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### S U M M A R Y

- 2 INFORMATION: 99% of documents are now available  
European Commission opens its files to the public.
- 3 CONSUMERS: Preventing accidents by explaining their causes  
European Commission proposes that the EHLASS programme be continued.
- 4 BEE-KEEPING: European Commission is studying the sector's problems ...  
... in order to preserve this ecological agricultural model.
- 5 FISHERIES: European Commission has solutions to the critical situation ...  
... facing European fishermen.
- 6 EIB: Despite the recession, the European Union's bank for long-term finance ...  
... lent nearly ECU 20bn. last year, a 15% increase over 1992.
- 7 CONSUMERS: European Commission launches its first competition ...  
... aimed at encouraging young Europeans to shop intelligently.
- 8 A PEOPLE'S EUROPE: Ending discriminatory taxation  
European Commission warns the Twelve.  
  
CONSUMERS: What future for car dealers?  
European consumers' organization calls for an end to the present system.
- 9 CONSUMERS: European Commission wants their voice to be heard more often  
It has taken two steps to this end.  
  
A PEOPLE'S EUROPE: Simpler tax formalities ...  
... for owners of holiday homes in Spain.

Mailed from Brussels X

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 200 rue de la Loi • T-120 7/56 • 1049 Brussels • Belgium • Tel.: 299.90.52 • Fax: 299.92.08

Eurofoot

**INFORMATION: 99% of documents are now available**

The European Commission opens its files to the public.

Since February 15 you can ask for any European Commission document. And provided you are not asking for the minutes of Commission meetings or private correspondence, your chances of getting the documents you want are extremely good. The fact is that the new information policy adopted by the Commission in early February should result in 99% of Commission papers being made available to the public, according to the information commissioner, João de Deus Pinheiro.

The only documents which will remain confidential are those dealing with an individual's private life, public safety or an on-going legal or inspection procedure. Documents whose publication could destabilize money markets or international relations, or violate business secrets, will also remain confidential.

Commissioner Pinheiro has pointed out that the new policy is altogether different from the previous one: since the European Community was established in the 1950s certain documents were published while the others remained confidential in principle. Today the public has access to all documents, except certain specific categories of documents. The Commissioner believes that, thanks to the new policy, much greater use will be made hereafter of the very interesting studies carried out on behalf of the Commission but kept confidential.

The public can obtain documents free of charge if they are no longer than 30 pages. Longer documents cost ECU 10\* each, plus ECU 0.036 per page. Requests must be either in writing, in which case they must be addressed to the relevant Commission department - 200 rue de la Loi, B-1049 Brussels Belgium, or Bâtiment Jean Monnet, rue Alcide De Gasperi, L-2920 Luxembourg - or made in person, during office hours, at the European Commission offices in the various EU countries\*\*.

\* 1 ECU = UK£0.75 or IRE£0.78

\*\* Office in England: Jean Monnet House, 8 Storey's Gate, London SW1P 3AT

Office in Wales: 4 Cathedral Road, Cardiff CF1 9SG

Office in Scotland: 9 Alva Street, Edinburgh EH2 4PH

Office in Northern Ireland: Windsor House, 9/15 Bedford Street,  
Belfast BT2 7EG

Office in Ireland: 39 Molesworth Street; Dublin 2

CONSUMERS: Preventing accidents by explaining their causes

The European Commission proposes that the EHLASS programme be continued.

In the 12-nation European Union more people are victims of accidents in the home and in recreational areas than on roads and motorways. The victims of such accidents tend to be children and the elderly; hence the importance of measures aimed at preventing them. It has proved possible to reduce the number of accidents in recent years by analyzing their causes, thanks to a European programme called EHLASS, which became fully operational last year, after an experimental period. Early February, the European Commission proposed to the Twelve that the programme be extended until 1997.

EHLASS gathers as much information as possible on the nature and origin of accidents to people at home and at play. To this end it keeps in touch with hospital emergency services and the families of accident victims throughout the EU. The information obtained in this way is used to create databanks and is analyzed. This analysis enables national authorities and the European Commission to conduct information campaigns among the general public, negotiate with the manufacturers of the products in question and draw up technical standards which guarantee greater safety.

EHLASS has made it possible to discover the causes of accidents caused by toys, articles for infants, gym equipment, fireworks, ladders, electrically-powered tools for gardeners and handymen, electrical kitchen equipment and playgrounds. Thanks to the information obtained in this way, measures have already been taken which have resulted in fewer accidents.

Launched with EU money, funding for the EHLASS programme should come increasingly from the Member States. The Commission has proposed that the EU provide 80% of the funds needed in 1994 - and only 50% in 1997.



BEE-KEEPING: The European Commission is studying the sector's problems ...  
... in order to preserve this ecological agricultural model.

The citizens of the European Union get through some 250,000 tons of honey each year. Nearly half this amount - between 114,000 to 122,000 tonnes - is supplied by the 458,000 European beekeepers who look after seven million beehives. The balance is imported, mainly from Argentina (38,900 tonnes), Mexico (30,200 tonnes) and China (24,800 tonnes). France is the leading producer in the European Union, with 36,000 tonnes, followed by Germany (25,000 tonnes), Spain (23,000 tonnes) and Italy (9,000 tonnes).

A true model of traditional, environment-friendly agriculture, European beekeepers nevertheless are facing difficult times, in large part because of cheap imports from third countries. The EU's agricultural ministers have asked the European Commission if it cannot help this sector. They themselves have suggested a series of measures, including minimum import prices, strict quality criteria, strictly enforced, for honey marketed in the EU and income support measures for beekeepers. The problem posed by the high European Union price for sugar, which is fed to the bees, has also been raised.

The difficulties facing European beekeepers are preoccupying the European agricultural commissioner, René Steichen; he is determined to help a sector which helps preserve flora and maintain the ecological balance, thanks to pollination. He reminded the Council that it had already received from the Commission a proposal designed to protect European beekeepers from cheap imports of honey and ensure the free movement of honey throughout the 12 Member States. Mr. Steichen also pointed out that there already exists a series of Community mechanisms which can be used to help European beekeepers. They can be helped financially through the structural funds - aid for rural areas and regions with a GDP (gross domestic product) below the Community average. Honey producers who join forces can seek help with launching their activities. The Commissioner cited the case of Greece, which received ECU 500,000 last year to help its beekeepers produce and market their honey.

... / ...

Commissioner Steichen invited the Member States to take advantage of the existing opportunities at the EU level to help their beekeepers. He indicated that the Commission for its part had invited a group of European experts to study the problems facing beekeepers. The fruit of their labours will be presented as soon as the work is over.

\* 1 ECU = UK£0.75 or IRE£0.78

FISHERIES: The European Commission has solutions to the critical situation ...  
... facing European fishermen.

Television brought the grim spectacle of French fishermen in violent confrontation with their own policemen to viewers throughout the 12-nation European Union. The despair and anger of the fishermen had been provoked by another fall in fish prices at the end of January. The fact is that prices have been in free fall since early 1993. In reply to a request from the French government, the European Commission at once decided to set minimum prices for imports from non-EU countries until 15 March 1994.

The Commission has redressed the situation for the time being by shutting the door to the large-scale imports of cheap fish which had further aggravated the crisis on the Community market. But it has gone a step further by proposing to the Twelve a series of concrete measures for dealing with the deeper causes of the crisis in the fisheries sector. It is proposing, for example, that foreign fishing boats be prevented from directly discharging their cargo in EU ports. At the same time the EU's own fishing industry would be provided the help needed to modernize its fleet, develop aquaculture, improve the processing and marketing of fish and launch advertising campaigns to encourage Europeans to eat more fish.

The European fisheries commissioner, Iannis Paleokrassas, has also indicated that the Commission has mobilized its experts to analyze in depth the problems facing the industry, in order to be able to assess the situation before March 15, when the present emergency measures come to an end.

EIB: Despite the recession, the European Union's bank for long-term finance ...  
... lent nearly ECU 20 billion last year, a 15% increase over 1992.

The European Investment Bank's balance sheet for 1993 is more than satisfactory. The EIB loaned nearly ECU 20 billion\* last year, as against ECU 17 billion in 1992. The European Union's financial arm, the EIB played a key role in helping sustain the level of economic activity in the EU's poorest Member States in particular. Thus, of the ECU 12.5 billion which it loaned within the EU, 74% went to disadvantaged regions, including ECU 4 billion to Spain alone. The fact is that loans for investment purposes were concentrated in EU countries with the lowest per capita income: Portugal (22%), Greece (15%) and Spain and Ireland (14% each).

In addition to its contribution in favour of the EU's economic and social cohesion programme, the EIB played an important role in financing the trans-European networks in telecommunications, transport and energy. Some ECU 7.8 billion in all were loaned by the Bank for these networks. The EIB also played an important part in fostering cooperation with third countries. The loans to non-EU countries (amounting to ECU 1.9 billion) more than doubled last year as compared to 1992, with the lion's share going to the Mediterranean countries and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

There was a sharp rise in the amount loaned to small and medium-sized enterprises in particular, in order to help them become more competitive. More than 3,000 SMEs borrowed from the EIB last year. Finally, more than ECU 4 billion were loaned by the Bank for projects aimed in large part at improving environmental protection, water and waste management and the reduction of atmospheric pollution.

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The EIB President, Sir Brian Unwin, expressed his satisfaction at the Bank's activities in 1993. He felt that it was ready to participate actively in financing the major infrastructure projects envisaged in the White Paper on growth, competitiveness and employment.

\* 1 ECU = UK£0.75 or IR£0.78

CONSUMERS: The European Commission launches its first competition ...  
... aimed at encouraging young Europeans to shop intelligently.

Young people, who have yet to acquire the critical approach of their elders when shopping, are often the preferred - and vulnerable - target of seductive advertisements. To help them become alert shoppers the European Commission has decided to organize a major European competition, open to all youngsters between the ages of 10 and 14, living in the 12-nation European Union.

The competition theme is "How to choose a product?" and the competition's originality lies in the fact that young people are being asked to draw up the message aimed at other young people. Those taking part will have to prepare the material - brochures, magazines, exhibitions, slides, etc. - needed to draw the attention of young people to such consumer issues as the relationship between the price of goods and their quality, their effect on the environment and their safety in use. The products in question are those which young people generally buy, such as compact discs, clothing and sports equipment.

The winners will not only receive prizes but also have the satisfaction of seeing their message on their television screens.

### A PEOPLE'S EUROPE: Ending discriminatory taxation

The European Commission warns the Twelve.

As many as 200,000 to 300,000 Europeans must pay higher income taxes than their colleagues and fellow workers because they live in one European Union country and work in another. For the European Commission, this is an anomaly in a single market, and it plans to take cases of discrimination to the European Court of Justice. It alerted the Twelve on February 10, by announcing the publication, in the EC's "Official Journal", of the recommendation which it adopted at the end of December, calling on Member States to ensure that workers living in another country enjoy the same tax benefits as residents (see Eurofocus N° 3/94). The Commission will evaluate the situation fully at the beginning of next year.

### CONSUMERS: What future for car dealers?

The European consumers' organization calls for an end to the present system.

The European Consumers' Organization (BEUC) wants an end to the present system of car distribution in the EU, it told the press at the end of January. Under this system cars are sold through national networks of dealers, who cannot handle more than one brand because of exclusivity arrangements with manufacturers. Although it contravenes the EU's competition rules, the system was authorized by the European Commission for a 10-year period in 1985, on condition that consumers were able to make cross-border purchases at reasonable prices.

But this is not the case, according to BEUC. Price differences within the EU remain substantial. What is more, motorists wanting to buy a car in another EU country face all sorts of difficulties. As if to discourage them even further, manufacturers do not always respect the guarantee in the case of cross-border purchases, while the service offered by dealers does not seem to be good enough to offset these inconveniences.



CONSUMERS: European Commission wants their voice to be heard more often  
It has taken two steps to this end.

Consumers should have a greater say in European affairs, in keeping with the spirit of the Treaty of Maastricht. And they will, thanks to the European Commission, which decided on two measures in early February. The main consultative body representing consumers has been enlarged and a new organization set up, which brings together European consumers and producers.

The membership of the Consumers Consultative Council has been enlarged to include the inter-regional European consumers institute; at the same time the European Consumers' Organization (BEUC) has been given more seats on the consultative council. Trade unions, families and cooperatives are also represented on the council.

A European consumers forum, which brings together organizations representing consumers, on the one hand, and producers on the other, will meet once or twice a year. The first meeting has been set for this September. Its double theme: access to the courts for consumers and after-sales service and guarantees.

A PEOPLE'S EUROPE: Simpler tax formalities ...  
... for owners of holiday homes in Spain.

Those Europeans who own holiday homes in Spain but live in another European Union country are to be spared the expensive formality of having to use a tax representative based in Spain for the purposes of meeting income tax requirements relating to property. Following complaints from individuals and questions to the European Commission from Euro-MPs, the Spanish government adopted a law at the end of December which takes care of this particular problem. The European Commissioner for fiscal matters, Mrs. Christiane Scrivener, expressed her satisfaction in a communiqué published at the end of January.