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Journalists for Europe

EC INSTITUTIONS: The 17 "ministers" for the Europe of 1992

The new European Commission took office on 6 January under Jacques Delors.

Like its predecessor, the new European Commission is presided over by Jacques Delors. It will hold office until 1 January 1993, the date set for the completion of the Single Market. Clearly the Community's 17 "ministers" will have their hands full.

"Ministerial" responsibilities were shared out on December 16. Mr. Delors both remains President and retains responsibility for monetary affairs. He is a specialist in this sector of vital importance for the Single Market. He will also continue to preside over the group of experts entrusted by the EC heads of state and government with the task of reporting on European monetary union.

Because Commission decisions are taken collectively, all the new Commissioners will have their say in the realization of the 1992 project. Even so, it will occupy some more than others. They include President Delors himself, of course, as well as Martin Bangemann, responsible for the internal market, industrial affairs and relations with the European Parliament, and Mrs Christiane Scrivener, who has responsibility for the customs union, VAT and other consumption taxes, direct taxation and social contributions. As the EC's competition commissioner, Leon Brittan will have an important role to play, given the Commission's considerable powers in this field.

Other commissioners with responsibility for one or more areas of the 1992 project include Filippo Maria Pandolfi (research, telecommunications and informatics); António Cardoso e Cunha (energy, small businesses, the crafts, trade, tourism and cooperatives); Jean Dondelinger (audiovisual, press and information and culture); Karel Van Miert (transport and consumer protection); Carlo Ripa di Meana (environment). The Community's agricultural policy has become the responsibility of Ray McSharry, social affairs and education that of Mrs Vasso Papandreou, while Britain's other commissioner, Bruce Millan, has inherited responsibility for regional aid. Henning Christophersen is now commissioner for economic and financial affairs, with responsibility for coordinating Community aid. Peter Schmidhuber is the new budget commissioner.

As before, the European Community's relations with the outside world are in the hands of three commissioners: Frans Andriessen (trade policy and other industrialized countries, both East and West); Manuel Marín (the 66 Lomé Convention countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific) and Abel Matutes (other developing countries). Mr. Marín is also handling the EC's fisheries policy.

LABOUR: European health and safety standards

The Twelve agree on a Community regulation.

The "social dimension" of the Single Market, set for the end of 1992, is beginning to emerge. The European Community Council of Ministers reached agreement on December 16 on the general principles guaranteeing the health and safety of employees at their place of work. The minimum requirements that employers must meet are set out in a Community regulation, which deals with standards of hygiene and safety as well as the information and training to be given to employees.

This Community directive establishes the principle of the employer's responsibility for the protection of the health and the safety of employees, although it can be set aside by the national authorities in the event of force majeure (if the factory is hit by lightning, for example). The directive, which provides simplified procedures for smaller companies, does not try to settle all problems. It will have to be completed by a number of specific regulations in such fields as work with VDUs, the transport of very heavy loads, etc.

The adoption of these specific directives cannot be taken for granted. The text regarding the protection of workers from benzene is in limbo, for example, the EC Council of Ministers having adopted by a majority a regulation rejected by the European Parliament.

CONSUMERS: The EC spreads its mantle over 175 alcoholic beverages

The Twelve agree on names for them.

The Twelve can be expected to stop quarreling over whether a particular whiskey or cognac is the genuine article or a fake. Consumers throughout the European Community need no longer worry as to the quality of an alcoholic beverage, provided it is on the list of 175 European products adopted by the Community's agricultural ministers on December 14.

The EC Council of Ministers in fact has drawn up the official definitions which all European producers will have to respect hereafter. It marks the first step towards harmonization at the European level in the drinks sector. The Community authorities will now try to ensure that the rest of the world also respects these 175 definitions. This will be no easy task, given that the trade in counterfeit goods is international.

AIDS: Companies should not test for it

The Twelve take a stand.

Those infected with the AIDS virus, or who have the disease, "do not put at risk their colleagues at the workplace ... There is no justification, therefore, for screening ... job applicants ... Nor does screening during periodic medical examinations, conducted at the workplace, represent a suitable method of fighting AIDS." These were the conclusions reached by the European Community's health ministers on December 15. They are based on the principles of the World Health Organization (WHO), and their adoption marked an attempt to calm the fears which the spread of AIDS can give rise to.

The fact is that the number of cases of AIDS in the 12-nation Community had virtually doubled in a year to 15,300 by the end of last September, according to the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Paris. The biggest increase was among drug addicts who inject themselves, especially in the Community's southern regions. The number of cases of AIDS among blood donors has fallen, however, thanks to the precautions that are now being taken.

The Community's health ministers want companies to make information about AIDS available to their workforce, through their doctors and other medical staff. Large firms should set an example in this respect. The ministers also take the view that someone who is carrying the AIDS virus but is not ill should be treated as any other worker. And an employee who has become infected should not be required to tell his employer. As for those who do contract the disease, they should be treated in the same way as other seriously ill employees, according to the Community's health ministers.

CANCER: Anti-smoking proposals turned down

The European Year of the fight against cancer off to a bad start.

The European Community's health ministers, after declaring 1989 "the European year of the fight against cancer", failed to adopt at their December 15 meeting two regulations proposed by the European Commission in order to reduce the incidence of cancer among smokers. The first would set the maximum tar content of cigarettes at a very low level, the second would require all tobacco products sold in the EC to carry the warning "severely injurious to health." Manuel Marín, who was the European Commissioner responsible for social affairs until the beginning of this month, expressed disappointment at the decision. He called on the public to bring pressure to bear on the 12 governments. The next meeting of the Community's health ministers is set for May.

RESEARCH: The Twelve approve two new programmes

BRITE/EURAM for traditional industries, JOULE for energy.

The European Community's traditional industries, from textiles to the aeronautical, will get a technological helping hand from the BRITE/EURAM programme, which is to receive ECU 500mn.* in Community funds for the period 1989 to 1992. This follows a decision of the EC's research ministers of December 15.

Ministers also reached agreement on the JOULE programme, which is devoted to non-nuclear energy. It is to receive ECU 122mn. in Community funds for a period of three years and three months starting 1 January 1989.

The two R&D programmes consist largely of work that is already going on. It is being undertaken jointly by industrial companies, universities and research institutes in the different Community countries. The costs are shared equally between the EC, on the one hand, and those actually conducting the research on the other.

BRITE/EURAM is a continuation of two programmes: BRITE (Basic Research in Industrial Technologies for Europe) and EURAM (European Research in Advanced Materials). It brings together practically all Community R&D aimed at using the best modern technologies to breathe new life into traditional industries. The scope of BRITE/EURAM has been extended, however, to include the aeronautical sector, which has not been the object of Community research so far.

A decision to this effect was taken by the research ministers at their meeting on December 15, at the suggestion of the European Commission. ECU 35mn. will be spent over a 2-year period on research into aerodynamism, reduction of noise levels, the use of computers in aircraft instrumentation and propulsion systems.

Other areas of R&D under the BRITE/EURAM programme include new materials; product design and quality control; the application of new technologies to the most traditional industries and to small and medium-sized enterprises and manufacturing processes.

The JOULE programme brings together research into renewable energy sources - solar, wind, biomass and geothermal; energy savings in buildings and in industry and fossil fuels - oil, natural gas and coal. JOULE aims both to increase security of supplies and find new, non-polluting uses for coal, petrol and natural gas.

* 1 ECU = UK£0.65 or IR£0.78

SOCIAL SERVICES: Twelve very different systems ...

... with growing differences.

Social services are viewed very differently from one European Community country to another. What is more, the gap between the Twelve is tending to widen, according to a study carried out on behalf of the EC Council of Ministers. Its main findings were published by the European Commission at the beginning of December.

In its report the Commission has taken 1984 as the base year and tried to forecast the situation in 1990. The study shows that the share of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) devoted to social services in the 12-nation Community, after rising between 1980 and 1983, has been falling in the second half of the 1980s. By 1990 it would have fallen to 25.6%, from 27.2% in 1983. All EC countries seem to show the same trend with the exception of Greece and Spain.

The share of social services in the GDP of individual Community countries was highest in the Netherlands in 1984, when it reached 32.8%, and lowest in Portugal, at 15.2%. But this share should decline more rapidly in Portugal than in the Netherlands until 1990, when the leaders in the field of social services will be Belgium and France, in addition to the Netherlands. The laggards in the matter will be Spain and Portugal, according to the Commission.

Each Community country has its own system of financing the social services. The three main sources of income - companies, the State and the ordinary citizen - have roughly the same importance in the Community as a whole. But their respective shares vary greatly from one country to another, something which is not expected to change until 1990. The State provides nine-tenths of the resources in Denmark and some three-quarters in Ireland. In France, businesses contribute more than 40% of the total, while in the Netherlands individuals are the major contributors.

How the resources are spent on the various social services varies substantially also from one country to another. Old-age pensions represent the main item of expenditure in nearly all Member Countries; they account for more than 70% of the total in Greece but not more than 31% in Ireland and the Netherlands. Expenditure on health comes first in Portugal, the Netherlands and Ireland but represents less than 20% of the total in Greece. Maternity and family allowances make up 10% of the total in Britain, Ireland and Denmark but their share is below 4% in Greece and Spain. This situation should remain unchanged until 1990.

BRIEFLY ...**84 university establishments ready for education without frontiers**

As many as 81 university departments and three associations of universities will take part in the first phase of an experiment in education without frontiers, to be launched for the academic year 1988/89 in the framework of the Community exchange programme, ERASMUS. In each of the five disciplines covered by the experiment - business management, chemistry, medicine, history and mechanical engineering - some 16 or 17 faculties, located throughout the 12-nation European Community, have been selected by the European Commission, to which must be added three associations of European faculties. Students from these institutions will be able to spend time in faculties in several countries, for the credits thus obtained will allow them to earn their degrees in the normal length of time.

Vocational training for women and the challenge of 1992

National, regional and local bodies in the 12-nation European Community which deal with the vocational training of women can hereafter share information and experiences, thanks to a Community-wide network, IRIS. It was launched by Manuel Marín, when he was still EC Commissioner for social affairs and education, at a seminar held in Brussels on December 12 and 13. IRIS offers all who are interested the possibility of exchanging both information and documents, consulting databanks, taking part in European meetings and observing the implementation of training projects in the field. In Greek mythology Iris is the goddess of the rainbow and faster than her male colleague, Hermes, as messenger of the gods - or so the inventors of the project claim.

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1990. European Year of Tourism

1989 is the year of the fight against cancer. However, the European Community's ministers of tourism decided on December 14 that 1990 will be European Tourism Year, without even waiting for the previous European year, that of the cinema and television, to draw to an end. The ministers also adopted an action programme aimed at developing a "frontier-free tourist space" in the Community. Thanks to ECU 5mn.* in Community funds, it will be possible to organize information and publicity campaigns, competitions and other promotional activities.

* 1 ECU = UK£0.65 or IR£0.78

BRIEFLY ...**Less alcohol at the wheel from 1993?**

The maximum permissible level of alcohol in the blood for drivers of motor vehicles could be reduced to 0.50mg per millilitre from 1993 if the European Community Council of Ministers adopts the regulation proposed by the European Commission at the end of 1988. The regulation would represent a substantial cutback from present levels in all but two Member States: the Netherlands and Portugal, where the maximum authorized level is already at 0.50mg/ml. Elsewhere it has been set at 0.80mg/ml. Drunken drivers are responsible for between one third to one half of all fatal accidents involving adults. The fact is that a level of 0.50mg/ml can affect the behaviour of a young driver or of one unaccustomed to drinking.

A genuinely European driving licence

At present a motorist who changes his country of residence must exchange his old driving licence for a new one within a year, at a cost which varies from one EC Member State to another. At the end of last year the European Commission proposed to the Twelve that each of them recognize the driving licences issued by the other, thus allowing the peripatetic motorist to save both time and money. The Commission's proposal also contains provisions aimed at standardizing driving licences and the necessary examinations.

Towards frontier-free car insurance

A proposal which the European Commission sent the Twelve at the end of 1988 would allow motorists to insure their cars where they like, even while guaranteeing accident victims adequate indemnification within a reasonable period of time. It involves extending to motor insurance the elimination of national frontiers already decided on for all non-life insurance in June 1988. The Commission's proposal seeks to resolve all the problems which are specific to this branch of the insurance industry: safeguarding the interests of accident victims; the operation of national guarantee funds to indemnify the victims of accidents caused by drivers who are not insured or cannot be identified and, finally, the system of green cards.

BRIEFLY . . .**Denmark remains the most expensive of the Twelve**

Denmark remained the most expensive of the 12 European Community countries as of last October, according to Eurostat, the EC's statistical office. With Belgian prices as the reference (100), the "cost" of a basket of goods came to 135.9 in Denmark and only 56 in Portugal, the least expensive Community country. Eurostat's figures show that the gulf between the Twelve is widening. The same basket of goods cost 128.3 in Denmark in October 1985. Germany and France remain the most expensive countries after Denmark, Greece and Spain the two cheapest after Portugal. In all the other Community countries the basket costs somewhat less than the reference price.

Farm incomes show a slight rise in 1988

The average farm income in the European Community (excluding Portugal) rose by 1.3% in 1988, according to estimates published by Eurostat, the EC's statistical office. In 1987 incomes fell by 2.3%. The average net income of the non-hired agricultural labour force rose by 1.4%, having fallen by 1.4% in 1987. As always, these figures conceal substantial differences between individual Member States. Farm incomes rose by 15% in Ireland, more than 10% in Germany and Spain, nearly 6% in Greece and 4% in Belgium. Incomes fell, however, by 9.7% in Britain, 4.2% in France and nearly 2% in Denmark and Italy. In the Netherlands and Luxembourg the rise was equal to the Community average.

More than ECU 476mn.* in regional aid

Regions facing difficulties in seven of the 12 European Community countries will receive a total of ECU 476.2mn. from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The sum, representing the seventh allocation for individual projects in 1988, was released by the European Commission in mid-December. Italy is to receive half the total amount, with Britain, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain sharing the balance. Nearly ECU 459mn. will be devoted to large-scale infrastructure projects, mainly in the Italian Mezzogiorno. The remainder, over ECU 17mn., will help finance industrial investments, mainly in Ireland, where more than 1,500 jobs will be either created or saved.

* 1 ECU = UK£0.65 or IR£0.78