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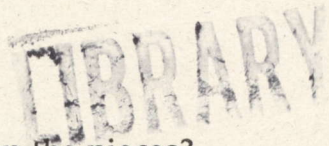
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## SUMMARY

- 2 ENVIRONMENT: Who must pick up the pieces?  
European Commission adopts a green paper on environmental damage.
- 3 CINEMA: 35 film festivals are supported by the EC  
European Commission has decided to give ECU 554,000 to 35 audiovisual fairs in 1993.
- 4 CULTURE: Protecting a country's cultural heritage in the single market  
The Twelve adopt a directive which allows a Member State to recover cultural goods exported illegally.
- 5 CONSUMERS: A European information centre for northern Portugal ...  
... and Galicia. Soon there will be 10 such centres.
- SOCIETY: A European dimension at the service of handicapped people  
The Twelve adopt a 4-year programme called HELIOS II.
- 6 RETIREMENT: What are pensions worth in Europe?  
It is better to have a supplementary pension in the countries of northern Europe.
- 7 LABOUR RELATIONS: Greece and Spain lead in the number of strikes ...  
... while Luxembourg is a haven of peace.
- 8 UNEMPLOYMENT: The 10% mark is crossed in January  
EC's unemployment rate has not been as high since April 1988.
- 9 SINGLE MARKET: Putting computers to work for people  
European Commission proposes both guidelines and the means to implement them.

Mailed from Brussels X

ENVIRONMENT: Who must pick up the pieces?

European Commission adopts a green paper on environmental damage.

Seveso, the Amoco Cadiz, Sandoz, La Coruña ... there seems to be one ecological disaster after another; and though they are all different, each in its time has given rise to fear and despair, even while raising in dramatic fashion the problem of repairing the damage to the environment - and paying for it.

The principle that the polluter pays is now generally accepted; but its implementation is not always obvious. To begin with, it is necessary to define just who the polluter is, fix the cost of putting things right and ... pay the bill. This is the goal of a wide-ranging dialogue which the European Commission has just launched through the device of a green paper, which was presented to the press by the new Environment Commissioner, Mr. Paleokrassas. He has asked all interested parties, from industrialists to farmers and environmental protection bodies to insurance companies and lawyers, to forward their comments on this text to the European Commission by October 1. The Commission will then join forces with the European Parliament to organize a public hearing.

The problem of repairing the damage caused by ecological disasters is a major pre-occupation of all national and international authorities. But the ways in which the different institutions, from the EC Council of Ministers to the Council of Europe and from national parliaments to international bodies, are meeting the challenge are very diverse and very often inadequate. The green paper is the European Commission's response to the concerns expressed by the EC's environment ministers and marks a supplementary stage in the Community's environmental policy.

The problems are not easy. The recourse to the principles of civil liability can pose major difficulties in the environmental field, given that convincing scientific arguments are often lacking. Notions such as "responsibility", "damages" and "environment" in particular are often vague and ambiguous, and their interpretation differs from one legal system to another. Besides, the cost of repairing the damage can turn out to be excessive for the economic sectors concerned, to the point where industrial investments can fall off. In addition, liability for the damage can fall on several actors, making it difficult to apportion costs. Finally, problems can arise in cases, for example, of chronic pollution, past damages, activities authorized by the authorities, or in fixing the extent of damages, in proving the place of causality, etc.

This is why the European Commission, after having examined the problems linked to the introduction of a legal system of "liability with fault", is of the view that liability without fault is more appropriate to the particularities of repairing environmental damage, because of the difficulty in defining the criteria of a fault and establishing proof of it.

The green paper envisages, therefore, a dual system based on the objective liability without fault on the one hand, and on a compensation mechanism on the other, when the author of the damage cannot be found.

All this will take time, of course, and a European directive dealing with the matter cannot come into effect before two or three years. What is important is that the procedure has been launched. In the meantime the Commission will see to it that the existing laws are respected.

CINEMA: 35 film festivals are supported by the EC

European Commission has decided to give ECU 554,000 to 35 audiovisual fairs in 1993.

The European Commission has chosen 35 audiovisual fairs in 11 EC countries (there is none in Luxembourg), to receive EC aid for a total amount of ECU 554,000\* in 1993. The aim is to enhance the value of Europe's cultural heritage in the audiovisual field, by encouraging the organizers of film festivals and film producers to present European works of quality to the general public.

In making its selection the Commission has particularly sought to promote the initiatives of Member States with a limited capacity for film production and the projects of young European creators. The festivals selected by the Commission range from those screening films of a general character to festivals devoted to cartoons, horror films, documentaries, the young and include festivals of short films or early works.

\* 1 ECU = UK£0.83 or IR£0.80

CULTURE: Protecting a country's cultural heritage in the single market

The Twelve adopt a directive which allows a Member State to recover cultural goods exported illegally.

Checks on merchandise at the EC's internal frontiers have disappeared since the beginning of this year. In order to make sure that the creation of the single market does not lead to a veritable traffic in works of art and other cultural goods, the European Commission has proposed the introduction of a dual security system to protect the national treasures of its Member States.

On the basis of a common list of objects to be regarded as national treasures - such as objects from archaeological and historical sites, ecclesiastical treasures, paintings, sculptures, ancient manuscripts and books - the Commission has proposed a regulation which provides for controls on exports of national treasures to third countries as well as a directive which would allow a Member State to recover a national treasure which has been "illegally" exported to another Member State.

With the adoption by the Twelve of these two texts - the regulation was adopted last November, the directive on March 15 - the Community mechanism for the protection of national treasures is now in place.

As a result, no object which is a national treasure under the terms of the regulation, can leave the Community's territory without prior authorization. At the internal level the courts of the Member States in which a cultural object has been found, will be required to order its restitution, provided the Member State which claims it was illegally exported from its territory can prove it.

CONSUMERS: A European information centre for northern Portugal ...

... and Galicia. Soon there will be 10 such centres in the EC.

Consumers living in northern Portugal and in the nearby Spanish province of Galicia now have their own cross-border information centre. Located in Guimarães, in northern Portugal, this centre, which was inaugurated on March 15, was set up by three local consumer organizations, with the help of the European Community. The centre provides information and advice on transactions, including purchases, made in the neighbouring country: the new possibilities offered by the single market, the rules of the game and the possibility of lodging an appeal in the event of a dispute.

Five similar centres were already in existence, in Aix-la-Chapelle (Germany), Barcelona (Spain), Gronau (on the German-Dutch border), Lille (France) and Luxembourg. Four more centres will be opened in the coming months, making 10 in all in the European Community.

SOCIETY: A European dimension at the service of handicapped people

The Twelve adopt a 4-year programme called HELIOS II.

EC ministers decided at the end of February to bring a little more sunshine into the lives of handicapped people, by adopting a 4-year (1993-1996) action programme called HELIOS II (from the Greek for the sun). The new programme is a follow-up to HELIOS I, which ran from 1988 to 1991. Like its predecessor, it enables the Twelve to exchange information and experiences regarding the best methods for the readaptation of handicapped people and their integration into schools, professional life and society in general.

Thanks to the ECU 37mn.\* provided by the EC, HELIOS II will finance training programmes, meetings and activities aimed at the general public. The system will also improve the information available to the handicapped, by means of a European information network called HANDYNET. It will also help handicapped people to take part in the various EC exchange programmes, in education, vocational training and research in particular.

\* 1 ECU = UK£0.83 or IR£0.80

RETIREMENT: What are pensions worth in Europe?

It is better to have a supplementary pension in the countries of northern Europe.

What standard of living can Europeans expect at the moment of their retirement if their only pension is the one required by law? Thanks to a study carried out by Eurostat, the EC's statistical office, in all 12 EC countries, it is now possible to compare the various pension schemes in force in the Community.

Eurostat took as its reference point the average wages of a worker in the manufacturing industry. On the basis of this it calculated the pension's "replacement value", which was then expressed as a percentage of the wages received just prior to retirement (after deductions for taxes and social security contributions).

According to the Eurostat survey, mandatory pension schemes are the most favourable in the EC's southern Member States. The minimum rate is 89%, whatever the marital status and size of the last pay packet, rising to as much as 132% in Greece for a worker with a dependent spouse and paid two-thirds of the average wage.

In France someone without a dependent spouse and in receipt of an income equal to the average wage enjoys a rate of 88%. This rate falls to 75% in the case of an individual without a dependent spouse but paid at twice the average wage. The rates are much lower in Denmark (37%), Ireland (26%), the Netherlands (27%) and the U.K. (30%), in the case of a retired person without a dependent spouse and paid at twice the average wage prior to retirement.

The main conclusion to be drawn from the Eurostat survey is that a supplementary pension is a virtual must in the EC's northern Member States, particularly in the case of persons on low incomes and without a dependent spouse and for those with a high level of earnings.

LABOUR RELATIONS: Greece and Spain lead in the number of strikes ...  
... while Luxembourg is a haven of peace.

Of the 12 EC countries the two which have had the most turbulent labour relations in recent years are Greece and Spain: they have led their EC partners in the number and virulence of their conflicts between employers and workers. They are also the only EC countries in which there is a tendency for strikes to grow in importance. Luxembourg, in contrast, appears to be a haven of social peace, with six strike-free years out of ten, according to statistics published by Eurostat, the EC's statistical office, in mid-March.

Statisticians measure the importance of labour conflicts in terms of the number of working days lost per 1,000 workers because of strikes or lockouts. Given that strikes are often linked to circumstances or precise events, their extent is measured over periods of several years. Thus between 1987 and 1991 - the most recent period analyzed by Eurostat - the number of working days lost per 1,000 workers has fallen in all EC countries in relation to the period 1982-1986, with the exception of Greece and Spain, where there has been a sharp increase.

In the years 1982-1986 it was Italy which held the record as regards strikes and other labour conflicts in the 12-nation Community; it was followed by Spain and Greece. In the period from 1987 to 1991 it was Greece which recorded the largest number of working days lost - more than 900 per 1,000 workers, which put it well ahead of Spain, with fewer than 700. Next came Italy - 275 - and Ireland - 186, then Britain - 126 - and France - 101. The number of days lost was relatively small in Portugal - 65 - Denmark - 39 - the Netherlands - 14 - Luxembourg - 10 - and Germany - 6. There was no equivalent figure for Belgium; however, between 1988 and 1991 the number of working days lost was well below the Community average.

The large number of working days lost in Spain and Greece can be explained in large part by the frequent general, or near-general, strikes and also by public sector conflicts in Greece.

In several EC countries the number of working days lost fell dramatically at the end of the 1980s and the start of the 1990s. This was particularly true of Britain, Italy, Denmark and Ireland. The number of working days lost in France and Portugal has never been as low as in recent years.

Labour conflicts have not evolved in the same way in the different economic sectors. Strikes have lost much of their importance in industry in nearly all EC countries, with the exception of the Netherlands and Greece. A strike in the Dutch building industry in 1990 pushed up the number of working days lost, while strikes in mines and quarries in particular led to a sharp rise in Greece. In Spain, where statistics are incomplete, strikes in industry also are assumed to have gained in importance.

In the service industries, however, a certain increase has been noted in the number of working days lost because of labour conflicts. This is particularly true of Greece, but losses have also been recorded in Germany and France - in the public sector - and Britain, in the transport sector.

UNEMPLOYMENT: The 10% mark is crossed in January  
EC's unemployment rate has not been as high since April 1988.

The EC's unemployment rate crossed the 10% mark in January, on a seasonally adjusted basis. The last time unemployment was at 10% was in April 1988, according to Eurostat, the EC's statistical office.

The rise in unemployment levels was the sharpest in Spain and West Germany in the course of the last 12 months. But the level of unemployment dipped slightly in Italy.

The unemployment rate continues to vary substantially from one EC country to another, ranging from 2% in Luxembourg to 20% in Spain. Female unemployment (12%) has remained at a higher level than male (8.7%). It reached 26.8% in Spain and 20.4% in Ireland. As for unemployment among the young, it ranges from 0 to 19% for the 12-nation Community, with a peak of 35.5% in Spain.



SINGLE MARKET: Putting computers to work for people

European Commission proposes both guidelines and the means to implement them.

Speed up social security payments to people living in another EC country than the one making these payments; improve the cross-border fight against natural disasters and facilitate the search for a job in another European country: here are three examples of services which telematics - the marriage of telecommunications and information technology - could render EC citizens if it were used to link together the public services of the 12 EC countries. What is more, the development of such European networks would contribute to economic recovery - no mean advantage at the present time. These few good reasons, as well as several others, have led the European Commission to propose to the Twelve, in mid-March, guidelines for the introduction of such networks and the sums to be made available from the EC budget for helping set them up.

In the Treaty on European Union, signed in Maastricht last year, the Twelve provided for the setting up of major European networks in the field of transport, energy and, precisely, telecommunications. At Edinburgh, last December, the EC's heads of state and government decided to provide "European" financial means for the carrying out of major infrastructure projects - in telecommunications, among others - in order to stimulate an economy in crisis.

The European Commission is proposing to the Twelve a 5-year programme called Interchange of Data between Administrations (IDA). Some ECU 180mn.\* would be made available from the Community budget, to be supplemented by ECU 85mn. for the creation of a computerized network specializing in statistics, and a further ECU 85mn. for other specialized networks, regarded as a priority for the proper functioning of the European single market: taxation, checks on exports, education and training in particular.

However, these contributions from the EC budget would amount to only a tiny fraction of the investments needed to set up the communications network between the various national administrations: the Twelve would have to spend a total of at least ECU 6 billion, over five years. To this sum must be added another ECU 6 billion, over seven years, to enable the less well-off regions of the EC to catch up in the field of telematics.

1 ECU = UK£0.83 or IRE£0.80