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SUMMARY

- p.2 SINGLE MARKET: Controls by Customs must end.
The European Commission is studying the measures needed to speed up the elimination of border controls without endangering security.
- p.3 CUSTOMS: No need to declare your camera, guitar or personal computer
The Twelve make travel with the tools of your trade easier.
- p.4 SOCIETY: Basic social rights for all Europeans in 1992
Employers, workers and the self-employed agree on the essentials.
- p.5 ECONOMY: The European Commission is optimistic for 1989 and 1990
Investments and job creation are on a rising trend.
- p.6 TRANSPORT: Clearing the skies
The European Commission is working on its proposals for the second stage in the liberalization of air transport.
- p.7 ENVIRONMENT: The European Parliament comes to the defense of animals
About whales ... and wolves,
p.8 and honey for the brown bear.
- p.9 SMALL BUSINESSES: Towards a new dimension in Community policy
The European Commission proposes an action programme for 1990 to 1993.
- SMALL BUSINESSES: Andalusians seek European partners
The operation Europartnership '89 enters its second phase.

Mailed from : Brussels X

EUROFORUMS

SINGLE MARKET: Controls by Customs must end

The European Commission is studying the measures needed to speed up the elimination of border controls without endangering security.

"In the fight against terrorism and the traffic in drugs and arms, coordination between the various police departments is much more important than control by Customs", according to the pragmatic Martin Bangemann, Vice-President of the European Commission with responsibility for the internal market. He would start with discussions on the measures the Twelve must take to end physical checks at the Community's internal frontiers; only afterwards would he tackle the problem of the legal instrument needed to put them into effect.

"It's no good overloading the boat", Mr Bangemann told a press conference. It was a question of "doing what has to be done and no more" so as not to give countries that are reluctant to lift controls at the Community's internal frontiers a pretext. The fact is that since 1986 the elimination of border controls is one of the priorities of the Single European Act, signed by all EC countries. At their summit meeting in Rhodes the Twelve set up a group of co-ordinators, one from each Member State, working under the aegis of the European Commission. The Rhodes Group has already met in Brussels and will hold a further six meetings between now and July.

The tasks the Group feels must be undertaken on a priority basis include defining the right of asylum, drawing up a list of the countries whose nationals must obtain a visa to enter the EC and reaching agreement on the especially thorny issue of extradition.

While the need to ensure the Community's security was never greater, the elimination of controls by Customs will not open the floodgates to criminals. Even the establishment of a Community-wide police force, a European FBI, as it were, does not appear absolutely necessary at this stage. The fact is it would pose problems as regards national sovereignty and individual freedom.

Closer cooperation between the police forces of the Member States, as well as spot checks at the borders by flying squads, would probably be enough, judging from the experience of the Schengen group. (Its members are Germany, France and the Benelux countries; they will be joined shortly by Spain and Italy.) When the Group was set up it faced the very same problems of cooperation between the different police forces, requests for asylum and the grant of entry visas. These problems have either been solved or solutions are in sight. Most important of all, the decision to lift border controls has not led to a complete takeover by criminals and terrorists.

CUSTOMS: No need to declare your camera, guitar or personal computer

The Twelve make travel with the tools of your trade easier.

Musicians will be able to move freely throughout the 12-nation European Community with their guitar, violin or trumpet; television teams with their cameras and journalists and technicians with their personal computers after 1 July 1989. Thanks to a Community regulation adopted by the EC Council of Ministers on 27 February, it will be unnecessary to declare the tools of one's trade when travelling within the Community.

The new regulation will make life much easier for all who must travel to another Community country for a given period of time with equipment or goods to be used locally. Under the present system, in force since 1985, they must obtain a special carnet. While this marked a considerable improvement on an earlier system, it does not apply to all goods.

Virtually all goods are covered under the new system, with the exception of those listed in the regulation. They include precious stones, carpets, fur coats, expensive jewellery, etc. Vehicles are not covered, which is the case at present also.

The new regulation will help painters and sculptors who want to exhibit their works in another EC country as well as garage mechanics driving to the rescue of motorists whose cars have broken down just across the border.

The new Community regulation is a further step down the road to the complete elimination of all controls and formalities at the EC's internal borders.

SOCIETY: Basic social rights for all Europeans in 1992

Employers, workers and the self-employed agree on the essentials.

In a European Community without internal frontiers companies, workers and the self-employed will become increasingly mobile. It may seem normal, therefore, that Community legislation should guarantee the same basic rights to everyone. The European Commission in fact has been asked by representatives of employers, workers and other interest groups, such as consumers, to draft legislation to this end, on the basis of the principles they adopted on February 22.

The Commission President, Jacques Delors, and the then Commissioner for Social Affairs, Manuel Marin, asked the EC's Economic and Social Committee last November to produce proposals for a "Community Charter on basic social rights". The Committee, a consultative body, seemed best suited for the task, given that employers, workers, consumers, the professions, farmers, small businesses, etc. are represented on it.

The ESC does not favour a charter, but it wants the social rights embodied in international conventions to appear in the laws of each Community country, by means of traditional Community legislation. While these conventions have been ratified by the 12 Member States individually, there are exceptions.

The basic rights in question range from the right to social protection to the right to strike and include education, freedom of trade unions, the possibility of choosing a profession or to set up a cooperative, daily rest periods, annual holidays, protection in the event of redundancy, etc. These rights may seem evident to Europeans, but this is hardly the case in many parts of the world.

The ESC does not want employers to be able, with the completion of the single market in 1992, to take unfair advantage of differences in the social legislation in force in Member States. As an ESC official pointed out, companies that provide temporary workers must be prevented from recruiting them in Spain, for employment with German companies but at Spanish wages. The Committee has also insisted on the right of the workforce to information in the event of company restructuring and mergers.

The ESC adopted its opinion on basic Community social rights by 135 votes to 22, with 8 abstentions. Thirteen British members, representing employers and other interests, were among those who voted against it.

ECONOMY: The European Commission is optimistic for 1989 and 1990.

Investments and job creation are on a rising trend.

More investments and a continued fall in unemployment are forecast for this year and the next by the European Commission, which has been assessing the current economic situation in the European Community. The Commission, which regards the situation as favourable for the success of the 1992 programme, has nevertheless warned the Twelve that inflation could pick up again.

1988 was a very good year for the 12-nation Community, whose economies should remain on course, according to the Commission. A slow but steady decline in unemployment, which has so far appeared intractable, seems to have set in. The proportion of registered unemployed in the 12-nation Community fell to 11.2 percent in 1988, as compared to 11.6 percent the previous year. The Commission expects unemployment to decline to 10.75 percent this year and to 10.5 percent in 1990.

The Commission's report points out that the decline in unemployment is due to a sharp recovery in job-creation. The Community, which lost 2.4mn. jobs between 1981 and 1985, is expected to create some six million jobs between 1986 and 1990. Of these six million, roughly 2.75mn. will be absorbed by population growth, while two million will be taken up by people, especially women, who had given up looking for work during the crisis years. As for the remaining 1.25mn. new jobs, they will be used to reduce unemployment.

The rise in employment has been made possible by faster economic growth. The Community's GDP grew by 3.7 percent last year, as against only 2.8 percent in 1987 and 2.6 percent in 1986. The Commission expects the economy to grow by 3 percent this year and in 1990, generating more jobs than a similar level of growth would have done in the past. Investments have recovered because yields are higher and companies are preparing actively for the single market in 1993.

The picture is not entirely rosy, however. The Commission is concerned by growing inflationary pressures in all the Member States, with some more badly effected than others. It has also expressed concern at the widening gulf between countries with trade surpluses, such as Germany, and those with deficits, such as Britain and Spain. The chronic budgetary deficits of a number of countries, including Belgium, Greece and Italy, are also a source of concern.

TRANSPORT: Clearing the skies

The European Commission is working on its proposals for the second stage in the liberalization of air transport.

"Europe's overcrowded airways should be at the top of the agenda for all bodies with transport responsibilities", the EC's Transport Commissioner, Karel Van Miert, told an extraordinary meeting of the Association of European Airlines (AEA), which had been convened in Brussels to discuss the problem of air traffic congestion.

The representatives of 22 European airlines took the opportunity to launch a veritable campaign in favour of a unified system of air traffic control, in order to deal with the growing congestion at European airports and in the skies. The AEA has commissioned a study on the costs and benefits of a single authority, which would replace the 22 currently in existence. The study will be sent to the European Commission.

The situation has become alarming. One flight in five was delayed for more than 15 minutes last year, at a cost equal to the operation of 20 aircraft, despite the measures taken by airlines. The problem posed by the coexistence of 22 national systems, often technically incompatible with each other when not obsolescent, is made worse by the large number of air corridors set aside for military use and inadequate international cooperation.

The nine nations that belong to Eurocontrol, the air cooperation agency set up in 1960, have always refused to transfer their sovereignty in the skies to a European body, as was pointed out by AEA's Secretary-General, Mr Neumeister.

Air traffic congestion is partly the price of the success of the Community's efforts to liberalize air travel. But it has become necessary to ensure that passengers do not become increasingly the victims of delays under disagreeable conditions, with all the attendant risks for passenger safety. Better organization and more effective coordination of the existing air traffic control systems is needed. Strengthening Eurocontrol is essential to this end.

Moves to liberalize the air transport market must nevertheless continue at the same pace, in the Commission's view. Mr Van Miert told the AEA meeting that the Commission would present its proposals for the second phase before the summer. He intended to put the consumer first by rapidly introducing greater flexibility on air fares and reducing the restrictions and complexities which currently hamper access to reduced fares.

ENVIRONMENT: The European Parliament comes to the defense of animals.

About whales ...

The plight of three whales that found themselves trapped in ice in North American waters a few months ago aroused world-wide sympathy. But it did not put an end to whaling. The European Parliament, therefore, has once more expressed its hostility to whaling, whether for commercial or scientific purposes. A resolution calls on the European Commission and the Council of Ministers to take immediate steps to protect all whales: countries which do not respect the decisions of the International Whaling Commission should be subject to economic sanctions. The Commission is also asked to discuss with Denmark and Portugal a ban on whaling around the Faroe islands and the Azores.

... and wolves

As for wolves, they have virtually disappeared from the Community: a mere 1,500 survive in Spain, Portugal, Greece and Italy. The European Parliament has come to the rescue of these much-maligned creatures, which today face extinction. The Euro-MPs are calling for the adoption, as a matter of urgency, of a global strategy aimed at saving the wolf from extinction, involving complete legal protection and the introduction of effective methods of control.

These measures would have to be supplemented by an information policy aimed at not only the general public but also hunters, shepherds and gamekeepers. The Euro-MPs also want wolves raised in captivity, where their numbers have fallen dramatically; the management of their habitat, especially forests, in terms of the animal's needs, and indemnity payments to farmers for the loss of livestock to wolves.

While the Euro-MPs do not want the woods peopled with Little Red Riding Hoods, they do favour the re-introduction of the wolves natural prey, including deer and stag.

And honey for the brown bear.

Their numbers have dwindled to a mere 400. The survivors are to be found in the mountainous regions of four European Community countries. They are most numerous in Greece, which has around 200 of them. Italy has around 100, Spain 90 and France just a score or so. And with the exception of some 80 of them in a national park in the Italian Alps, all are threatened with extinction.

The brown bear once reigned supreme in the forests of all of Europe and North America, as well as in Asia and North Africa. But its numbers have been sharply reduced with the destruction of its habitat, the forests, and by hunters. Despite a ban on hunting, introduced some years ago, the species remains under threat of extinction.

An age-old struggle is therefore ending, as always, with the animal's defeat. But now that people are becoming aware of the damage they have inflicted on their environment, help may be on the way for the brown bear also.

The European Parliament has just adopted the report by Mrs Lentz-Cornette, which calls for a strengthening of the measures already agreed to by the European Commission in 1987 for the protection of the larger mammals. It involves nothing less than the prevention of forest fires, the protection of hives, a census of the existing bear population and a campaign to alert public opinion. But Euro-MPs believe it is equally necessary to study the impact of new forest trails, ski-runs, transmission lines and dams.

The fact is that if bears are to be protected the environment must be protected also.

SMALL BUSINESSES: Towards a new dimension in Community policy

The European Commission proposes an action programme for 1990 to 1993.

The European Commission has just sent the Twelve an ECU 135mn.* action programme in favour of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), covering the period 1990 to 1993. It takes the view that in order to prepare SMEs properly for the 1992 single market it is necessary to do more to eliminate administrative constraints, provide information and promote cooperation between businesses.

Since 1986 the Commission has set up, with relatively limited means, such helps to small businesses as an information network, the Euro-Info-Centres and BC-NET, a computerized business cooperation network, aimed at putting companies looking for partners in touch with each other throughout the 12-nation Community.

However, much of the work that is being undertaken is on an experimental basis. The Commission would like to step up its activities, so as to cover as many regions and small businesses as possible.

* 1 ECU = UK£ 0.64 or IR£ 0.78

SMALL BUSINESSES: Andalusians seek European partners

The operation Europartnership '89 enters its second phase.

Some 221 Andalusian companies, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) for the most part, are looking for partners elsewhere in the European Community. Their aim: to add to their plant, expand their markets or diversify their operations. Chosen from among 700 candidates, these companies will be able to meet their potential partners in their region - in Torremolinos, on June 22 and 23. The meetings are being convened in the framework of Europartnership '89, the operation jointly organized by the European Commission, the Spanish Industry Ministry and the regional authorities.

The cooperation proposals submitted by the Andalusian SMEs are set out in a catalogue, published in four languages and distributed throughout the 12-nation Community by BC-NET (see above) and the SME information and consultancy networks set up by the European Commission: the Euro-Info-Centres and the enterprise and innovation centres.

The operation, which seeks to speed up the development of the Community's less favoured regions, is the second of its kind: Europartnership '88 was conducted in Ireland. The Andalusian SMEs are active in a variety of sectors, ranging from olive oil to telecommunications, and from floorboards to agricultural machinery.