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A PEOPLE'S EUROPE: The right to vote

A European Commission directive on voting rights for Community nationals in local elections in their country of residence.

Five million European Community nationals will finally have the right to vote in municipal elections in their country of residence. The European Commission has just adopted a proposal for a Community Directive which should make it possible to settle a somewhat thorny problem and put all Community nationals on an equal footing.

The starting point for the proposal, presented by the European Commissioner, Carlo Ripa di Meana, is the observation that all the necessary conditions are hereafter present and that the Single European Act is fundamental in this connection. At present only Denmark, Ireland and the Netherlands grant the right to vote in municipal elections to all foreign nationals, while Britain grants it only to the Irish and nationals of Commonwealth countries. The nationals of all three countries lose the right to vote at home if they are resident abroad.

This is also the case as regards nationals of Germany, Luxembourg, Portugal and Belgium. Greeks and Italians can vote in elections at home but must return in order to do so. French nationals can vote by proxy and Spanish nationals by proxy or mail.

The proposed Directive tries to bring order in this chaos. A choice must be made, to begin with. An Italian will not be able to vote both in his home country and his country of residence. Moreover, a minimum period of residence may be required. The European Commission has proposed that this period should correspond to the term of office of a municipal council.

Other conditions, such as minimum voting age, capacity, whether voting is to be obligatory or not, will remain within the competence of the Member States, according to the legislation in force. The Directive also provides for a transitional period, to avoid abrupt changes. It allows a Member State whose population includes more than 20% of nationals of other Community countries (something which is true only of Luxembourg) not to implement the new Directive during the first elections following its entry into force, and to implement it gradually during subsequent elections.

The European Commission's proposal also recognizes the right to stand for elections, and sets a maximum period of residence, equal to twice the term of office of a municipal council. Member States would have the right, during the first two elections, to limit the number of councillors who are nationals of other Member States to 25% of the total.

The proposed Directive also provides that such persons may be excluded from the post of Mayor or Deputy Mayor, where they represent the state in their municipality. This provision also applies in cases where municipal councillors participate in elections to one of the Houses of Parliament. This is the case as regards the Senate in France, for example.

A PEOPLE'S EUROPE: A first progress report

The European Commission reports to the European Parliament and indicates future priorities.

The European Community flag, introduced in March 1986, flies more boldly in Europe and elsewhere; the notes of the Community anthem can be heard more often and its emblem is being used more widely, both within the Community's frontiers and abroad. The fact is that these symbols of Community identity and European unification are winning instant recognition from both Community nationals and strangers.

A People's Europe is taking shape daily, as the European Commission makes clear in its first balance sheet to the European Parliament of the activities undertaken. The Commission has also listed future priorities in the form of guidelines.

Europeans now have a common passport, although its introduction has been slightly delayed in Britain and the Netherlands. The ERASMUS programme to encourage student mobility was launched successfully a year ago; it was followed this May by an exchange programme for young people, boldly styled YES. The mutual recognition of diplomas, recently adopted by the Council of Ministers, has been preceded by a 1985 decision covering the diplomas of architects, pharmacists and most medical professions.

Among the measures already adopted are those relating to equality of access for young people to museums and cultural activities; the increase in the duty-free allowance for travellers to ECU 350*; an end to the tax levied by the post office for presenting small parcels from abroad to the customs and the regulation on toy safety.

Community measures in the health field include the emergency health card, adopted in 1986, as well as the more recent action programme against cancer. Victims of natural disasters can count on more effective emergency aid and the means to combat such disasters.

Despite the positive elements in this balance sheet, the European Commissioner responsible for a People's Europe, Carlo Ripa di Meana, did not hide the fact that the Commission is dissatisfied at the slow rate of progress in other fields. This is especially the case as regards the proposals submitted by the Commission but which still await a Council decision.

The more important of these include proposals regarding the right of residence of students and those who are economically inactive; simpler controls on persons at the Community's internal borders and the Community directive on the temporary import of motor cars.

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The approach of 1992 will certainly give fresh impetus to a People's Europe. The 1989 European Parliamentary elections will offer fresh opportunities for increased cooperation between Parliament and Commission - and for a speedier settlement of pending issues.

Other developments likely to give a fresh impetus to a People's Europe include an extension of the right to vote in municipal elections to nationals of other EC countries; the creation of a genuinely European cultural area and a television without frontiers; better information and communication and the preparation of a Charter of the rights of the European citizen.

* 1 ECU = UK£ 0.65 or IR£ 0.78.

INFLATION: Moderate in May

Inflation is running at much the same rate as last year.

Prices were reasonably steady throughout the 12-nation European Community between April and May, when they rose 0.2%. They rose 1.7% during the first five months of the year, as compared to 1.6% during the corresponding period in 1987. The inflation rate for the 12 months ending in May was 2.8%, as against 2.9% a year ago, according to Eurostat, the Community's statistical office.

The consumer price index rose moderately in nearly all EC countries in May, the increase ranging from 0.1% to 0.4%. Prices even fell by 0.1% in Spain; however, they rose 1% in Denmark, because of the half-yearly adjustment in rents.

Inflation was lower in the EC than in the United States, where it was 4% over a 12-month period, but it was much higher than in Japan, which recorded 0.2%.

Within the 12-nation Community the gap remains substantial between countries with high inflation rates and those with low ones. The 12-monthly rate for Germany and the Benelux countries was around 1%, as against 12.5% for Greece. The other Community countries were strung out between these two extremes: Ireland 2%; France 2.5%; Spain 3.9%; Britain 4.2%; Denmark 4.7%; Italy 5% and Portugal 8.3%.

INTERNAL MARKET: A single Community for diploma and degree holders

The mutual recognition of diplomas and degrees will come into force in two years.

The European Community Council of Ministers has at last adopted the Directive on the mutual recognition of degrees and diplomas. It will come into force in 1990, after having received the go-ahead of the European Parliament.

The Directive covers some 80 professions, including the teaching and legal professions, access to which is subject to the approval of the public authorities or professional bodies. From 1990 every Community national in possession of a degree or a diploma awarded by an institution of higher education after three years of studies, will be able to practice in any of the 12 Community countries. This is a freedom enjoyed at present only by the medical profession and architects.

To prevent distortions due to differences in the contents or duration of the studies or training needed to obtain a diploma or degree, the Member States will have the right to ask candidates to take an aptitude test or practice under national supervision for a period of up to three years maximum. The candidate will be able to choose for himself, except in the case of professions requiring detailed knowledge of national law (barristers and lawyers as well as chartered accountants, tax advisors, etc.). In such cases the national authorities will decide.

Diplomas and degrees awarded by institutions in third countries will also be recognized, provided they are recognized by the candidate's own country and that he has practised in the country in question. This will also be the case as regards diplomas awarded by professional associations, such as Britain's chartered bodies.

The Directive covers engineers also, until such time as their professional bodies reach agreement on a Directive of their own.

The candidate obviously will have to meet both the language requirements of his profession and a certain number of provisions contained in an annex to the Council decision and which relate to character and moral conduct.

INTERNAL MARKET: From the price of medicines to brand names

Some more steps on the road to 1992.

Work on completing the single European Market is progressing briskly, thanks to some major and a larger number of more modest but equally indispensable decisions by the Twelve. The liberalization of capital movements and the mutual recognition of diplomas and degrees rank among the former; the latter include the burgeoning European Community food laws and the various texts approved by the EC Council of Ministers on June 22. Among them are the measures for dealing with price controls on medicines, trade marks and building materials.

The Twelve approved a Community regulation designed to ensure that the controls imposed by the national authorities do not give an unfair advantage to domestic manufacturers and laboratories at the expense of their competitors in other Community countries.

The fact is that most EC countries are trying to limit spending on the health service by fixing or controlling prices and imposing conditions for the reimbursement of prescription and other charges. There is a danger, therefore, that in the absence of a Community regulation governments may be tempted to encourage the use of locally produced medicines.

The new Community rules, which must now be examined by the European Parliament before their formal adoption by the Council, require the publication and justification of national decisions.

The Ministers also reached a common position on Community rules which will apply to trade marks for products and services. The text, which will be formally adopted after examination by the European Parliament, provides a European definition for signs which can represent a trade mark. It also sets out the rights attached to the ownership of a trade mark and penalizes fanciful ones. No rights will attach to a trade mark which has not been used for five years in the country in which it has been registered.

The Twelve also agreed on safety and health standards for building materials. These products represent an annual turnover of ECU 300 billion*. Here, too, the European Parliament's opinion is needed.

* 1 ECU = UK£ 0.65 or IR£ 0.78.

INTERNAL MARKET: European food standards but no receipts

The Twelve agree on deep-frozen foodstuffs, additives and flavourings.

Pizzas ready for the oven, deep-frozen fillets of sole and prepackaged cakes will soon be able to take advantage of an emerging European common market. The European Community's Council of Ministers, which met on June 22, was able to agree on a series of regulations aimed at harmonizing national legislations on deep-frozen foods, on food additives in general and flavourings in particular and on packaging and other materials which come into contact with food products. But ministers made no attempt to impose their favourite receipts on their fellow citizens.

The Council began by adopting a Community Directive setting the principle of future Community standards applicable to flavourings used in food preparations, as well as the rules regulating their labelling. Experts from the Member States and the European Commission will later draw up more detailed technical standards. To facilitate their work, the Commission will prepare an inventory, within the next two years, of the products in question and the raw materials used in their manufacture.

Community standards will be drawn up by experts for the other additives used in food preparations as well. For the moment, the EC Council of Ministers is agreed on the principle of harmonizing national regulations, and has defined the categories of permitted additives and the provisions as regards labelling as well as general principles regarding their use. Only those additives which are necessary, safe and cannot mislead the consumer will be permitted.

The Council's common position must be examined by the European Parliament before it can be formally adopted. This is also the case as regards a proposal covering materials which come into contact with food, which the Council adopted the same day. It imposes strict quality standards and rules regarding labelling. The detailed technical standard will be drawn up by the experts.

As the European Commission has pointed out, the fact that the Council no longer tries, as it once did, to put together "European receipts" has made it easier for the Twelve to adopt common rules for 1992. The Council also adopted a set of Community standards for deep-frozen products and covering all stages in the chain, from manufacture to sale in shops and including transport and storage.

ROAD TRANSPORT: The target is 1 January 1993

But the liberalization process begins this year.

After 1 January 1993, the European Community's long-distance lorry drivers will no longer need a permit to deliver goods in another Member State. They will also be able to pick up a return load, something which is frequently not allowed at present. By adopting a Community regulation along these lines at their meeting at the end of June, the Community's transport ministers undertook to ensure that road hauliers, too, can meet the 1992 target.

The Ministers also drew up a time-table for the progressive liberalization of road transport. All the measures which currently restrict the hauliers' freedom to deliver goods to any part of the Community will have gone by 1 January 1993, the date for the opening of the single European market. The liberalization programme will cover deliveries within the Community's frontiers as well as goods coming from or intended for a non-Community country.

The abolition of the present system of quotas will not automatically mean that anyone can set off down the Community's motorways at the wheel of a lorry. In order to be able to offer their services in the other Member States, hauliers will need a Community licence, which will be issued on the basis of their competence and professional experience.

The Ministers decided, meanwhile, on an annual increase of 40% in the number of quotas granted at the Community level, both for this year and the next. As for the permits to be granted during the rest of the transitional period, the Ministers undertook to make an announcement before 31 March 1990. The European Commission must submit proposals to them before the end of next year, together with a report on the effects of the first liberalization measures.

The Twelve must also decide, before 31 March 1990, the lot of hauliers who must cross a non-member country in order to go from one EC country to another. In any case, the system adopted cannot discriminate in any way between the Member States.

The text adopted by the Ministers also provides that the European Commission or the EC Council of Ministers, as the case may be, will be able to allocate additional permits during the transitional period to meet possible needs.

TO OUR COLLEAGUES OF THE EUROPEAN PRESS

Many of you have already filled in our questionnaire. Those of you in France, Germany and Belgium led the way, followed closely by our colleagues in the Netherlands, Portugal and Britain. Those in Italy and Spain have lagged behind, unless it is the postal service which is to blame.

We are reprinting the questionnaire for those of you who either did not receive it or overlooked it*.

We shall analyse the results of our survey, in the hope it will help us improve our service.

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Do you find EUROFOCUS useful?
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 - more long articles?
 - more short articles?
 - the present mix?
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Industry	Health	Research
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