employment to their own nationals in all jobs directly involving the responsibility of the State and the defense of its interests. They include, for example, such jobs as chief of police, judges and tax officials.

But there are thousands of other civil service jobs. The European Commission plans, therefore, to see that the principle which the EC's own judges have reaffirmed is respected in four major areas of activity.

They are: (1) such public services as posts and telecommunications; gas and electricity; radio and television and public transport; (2) medical and paramedical services; (3) the state-run educational establishments and (4) civil research in public establishments.

In the European Commission's view the free movement of people should be a key element of the single market envisaged for 31 December 1992, an objective which is included in the EC "Constitution" since 1 July 1987. It notes that the opening up of public service jobs to all Community citizens should complete other activities which it has already launched or is planning to: exchanges of students and research workers; the mutual recognition of degrees and diplomas; the liberalization of transport, etc.

### A CITIZEN'S EUROPE: Vexatious border crossings

European customs officials who are ignorant of EC legislation and the rights of the Community's citizens.

When Mr. X, who is French, was visiting his parents-in-law in Belgium, he received a handsome watch as a present. But he was stopped by French customs officials on his return and his watch was confiscated in lieu of the payment of VAT. Only the intervention of the European Commission restored his rights to Mr. X. The fact is that under a ruling of the EC Court of Justice, French customs could only seek to recover from Mr X the difference between the French and Belgian VAT rates.

A German employee, who was sent by his company to its French subsidiary for three months' training, was fined 700 French francs because he was carrying his personal computer, which was confiscated for 24 hours. The European Commission compelled French customs to refund him the full amount.

A truck driver arrived at Calais, only to be told that the documents which a forwarding agent had given him in Dover contained a number of mistakes. French customs officials refused to listen and fined the driver 60,000 French francs, even though their British colleagues had sent on the corrected documents at once. The Commission intervened once again. It pointed out that the driver had acted in good faith and it had the fine reduced to 5,000 francs.

The European Commission was equally successful in another case involving French customs. A Belgian accused of trying to export antique furniture illegally from France by crossing the border at an unauthorized French customs post, was fined 10,000 French francs. He could not have known that it was unauthorized as the signboard had been removed. The fine was reduced, therefore, to 1,000 French francs.

A German truck driver made a delivery in Paris without having had the transit documents stamped by customs officials. When the recipient tried to put matters right he was fined 48,000 French francs. Again, thanks to the Commission, which showed that he had acted in good faith, the fine was reduced to 3,500 French francs.

Such incidents seem to be multiplying as the fatal date of 31 December 1992 draws nearer. They point to a growing awareness of the Community's existence on the part of its citizens. Surely it is not too much to ask of government officials that they change their attitude in anticipation of the completion of the single market in 1992. The vexatious behaviour of customs officials, the continued reluctance and short-sightedness of government departments, their continued recourse to niggling checks, are both odious and costly. They are destroying the average person's confidence in the European Community and frustrating his readiness to help build it. Some cases are simply mind-boggling: such as the refusal of British financial institutions to accept payment for Eurotunnel shares with a Eurocheque.

Hence the European Commission's readiness to help the ordinary citizen whenever he comes to it with a well-founded complaint.

HEALTH: European scientists against job-related cancers

The European Commission proposes a new ECSC-funded medical research programme.

To safeguard the health of coal miners and steel workers, the European Commission is giving priority to the fight against job-related cancers. It plans to devote to it up to one-third of the budget of the next medical research programme of the European Coal and Steel Community. For the programme as a whole, the fifth of its kind, the Commission envisages a total expenditure of ECU 12m.\* over a 5-year period beginning in 1988.

The Commission plans to fund studies on the frequency of stomach cancers among miners and cancers of the lung and larynx among steelworkers. The research programme will also aim at improving methods for the early detection of cancer and at providing both training and information to workers on cancer-forming substances.

The new programme will also seek to protect the hearing of workers in the coal and steel industries. To this end the Commission will arrange for workers' hearing to be checked, in conjunction with research aimed at reducing noise at the work place. Under the fifth programme work will also be undertaken on diseases of the lungs, bronchial tubes, bones and muscles as well as the illnesses caused by certain chemical substances.

\* 1 ECU = UK£ 0.69 or IR£ 0.78

AGRICULTURE: The very poor to receive food surpluses the year around  
The Twelve decide to open their warehouses in 1988.

The European Community's needy will receive food from its enormous stock-piles throughout 1988 - and not simply in very cold weather. The Community's agricultural ministers unanimously agreed last month to continue on a year-round basis the operation in the early months of 1987.

Thanks to an ECU 100m.\* budget for this year, the EC will give the food-stuffs to charitable organizations chosen by the national governments, for distribution to the needy.

But the member states are not obliged to take part in this operation; surpluses, therefore, may not be available for free distribution throughout the Community. The European Commission had proposed that the operation be run on a Community-wide basis.

\* 1 ECU = UK£ 0.69 or IR£ 0.78

ENVIRONMENT: Nine EC governments called to order

From the disposal of empty bottles to the quality of bathing water.

The governments of the 12 European Community countries do not always implement spontaneously Community legislation on environmental protection. The European Commission was obliged last month to act against nine member states that have failed to draw up plans to encourage the recycling or re-use of empty glass bottles.

Only Ireland, Denmark and the Netherlands have so far implemented the Community directive on the disposal of bottles. But the Commission also had to act against Italy, whose national legislation lays down maximum levels for the presence in drinking water of certain pesticides which are ten times higher than the levels allowed under a Community directive.

Greece also has been called to order, because of its failure to apply the EC directive on bathing water to beaches other than those in the Athens area.

The French government has also had its knuckles rapped, for having authorized the import of 6,000 skins of wild cats belonging to species threatened with extinction, and therefore protected by an international convention the EC has adhered to.



NUCLEAR PROTECTION: The Twelve now ready to act together in case of an accident

Should a nuclear accident occur in the European Community, or in a neighbouring country, the 12 member states will be ready, in future, to act quickly to protect the health of the Community's 322 million inhabitants. The EC's foreign ministers agreed in mid-December on radioactive limits in foodstuffs and a Community-wide rapid information system. The two safety devices will come into operation as soon as an abnormally high level of radioactivity has been detected anywhere in the Community.

The radioactive limits set by the ministers will apply to all foodstuffs on sale in the EC, regardless of where they were produced. The standards now adopted are rather less strict than those adopted after the nuclear accident at Chernobyl. But the European Environment Commissioner, Stanley Clinton Davis, believes they allow a wide margin of safety. They still assume that 40% of foodstuffs put on sale are contaminated, whereas European experts had settled for a figure of 10%.

These radioactive limits will apply until the EC Council of Ministers can adopt safety limits that would be valid in all circumstances, even in the absence of any accident. For the moment, each member government is applying its own standards, subject to the limits which it sets remaining "as low as possible".

EC ministers also agreed on a rapid information system, which would come into effect in case of an accident. It fills the gaps in existing Community legislation. In future, each of the Twelve will have to inform the others, directly or indirectly, of the levels of radioactivity detected within its territory and the measures taken to deal with it and to protect public health.

The new system will cover all foodstuffs as well as drinking water and will apply to all sources of radioactivity: not only nuclear power stations but also research centres and other installations.

The Twelve also decided to re-introduce for another two years the post-Chernobyl rules on food imports, in order to prevent any contaminated foodstuffs from appearing on supermarket shelves. Nor can such foodstuffs be exported to third countries.