



a newssheet for journalists

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Mailed from: Brussels X

Journalists

HIGHER EDUCATION: Cross-border studies from next year

The European Commission launches a pilot scheme.

Students who want to divide their time between universities in, say, Britain, Germany and France, and yet end their peripatetic studies with a degree from a British university, have only to wait until the next academic year.

This is because some 80 institutions of higher education, from all 12 Community countries are taking part in a pilot scheme launched by the European Commission, under the Community's exchange study programme, ERASMUS. The scheme, which will run for six years from 1989/90, is open to students registered with any one of these 80 institutions.

It covers courses in medicine, business administration, history, chemistry and mechanical engineering. The student will earn transferable credits, 60 for a full academic year, 30 for a semester's study and 20 credits per term. Some 180 credits will be needed to obtain a bachelor's degree.

The 80 institutions will be helped financially by the Community, which will award five scholarships in addition for study at each of them. Each scholarship will be worth ECU 5,000* at least.

Interested universities and other institutions of higher education should write to: Bureau ERASMUS, 15 rue d'Arlon, B-1040 Brussels, Belgium. The telephone number is 233 01 11. The last date for applications is 31 October 1988.

* 1 ECU = UK£0.65 or IR£0.77

EMPLOYMENT: Still falling in the steel industry

But output was up last year.

Employment in the European Community's steel industry is still falling. The number of jobs had shrunk to 402,000 by May of this year, as compared to 431,000 in May 1987 and nearly 466,000 in May 1986. These figures, just published by the European Commission, are in marked contrast to figures for Community steel production, which is forecast to rise 6% this year by the Commission.

The Commission points out that 1988 is an exceptional year, with both domestic consumption and exports up sharply. Apparent consumption* is expected to rise by 4% this year. But world consumption will continue to decline over the years, even while competition grows sharper. The European steel industry must therefore continue to restructure itself, a process which implies further job losses.

* (production + imports) - exports.

TELEVISION: Gold for the BBC in Brussels

It wins a NIKE, the European Commission's award for the best portrayal of women in modern society.

Television tends to portray women as either housewives or sex symbols. To encourage a more balanced portrayal of women in modern society the European Commission has instituted its own award, which it has named NIKE, the Greek word for victory.

Like the Olympic medals, NIKES come in gold, silver and bronze. The first of them were awarded in Brussels on October 8. The gold NIKE was won by the BBC, the silver by Belgium's French language channel, RTBF, and the bronze by Germany's ZDF.

The BBC's award winning programmes, "Women in Black", looks at the lives of three widows. The RTBF's programme "Tan dura es la vida" (Life is hard) describes the efforts of a Peruvian woman to set up a canteen for poor children in Lima. "Mama, I'm crying", produced by the ZDF, tells of the fight against apartheid led by two women, one white, the other black.

The European Cultural Commissioner, Carlo Ripa di Meana, took the initiative in creating the NIKE award. It is the Commission's contribution both to the European Cinema and Television Year, 1988, and to the Community's efforts to promote the equality of the sexes.

The jury of nine women and three men was drawn from all 12 EC countries. It included the British actress, Helena Michell, and the Irish Minister of State, Mrs. Maire Geoghegan-Quinn. It was presided by Marlene Lenz, a member of the European Parliament and author of a report on the place of women in the media. It was this report which led Euro-MPs to ask the European Commission a year ago to take action in this field.

ENVIRONMENT: No weed-killer in drinking water, please

An important ruling of the EC Court of Justice in Luxembourg.

The European Court of Justice in Luxembourg has held that Italy cannot authorize the maximum permissible level of atrazine in drinking water to be exceeded except in an "emergency", for a limited period and only if there are no unacceptable risks to public health. The Court was answering a question raised by a judge in Turin, who had started legal proceedings against the Italian authorities.

The origins of the dispute lie in the interpretation to be given a Community directive (80/778) on the quality of drinking water. This directive sets the maximum permissible amount of atrazine - a highly dangerous weed-killer - at 0.1 micrograms (one-tenth of a millionth of a gram, in other words) per litre of water.

However, the Italian government raised this to 1 microgram by ministerial ordinance, on the grounds that the Community directive allowed it room for manoeuvre. The judge therefore asked the EC Court of Justice if the Italian state could derogate in this way from a Community directive.

From the Court's reply it appears that an authorization to exceed the amounts set under the EC directive can be given only in the event of an emergency, for a limited period of time (i.e. the time normally needed to ensure the water is once again safe to drink) and on condition that the supplies needed for human consumption cannot be met from elsewhere. In addition, the concentration must not be such as to threaten public health.

On the basis of the Court's ruling, the judge will now be able to decide on the legality or otherwise of the ministerial ordinance and, eventually, continue the proceedings against the Italian authorities.

INTERNAL MARKET: European patents for animals and plants

The European Commission wants to help biotechnologists protect their inventions.

The European Commission wants scientists who discover processes which modify the characteristics of plants and animals to be able to patent their inventions. It believes that a Community directive to this end would stimulate research in biotechnology in the 12-nation European Community and put European scientists on an equal footing with their American and Japanese colleagues.

At present the protection afforded European biotechnologists for their inventions does not extend beyond their national borders. As international patent conventions date from an age when the science of biotechnology was virtually unknown, each Member State interprets them in its own way.

The proposed directive would make it possible to obtain patents throughout the Community for transformations of living matter, animal or vegetable, which represent an innovation and have an industrial application. Researchers would be able to patent both the "finished product" and the technique used to produce it.

ENERGY: Tomorrow's fuels

The experts take stock of Community research.

Some 42 research centres in eight European Community countries are working on tomorrow's oil and natural gas, with the Community's financial backing. Their representatives took stock of their work with other European experts and European Commission officials at a meeting in Lyon (France) at the end of September.

The research is aimed at (1) providing the information needed to facilitate the exploitation of oil and gas reserves and (2) finding ways of improving natural gas and petroleum products in the light of the likely changes in their use. Thus some of the current research deals with the characteristics of "clean" petrol; other projects seek to adapt diesel oil to the diesel engines of tomorrow.

The EC has earmarked a total of ECU 15mn.* for this research. It will meet half the costs, as the balance must be borne by the participants themselves. The Commission has had a difficult time choosing from the 100 applications received. The research, which forms a part of the third Community programme devoted to non-nuclear energy, was begun between 1986 and the beginning of this year; it will end in 1990.

* 1 ECU = UK£0.65 or IR£0.77.

MERCHANT SHIPPING: The attractions of the Luxembourg flag

The Belgian merchant fleet could weigh anchor for the Grand Duchy.

Land-locked Luxembourg could yet turn into a maritime power. Its flag has its attractions, as the President of the Belgian Shipowners' Union, Mr Jacques Saverys, has pointed out. Putting the country's merchant fleet under it would raise profits by 25%, given that the employer's contribution to social security payments for seafarers is 27% in Luxembourg as against 52% in Belgium, without any loss of pay.

The Belgian Euro-MP, Mr Luc Beyer de Ryke, is concerned that the Community's merchant fleets are seriously considering giving up their national flags and to sail under flags of convenience for economic, social and fiscal reasons. He has therefore asked the European Commission whether, in order to protect the merchant fleet of Member States, it would not consider the harmonization of existing legislation and the eventual creation of a "European" flag.

The European Transport Commissioner, Stanley Clinton Davis, has assured the Belgian Euro-MP that the Commission shares his concern. Setting up new shipping registers within the Community is one way of meeting the threat posed by flags of convenience. The Commission will closely monitor the new intra-EC registers in order to ensure certain standards for vessels, together with crew safety and a certain level of employment for Community seafarers.

Direct Community intervention, to prevent the Community's merchant fleets giving up their national flags to sail under the flag of another Member State, seems unlikely at present. An alignment of operating conditions would be desirable, however, although it would need to take account of the need to remain competitive, given that Community shipping must operate in world markets. The opening of a Community shipping register has received the Commission's special attention, according to Mr Clinton Davis.

TRANSPORT: Another job for the European Commission

The Twelve want it to negotiate transit agreements with Austria, Switzerland and Yugoslavia.

The European Community cannot have a common transport policy unless the obstacles put in its way by third countries are removed. When the Community's transport ministers met informally in Athens recently, they recognized the need to give the European Commission a mandate to embark on a second round of negotiations with Austria, Switzerland and Yugoslavia. The aim: reach an agreement with all three countries before the end of 1989, guaranteeing reciprocal access to the entire road network.

The obstacles are so numerous as to threaten to bring to a halt traffic between Italy and Greece, on the one hand, and the rest of the EC on the other. The number of Greek-registered lorries which can cross Yugoslavia is limited by quotas, while Switzerland has a ban on lorries of more than 28 tonnes and on driving at night - and collects a road tax.

The Commission is satisfied with the outcome of the first round, begun a year ago. It is giving priority to lifting the numerous restrictions to which EC lorries are subject. It is prepared, however, to try to alleviate problems arising from the very high level of traffic from the Community (20 to 22mn. tonnes a year for Austria alone), by setting up a combined road-rail network and developing the necessary infrastructure in the medium-term, such as bridges and tunnels.

The European Investment Bank could help finance some of these projects; it has just lent ECU 100mn.* for the trans-Yugoslav motorway. Even so, the N° 1 priority, in the interests of safety and the environment, remains the removal of all obstacles and restrictions, especially on the Swiss side.

* 1 ECU = UK£0.65 or IR£0.77.

EMPLOYMENT: Working for a sect is still work

For the EC Court of Justice Shri Bhagwan's sect has an "economic activity".

The provisions of the Treaty of Rome which guarantee the free movement of workers apply equally to members of a religious sect, even when they are given board and lodging in lieu of a salary. The European Court of Justice in Luxembourg was very clear on this point when it ruled, on October 5, in favour of a German working for the Bhagwan community in the Netherlands.

Udo Steymann, a German national, was refused a residence permit by the Dutch because he was not a wage earner, according to the local police. Mr Steymann took the Dutch authorities to court, and when the case reached the Netherland's Council of State the latter consulted the Community's Court of Justice.

The Court held that the work which Mr Steymann did for the sect was economic in nature, given that the sect has commercial activities and provides its members board and lodging in return for work. The authors of the Treaty of Rome clearly did not have this in mind when they wrote that the European Community should promote "a harmonious development of economic activities".

THIRD WORLD: 1,000 gardens to blossom in the desert

UNICEF mails a giant postcard to Commission President Jacques Delors.

Some 1,000 children from the Belgian town of Neufchâteau were busy recently, raising the funds needed to enable children living in the Chad to create vegetable gardens in their schools, thus holding back the advance of the desert.

This UNICEF-sponsored project will also help the children both to feed themselves and learn how to grow food.

A number of painters, including J.-M. Folon, R. Somville, S. Creuz and Berrocal, helped the children of Neufchâteau assemble the world's largest painting, which covered a football field when completed. It was made up of 5,000 individual paintings, each of which was later sold to raise money for the project.

These paintings were the basis of the world's biggest postcard, measuring 10 feet by 7. One of these giant postcards was mailed to Belgium's Queen Fabiola, another to European Commission President Jacques Delors. Other recipients included Ronald Reagan, Mikhail Gorbachev and the President of the Organization of African Unity.

BRIEFLY**PUTTING EUROPEAN RESEARCHERS ON LINE**

If only European researchers could communicate with each other via their PC ... The telecommunications authorities of 22 West European countries undertook in September to make this possible from next year. The European Commission, for its part, announced at the beginning of October that it was going to make ECU 1mn.* available immediately for a pilot scheme which will allow European researchers to interconnect their computer systems. The funds are being provided by the Community research programme devoted to information technologies, ESPRIT.

The 6,000 or so researchers and engineers taking part in the ESPRIT programme will use the future network themselves to communicate between European research institutes. The network itself is the subject of a EUREKA*** project, COSINE**.

* 1 ECU = UK£0.65 or IR£0.77.

** Cooperation for Open Systems Interconnection Networking in Europe.

TOMORROW'S TELEVISION SHOWN IN BRIGHTON

The European model of high-definition television works! The British, Dutch, French and German engineers who built it, as part of a EUREKA*** project, demonstrated it at the International Broadcasting Congress in Brighton in September.

The demonstration covered every stage of the process, from studio production to transmission and reception by the new high-definition set and recording by laser disc receivers. The programmes produced with the European system can even be broadcast with equipment built to the competing Japanese standard. Hi-vision, thanks to a converter, also on display at Brighton.

This demonstration enabled European and Japanese officials and manufacturers to continue their talks on the adoption of a world standard. This remains a difficult goal, however.

*** A programme of technological research in which the governments of 18 West European countries and the European Commission are taking part.

EUROPE, TOO, IS THREATENED BY THE DESERT

The advancing desert, which is already laying waste large areas of Africa, now threatens one of the southernmost parts of the 12-nation European Community, Andalusia. A group of Euro-MPs was able to measure the desert's advance for itself, during a meeting organised on September 28 and 29 in an area which has been hard hit, Almeria.