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Mailed from Brussels X

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY: Two fateful years

European Commission presents its programme for 1993 and 1994.

Ensure the success of the single market and the relaunch of the European economy, by concentrating on the essentials; pave the way for future developments, beginning with the European Union, as provided for by the Maastricht Treaty, and explain the European Community better to its citizens - these are the major themes of the programme drawn up by the European Commission for 1993 and 1994, the period of its term in office. As is customary, it was Commission President Jacques Delors, presiding over his third Commission, who submitted the programme to the European Parliament on February 10.

Some three-quarters of Euro-MPs (73.5%) approved the new programme. This was a very satisfactory result, given that only two days before it was far from evident that the programme would win majority support: rumours that Euro-MPs planned to vote against it were rife even among the main political groups in the European Parliament. Even though the vote on the Commission's programme has no official standing, the European Parliament can both censure the Commission if it disapproves of its actions and require it to resign, although this has not happened so far. In any case, a Commission which did not have the backing of a majority of Euro-MPs would find itself in a politically untenable situation.

Be that as it may, the doubts as to whether Parliament would approve the Commission's programme, reflects clearly the present climate of crisis within the EC. "The economy is in crisis, society is in crisis, democracy is foundering", Mr. Delors told the Parliament, adding: "Victims abound, beginning with the unemployed and the dispossessed. But there is another potential loser. The very idea of a united Europe is in peril."

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the Commission's first concern should be to relaunch the economy, by first completing the single market and ensuring its effective operation. But here, as elsewhere, the Commission does not have a decision-making role: it proposes measures, watches over their implementation and sees to it that Community rules in general are kept. It will therefore see to it that the last obstacles to a frontier-free area are eliminated, particularly identity checks on individuals.

In order to relaunch the economy the Commission will work for the success of the "growth initiative" which the Twelve agreed on in Edinburgh last December - the first European Community action designed to stimulate the economy. The aim is to speed up investments, both in major infrastructure projects and for small and medium-sized enterprises. The Commission will also do all it can to convince each of the Twelve to contribute to this goal, by taking measures having a similar effect. The Commission also attaches a good deal of importance to research, vocational training and the environment.

The Commission must also prepare the follow-up during "these two years, which are likely to be crucial for the future of Europe", in the words of Jacques Delors. In the relatively near future this involves the implementation of the Treaty of Maastricht on European Union, which could come into force during the course of the year if it is ratified by Britain and Denmark.

The first stage of economic and monetary union (EMU), which the Maastricht Treaty provides for, began on 1 July 1990; the second stage must begin on January 1994. As from this year the European Commission will propose to the Twelve the precise rules of the game for this second stage, which must constitute the half-way house for the single European currency, envisaged for 1997 or 1999. To those who see in EMU an austerity programme which will choke off investments and prevent job creation, President Delors cited three figures in his address to the European Parliament: before 1985 the EC devoted ECU 5,000 million* a year on average to the structural funds (which have been set up to provide funds to regions with problems and for the training of difficult social categories. Between 1988 and 1993 the sum has risen to ECU 13,000 million a year, while between 1994 and 1999 it will almost double to ECU 25,000 million a year.

As for the citizen's need to be informed, which was strikingly evident in 1992, the Commission has decided to do more to satisfy it, by demonstrating the benefits of the European Community in daily life.

This is a heavy programme, made even more so if the challenges of the external world are taken into account. They include the former Yugoslavia as well as the international trade negotiations and the Third World

* 1 ECU = UK£0.82 or IR£0.80

SINGLE MARKET: The Karolus programme is launched

It provides for exchanges between the Twelve of their civil servants.

Over the next five years some 1,900 national civil servants who are engaged in the realization of the single market, and more particularly the enforcement of Community law, will have the opportunity of working with their opposite numbers in the other Member States for two months on average.

These exchanges will take place within the framework of Karolus, a new exchange programme designed to strengthen mutual understanding of Community legislation and its enforcement. In addition, as Mr. Raniero Vanni d'Archirafi, the new European Commissioner with responsibility for the single market, has stressed, the programme will encourage the development of a convergent policy as regards the enforcement of Community legislation in the single market.

"Karolus", Mr. Vanni d'Archirafi has pointed out, "will help promote greater confidence among the various Member States, something which is essential for the proper working of the single market".

During roughly two months, the national officials taking part in the programme will work alongside their colleagues in another EC country. They will also participate in two training seminars. The first will be held before the start of the period of exchange, and will be a preparation for it, as it will deal with Community policies and their objectives. The second seminar, to be held at the close of the exchange period, will give each participant an opportunity to profit from the experience of the other trainees and to make suggestions for the programme's improvement.

This year's participants will be officials entrusted with the "single market" regulation in a certain number of priority areas, selected in consultation with representatives of the Member States. A guide for applicants, containing all the information needed to take part in the Karolus programme, has been made available to each national administration, in its own language.

Britain: European Staffing Unit
Cabinet Office (OPSS)
Horse Guards Road
London SW1P 3AL
Tel.: 44/(0)71.270.62.91
Fax: 44/(0)71.270.61.38

Ireland: Careers and Appointments
Section, Department of Finance
Agriculture House
Kildare Street, Dublin 2
Tel.: 353/1/76.75.71
Fax: 353/1/77.39.49

SPORT AND TOURISM: When in the mountains, follow the guide

European Parliament wants the occupation of mountain guide harmonized.

In the autumn of 1988 the British, French, German and Italian associations of mountain guides set up a European commission of mountain guides. It was entrusted with the task of drawing up a "community platform", setting out the conditions of access to the craft and the conditions under which it could be carried on within the European Commission. The platform requires prospective mountain guides to obtain an administrative authorization, which can be issued only to those who have the necessary technical qualifications, acquired through basic training and regular proficiency courses. The training itself is divided into two parts: the first leading to the grade of "apprentice" guide, the second to that of a full-fledged mountain guide. The total period of training would run to 80 days at least, spread out over a minimum period of three years and a maximum of five. The associations would like the full system of training and controls to be

covered by a European directive, so that the authorizations issued in accordance with their platform may be recognized in all the EC countries.

Euro-MPs have not turned a blind eye to this initiative; in fact they have backed the demand of the associations of mountain guides, taking the view that their platform maintains the specificity of all the regions, while guaranteeing the equivalence of levels of professionalism. It thus anticipates the necessary harmonization of European regulations, in the light of a steadily greater integration.

There are additional arguments in favour of mountain guides receiving the same training throughout the EC. An important one is the growth in mountain tourism, which leads to the risk that people who are not properly qualified will act as mountain guides, something which could prove damaging both to the safety of their clients and to the reputation of professional guides. This problem is particularly serious in an area of activity, such as alpinism, which is dangerous by its very nature. Nor must one overlook the role that guides can play in environmental protection: Alpine flora and fauna are coming under threat from the rising numbers of people who are flocking to the mountains. Guides must therefore have some knowledge of botany and zoology also, if they are to help protect the environment and create an awareness of environmental issues among their clients.

The rules and instructions applicable to guides must therefore be updated by their associations, after which they must be embodied in the laws of the EC countries, on the initiative of the European Commission.

UNEMPLOYMENT: 14.1 million were jobless last year in the EC ...

... an increase of 1.2 million over 1991. A further rise in December

The employment situation in the 12-nation European Community continues to deteriorate. The unemployment rate had reached 9.9% last December, as compared to 9.8% the previous month; within a year it had risen from 9% to a shade under 10%, according to the most recent estimates by Eurostat, the EC's statistical office. Eurostat has estimated the number of jobless in the EC at 14.1mn. on average during 1992, an increase of 1.2mn. over 1991.

The EC's unemployment rate averaged 9.5% last year, as compared to 8.7% in 1991. The level of unemployment was lower in the United States - 7.4% in 1992 as against 6.7% in 1991. The corresponding Japanese rates were 2.2% and 2.1%.

The sharpest increases in unemployment between 1991 and 1992 were recorded in the four "largest" EC countries: the number of jobless rose by 9% in Germany and France and by 8% in Britain and Spain. Unemployment fell in only one EC country, the Netherlands, where it dropped by 6%.

Major regional differences remain as regards unemployment

The burden of unemployment is spread very unevenly among the 12 EC countries. Spain, the country hardest hit by under-employment, had an unemployment rate of 19.4% last December; this was almost twice the rate for the EC as a whole. At the same time Luxembourg, which has been largely spared this scourge, had an unemployment rate which, at 2.1%, was almost five times smaller than the Community rate. But regional differences within the EC, including differences between regions within the same Member State, appear even more substantial, as is clear from the latest Eurostat annual survey of regional unemployment in the Community, published in early February.

The survey shows that the spread between the highest and lowest rates narrowed slightly over the 12-month period to April 1992, despite a rise in unemployment in the EC as a whole from 8.5% to 9.4% over this same period. Last April the level of unemployment in Andalusia, in southern Spain, which had the highest level of unemployment of any region in the EC, was 15 times higher than the lowest, that of Luxembourg: 27% as compared to 1.8%. A year before unemployment in Andalusia was 16.6 times higher than in Luxembourg - 24.9% as compared to 1.5%.

In the EC as a whole the highest unemployment rates last April were to be found in the south of Italy and in the south and south-west of Spain; in Spain they stood at around 25% and in Italy at around 20%. At the other end of the scale, with unemployment rates of under 5%, were the regions of southern and central Germany; northern Italy; the northern, central and southernmost regions of Portugal and, of course, Luxembourg, regarded as a single region.

The spread within several EC countries was very high, according to figures published by Eurostat. The unemployment rate in the extreme north of Italy was 3%; but it stood at 21.8% in Sicily, in the extreme south. In Spain, there was a considerable difference between the 12.5% recorded in Madrid and the 27% reached in Andalusia. The unemployment rate in the centre of Portugal stood at 2.7%, as compared to 8.7% in the southeast of the country. Even if the differences were less spectacular in other EC countries, they nevertheless ranged between 5.6% and 10.8% in Belgium; between 5.5% and 13.6% in France; between 5% and 9.6% in the Netherlands and, in the U.K., between 8.3% in East Anglia and the east of England and 16.7% in Northern Ireland.

In the absence of comparable unemployment figures for the former East Germany, one can only point to differences within the former West Germany. Here they ranged between 3% in the south to 7.9% in the north.

Unemployment among those under 25 years of age was much higher everywhere than among the population in general. But regional differences in youth unemployment rates were substantial. On the one hand there was Bavaria with 2.4% and Luxembourg with 3.5%, and on the other Spain's Basque region with 41.9% and Italy with 53.3%.

TRANSPORT: Strengthening maritime safety

EC takes an important step towards the definition of very strict standards.

"For months we have been pressing for effective solutions against the increased pollution of the seas due to damaged oil tankers. The ministers concerned have not taken action; and even if the emergency meeting of transport and environment ministers did not take concrete measures, it achieved a breakthrough", the European Commission Vice-President Martin Bangemann declared last month. He had reason to be satisfied. Everyone, or nearly everyone, has had his eyes opened by the gravity of the situation. The European Community must now fight to secure stricter safety standards world-wide through the International Maritime Organization - "even if it means going it alone and imposing stricter rules within its own territory", Mr. Bangemann added.

But the Commission Vice-President also stressed that the maritime transport and shipbuilding industries are open to proposals which seek to strengthen safety. He was proved right barely a week later, when the various sectors concerned by the problem reached an agreement in London, under which tankers will avoid certain areas of Britain's territorial waters. The agreement, which is voluntary, was concluded between the U.K. authorities and representatives of British and international oil and transport companies. It was certainly helped by the public's response to the wreck of the "Braer" off the coast of Shetland and the ban on tankers using the narrow channel between Corsica and Sardinia.

It is important that the public not get the impression that the Twelve act only in the wake of some dramatic event. This time the EC seems determined to take the initiative.