



a newssheet for journalists

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EUROFORUMS

HEALTH: Harmonizing the Hippocratic oath

The European Parliament adopts a report on medical ethics.

The national codes of medical ethics adopted by medical associations in the various European Community countries must be adapted to the European code, approved by their representatives on 6 January 1987. This Code, although both useful and important, nevertheless cannot be regarded as the only one to express the views of all groups involved in health care. The fact is that all sections of society must be associated in the drafting of ethical principles and standards and the setting of rules of conduct in this field.

The Euro-MPs clearly pulled no punches in their debate over the resolution on the highly sensitive subject of medical ethics, which they adopted recently. It was hardly surprising, therefore, that the resolution and report by the Belgian Euro-MP, Jef Ulburghs, were adopted by a very narrow margin (82 to 79, with 4 abstentions).

The resolution insists that patients should be more closely associated with disciplinary proceedings, if they so wish, which should be held in public. It also asks that more magistrates sit on the disciplinary tribunals of the medical associations, particularly at the appeal stage. The resolution also considers that these associations should limit themselves to issuing cautions or warnings; the more severe penalties, such as suspensions, should be a matter for the ordinary courts. Finally, no one should be allowed to hold office in a medical regulatory body and a professional association at the same time.

There is enough here to offend the susceptibilities of a milieu as jealous of its autonomy and its prerogatives as the medical. But the health care sector has changed considerably in the last 10 years: with the considerable increase in the social dimension of health care the patient has become more aware of his own responsibility. While the

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doctor continues to play an important role in the area of ethics, it is no longer an exclusive one. Consequently, medical practitioners and their associations cannot by themselves represent the ethical views of the population as a whole. On such issues as care of the terminally ill, organ transplants, reproduction and contraception, abortion and experiments involving human beings, society as a whole must take a stand.

The monopoly enjoyed by medical practitioners is being increasingly challenged, even on matters of medical ethics. So many interpersonal relationships are involved - between doctors, nursing staff, social security agencies, therapists, social workers, hospitals, patients, etc. - that it would be quite inconceivable in a democratic society for only one of the parties concerned to determine the ethical aspects of these relationships.

The European Parliament has therefore called for the creation of a Council for Medical Ethics in each of the Member States and at the Community level. The composition of each council would be such as to ensure a balance between medical practitioners, specialists on ethics, law, morality, sociology and theology and representatives of the national health services and patients' organizations.

The Council's terms of reference would include the drawing up of a patient's charter, based on that adopted by the European Parliament; formulating general ethical principles, delivering opinions both to individuals and to institutions and the courts and, in general, preparing the work of the actual legislature. The last word would remain with the legislature, however. Neither the new councils nor the medical associations could take its place.

A modern Hippocratic oath for today's doctors.

MEDIA: Television without frontiers

Artsministers from the Council of Europe countries meet informally.

"Television without frontiers will come about in Europe, with or without regulations; in fact it is already taking shape," according to Carlo Ripa di Meana, the European Commissioner with responsibility for cultural matters. He was addressing the arts ministers of the 21 countries that make up the Council of Europe, at an informal meeting devoted to the elimination of all obstacles to free movement, held in Brussels on September 13.

The ministers had come together at the invitation of the President of Belgium's French-speaking Community, Mr. Valmy Féaux, who considers the Convention drafted by the Council of Europe to be too vague. He takes the view that the Convention should make it possible for programmes to be widely distributed, even while leaving untouched the help given by national governments to their audiovisual industries. This aid exists, but it is insufficient, according to the representatives of the countries that took part in the discussion. Hence the need for support mechanisms at the European level.

For Mr. Ripa di Meana, the conflict of views over the Council of Europe's drafts loses much of its importance given the way things are going and the urgency of the problem. "Several satellites for direct broadcasting will be in orbit before the end of 1989, and the internationalization of programmes will be a fait accompli by then," he said. It was necessary therefore "to act before then, and more especially to get ready for the arrival of high-definition television, with its very high financial and technical, as well as social and cultural stakes. I firmly believe that the existence of first the directive, then the convention is not only possible but even necessary if we are to avoid the contrast between two Europes - a highly regulated European Community, surrounded by another fragmented, deregulated Europe."

The directive and the convention can both co-exist and operate successfully, on condition that they are compatible and complementary and the principle of "the status of origin" is safeguarded, according to the European Commissioner. This is the principle that all programmes produced in a Community country and in conformity with the regulations, must be granted the freedom of the airwaves in all other Community countries.

"This is a principle which has inspired the single European market of 1992 and all other Community activities, and it must replace considerations of reciprocity under traditional international law in all fields," Mr. Ripa di Meana told the assembled arts ministers.

AGRICULTURE: Community shortages

A look at products for which the EC is not self-sufficient.

The European Community is famous for its agricultural surpluses, even though the problem has been successfully tackled in recent years. But these mountains and lakes in fact hide a number of "holes" - products which are not produced in the Community in sufficient quantities to meet consumer demand. The most important among them are honey, fruit, some cereals and oils and fats, as the European Commission recently pointed out in its reply to a question from the Irish Euro-MP, Mark Clinton.

The 12-nation EC produces hardly one-third of its requirements of honey, according to the latest statistics available (1985/86). Its production of oils and fats of marine origin (from seals, whales, etc.) amounts to only 16% of its needs, and to 59% in the case of vegetable oils.

The EC produces just under two-thirds of the nuts it consumes and just over three-quarters of the citrus fruit. It is almost self-sufficient (88%) in fresh fruit, except lemons, but the level of self-sufficiency falls to 59% in the case of dried fruit. While the Community is meeting all its needs in the case of fresh vegetables, its output of rice, lentils, dried beans, etc. covers only 80% of consumer needs.

If the EC has a surplus of wheat, barley, rye and oats, it is deficient in corn (84%) and other cereals, especially sorghum (61%).

THE COUNTRYSIDE: Less dependent on farming in the future

The conclusions of the EC's agricultural ministers.

The European Community's rural areas will find themselves facing changes of such magnitude in the coming years that the EC will have to act on several fronts at once, including not only the agricultural but also the environmental, regional and social. This, in substance, was the conclusion reached by the Community's farm ministers after they had shared their experiences and discussed the European Commission's guidelines on September 9.

The rural exodus of the 1960s and 1970s was giving way to a migration from the cities, except in Ireland. The Twelve took the view that agricultural employment would continue to fall, making it necessary to create jobs in sectors such as agro-industry, forestry and tourism.

CUSTOMS OFFICIALS: Monetary rewards for some

The situation in the 12 EC countries.

Relations between travellers and customs officials are unnatural by their very nature; it could hardly be otherwise. The former believe the latter to be especially nose, in some Community countries at any rate.

They presumably will not be surprised to learn that in half the Member States, customs officials generally receive a percentage of the net proceeds of confiscated goods. This is the case in Belgium, France, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg and Portugal, as the Dutch Euro-MP, Florus Wijsenbeek, was told recently by the European Commission.

Replying to a question from the Euro-MP, the Commission added that this was neither contrary to Community law nor likely to hamper the competition of the single European market in 1992.

REGIONAL AID: Roads and industrial estates to receive the lion's share

The 7th allocation of ERDF grants this year.

Motorways and industrial estates are to receive the lion's share of the ECU 232mn.* which the European Commission approved in mid-September. The sum represents the 7th allocation of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), and it will help finance individual industrial and infrastructure investment projects for 1988.

The five recipients of the ERDF grants are Britain, France, Italy, Portugal and Spain.

Nearly half the ECU 37mn. allocated to Britain will be invested in industry, where it will safeguard 1,300 jobs and create another 805, many of them in the north. The remaining funds will help finance infrastructure projects.

Industrial projects receiving ERDF grants include a credit-card processing centre in Dumferline and the modernization of a motor vehicle components factory in Antrim. Tourism-related projects include the Caphouse Colliery mining museum in Wakefield and the New Theatre in Cardiff. Industrial estates in Spain and Italy are also receiving ERDF grants for development purposes.

* 1 ECU = UK£ 0.66 or IR£ 0.78

ENVIRONMENT: The European Parliament wants very clean cars

Euro-MPs amend the European Commission's proposal.

The European Parliament wants the standards which would apply to smaller cars in the 1990s, as regards the emission of exhaust gases, to be as strict as those already adopted by the European Community for more powerful cars. It was along these lines, therefore, that the Euro-MPs amended, on September 14, the European Commission's proposal covering cars with engines of less than 1.4 litres.

The standards the Commission had set for smaller cars were less strict as regards emissions of carbon monoxide and nitrogen oxides. The European Parliament, while agreeing to the proposal as a whole, nevertheless felt that the limit values for permissible emissions which it lays down should be in line with those set for cars with engines of 1.4 litres and above. So far the Council of Ministers has been unable to find the majority needed to adopt the standards proposed by the Commission, standards which have attracted the hostility of a number of car manufacturers, especially in France.

The European Parliament has proposed a derogation of up to two years for European manufacturers facing major adaptation problems. It would be granted by the European Commission, once the manufacturer had proved it faced technical or economic problems.

The Euro-MPs also want the European regulations to provide for (1) national stimulants to enable manufacturers to meet the standards within the time limit, even if they obtain a derogation and (2) customers to scrap their "dirty" cars when they buy a "clean" one.

ENERGY: Coal - a neglected resource?

The European Parliament speaks up for Community coal.

The European Community has been neglecting its resources in coal, according to a resolution adopted by the European Parliament on September 14. The Euro-MPs, who criticize the closure of Community coal mines, want the Twelve to invest more in the exploitation of their coal resources and in research.

The Parliament has underlined the fact that world coal prices are currently much too low to allow European lines to be operated profitably, although the EC has 10 to 14% of world reserves.

AVIATION: No more looping the loop after Ramstein

The European Parliament calls for a ban on all dangerous air displays.

Aerial acrobatics pose a serious threat to spectators, pilots and Community citizens and should be banned, along with "all air shows, military or civil, involving flight demonstrations of military aircraft, all low-level flying and air combat exercises over inhabited areas" as well as "flights targeted at public buildings, hospitals, schools, nuclear power stations, etc."

The words are from the resolution adopted by the European Parliament on September 14. Euro-MPs are unlikely to forget the tragedy at Ramstein, with its 60 dead and 300 injured. An Italian Euro-MP, M. Tridente, denounced these "massacres carried out in peacetime by machines operated by irresponsible people."

His German colleague, M. Rothley, stressed the "uselessness of these displays of military might" and criticized the American authorities for having allowed displays of a type banned in the United States to take place on German soil.

The European Commissioner for the environment, Stanley Clinton Davis, reminded Parliament that the European Commission has no competence in the matter. However, he expressed the wish that the Member States would follow the example of the countries in which stricter rules are in force.

Unhappily, the tragedy at Ramstein was not the only one; air displays have already resulted in five serious accidents, with their trail of dead and wounded, this year.

BRIEFLY ...

THE COMMUNITY IN FESTIVE MOOD FOR ITS VERY OWN BICYCLE RACE

The arrival in Luxembourg, on September 18, of the third European Community bicycle race (it was won by Laurent Fignon!) was marked by a Festival of Europe. The Community had set up an information stand and each of the Twelve had stands offering their tastiest dishes.

The race began at Franconville, near Paris, on September 9, and took in parts of France, Belgium and Germany. Normally open to individual amateurs and professionals, national teams were allowed to take part for the first time this year. Each of the 12 stages of the race was dedicated to one of the Member States, so that all 12 were able to show off their folklore, culture and tourist attractions to the summer crowds.

TYING BRITAIN AND SICILY FIRMLY TO THE CONTINENT

The European Parliament had asked the European Commission, in a resolution adopted in September 13, to carry out a study into the economic, social and environmental implications of the Channel tunnel, on the one hand, and a bridge or tunnel linking Sicily to the Italian mainland on the other.

The Euro-MPs are convinced of the long-term benefits of both projects, but are concerned at the likely loss of jobs in the sea transport sector. They want an aid programme, backed by the Community, aimed at helping Sicily, Calabria and the Calais region.

The European Parliament also favours special safety measures for the Channel tunnel, including alternatives to it in order to deal with acts of sabotage or terrorism.

OCCUPATIONAL DISEASES: A FIT SUBJECT FOR HARMONIZATION

An illness recognized as an occupational disease may entitle its victim to compensation in Germany but not necessarily in Belgium or Spain. The European Commission feels that the disparities between the national lists of occupational diseases qualifying for compensation must be reduced, given the moves towards the single European market. It has therefore undertaken to update the European list of such diseases, described in its recommendations of 1962 and 1966. The Commission gave this information to the Belgian Euro-MP, Anne-Marie Lizin, who had expressed concern at the differences between the Belgian and Community lists.