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COMMISSION PRESIDENT APPEALS FOR UNITY

"Are we prepared to sacrifice all that we have built and the prospects it offers for the future because of budgetary quarrels, in which the money involved is chickenfeed beside the member states' own budgets? Absolutely not! I appeal to all Europeans of good faith.

1983 was a bad year for the Community; the failure of the Athens Summit simply brought to a head a crisis that had been lying dormant and that nobody had dared to call by its real name. The time has now come to ask ourselves what sort of Community do we want?

For me there can be no wavering. To relaunch European integration we must do two things: we must adapt what we have already achieved and we must engage Europe in a new phase of development.

Adapting the Community means reforming the common agricultural policy to save it, correcting the budgetary imbalances which are poisoning relations between the member states and imposing stricter discipline on the management of Community finances.

Engaging Europe in a new phase of development means creating a European economic and industrial area to take advantage of the size of the Community market in the fight against unemployment and deindustrialization, enlarging Europe to include Spain and Portugal and giving the Community the own resources it needs for further development.

For us Europe is not merely a Europe of technocrats, butter stocks, farm surplus and budget refunds. Europe is a Community of 270 million people who have lived in peace for 40 years - whose culture spans two thousand years and was the cradle of industrial civilisation.

Europe is also the world's greatest trading power, holds huge industrial and technological potential and is an untapped reservoir of resources that can guarantee our future.

We must keep going forward. We must return to the paths of Community orthodoxy, rediscover the enthusiasm that inspired the founding fathers of Europe and find a second wind to brave the world of the 21st century".

EC APPROVES NEW REGIONAL SPENDING

The European Community is to spend about £875/IR£1120 million on 2732 investment projects in Europe's poorest regions. The money is the fourth and final allocation for 1983 from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Most of it will go towards infrastructure projects and industrial investment designed to create or maintain about 48,000 jobs.

ITALY will get nearly a third of the money - Lit.924 billion - to finance 810 projects. They include the "Pollino" tourist complex and national park in Basilicata, a submarine aqueduct to pipe drinking water from the mainland to the island of Elba, a station and museum facilities to attract tourists to the Sardinian port of Cagliari and an arts complex comprising an exhibition room, art gallery and theatre in Latina. 185 industrial projects will create over 5000 new jobs. The Italian regions that benefited the most from the Regional Fund in 1983 were Campania, Calabria, Basilicata, Sicily and Puglia. Since 1975 Italy had had Lit.4382 billion in ERDF grants to fund over 4000 projects.

FRANCE is to get FF1962 million from the allocation. FF1741.8 million will go to infrastructure projects including improvements to the port of Cherbourg, construction of a radar station at Mindin in the lower Loire, improvements to the Rhône canal, extensions to the port of Sète, road improvements to the RN20 and in Lorraine, the Auvergne and Guyana, 450 telephone boxes in Ariège and the Haute-Garonne and modernisation of telephone and power networks in Brittany. 229 projects in industry, crafts and services will receive over FF220 million. Regions to benefit most from the allocation are the Midi-Pyrénées, Brittany, the Loire, Languedoc-Roussillon, Réunion and Guadeloupe. Since 1975 France has received FF 8663 million from the ERDF towards projects that have created over 158,000 jobs and saved 15,000 more.

REGIONS (Contd.)

THE UNITED KINGDOM is to receive £149 million to finance 620 projects, bringing total ERDF spending in Britain up to £9.361 billion over the period 1975-1983. In this allocation £113 million will go to infrastructure projects in the North West (a tourist complex and telecommunications in Merseyside), the North (a new bus service in Tyne and Wear and improved postal services in Newcastle), Northern Ireland (work on Belfast airport and improvements to rail and port services in Belfast and Londonderry), the West Midlands (telecommunications projects in Birmingham and Coventry) and Yorkshire and Humberside (road improvements and a new station at Saltaire). In Wales a £3.2 million grant is to go towards a new paper factory at Shotton. The plant will have an annual capacity of 180,000 tonnes and will provide 270 new jobs in the depressed steel town. Industrial projects funded by this allocation will create or save an estimated 15,000 jobs in Britain.

GREECE is to get Dr.13,144 million to finance 80 infrastructure projects, mainly in Macedonia and Western Greece. Dr.8504 million will go towards financing power stations in Kozani, the Peloponese and Western Greece. Other projects include the construction of a road between Patras, Pyrgos and Olympia, a 64-bed hotel on the island of Eubea, improvements to the Thessalonica-Idomeni railway line and drainage in the town of Larissa. Industrial investments are mainly aimed at the processing and marketing of primary products, metals and plastics. They will create 560 new jobs. Since it joined the Community Greece has received Dr.58.3 billion from the ERDF.

IRELAND will get IR£37 million from the allocation. Among the 74 projects to receive funds are six water and drainage schemes (IR£12.2 m.) and two road improvement schemes (IR£12.5 m.). IR£6.4 million will go to industrial investments in new technology. A project to produce computers at Blanchardstown in County Dublin will create 1800 jobs.

REGIONS (Contd.)

THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY will get DM 48 million. DM 35.6 million will go towards industrial investments that will create or maintain over 5500 jobs in the machine tool, metal-working, electronics and food industries. Most of the funding is concentrated in selected industrial development zones such as Knetzgau in northern Bavaria, where water supplies are to be improved and two roads extended. DM 12.8 million will go to infrastructure projects aimed at developing specific areas.

BELGIUM will receive FB334.6 million from the allocation. This will fund 37 projects, 35 of them infrastructure and 2 of them industrial. Of the FB325 million devoted to infrastructure projects, nearly 217 million will go to projects in Flanders, including roads, drainage, waste recycling at Bilzen and the enlargement of two water-sports centres. In Wallonia FB108 million will go towards cleaning up 4 disused industrial sites and converting them for use by small firms. They are located at Aubange, Marche-en-Famenne and Vielsalm. Other projects include an exhibition hall and cattle market at Bastogne.

DENMARK will get DKR37.5 million to finance 28 long-distance heating and energy projects in Greenland. In 1983 the Greenlanders got over DKR176 million from the ERDF.

THE NETHERLANDS will receive HFL32 million to finance 7 infrastructure projects in the north of the country. They include the extension of a quay at Eemshaven, improvement of the fishing port at Lauwersoog and the industrial port at Harlingen and the widening of a canal at Hoogeveen. Between 1975-1983 the Netherlands received HFL326 million from the ERDF, which created 824 jobs and saved another 685.

In 1983 the ERDF financed 3655 projects chosen by the European Commission from 5162 proposed by the member states. Some countries received funding for fewer projects than they originally hoped.

HOTEL FIRE PREVENTION PLAN

The idea of people plummeting to their deaths from burning tower block hotels has been a favourite media nightmare since the "Towering Inferno" first graced the silver screen in the early Seventies.

Real life tragedies in Seoul, Las Vegas and Zaragossa in recent years have lent substance to the idea and left over 300 dead. All 3 disasters occurred because of a lack of basic fire safety precautions.

To Europe's massive tourist industry, hotel fires are a hazard that won't go away. The EC countries have about 175,000 hotels containing 5 million beds and employing over two and a half million people. Fire regulations vary from the excellent to the seriously inadequate.

The European Commission has now come up with a plan to introduce minimum fire protection standards for hotels throughout the European Community.

Proposals listed in the plan include the installation of fire alarms, the clear marking and maintenance of exits and fire escapes, minimum construction standards, non-inflammable interior decoration and fittings, regular checks on wiring, heating and air-conditioning systems and special fire prevention training for staff.

Hotels would be subject to inspection and those complying with the EC standard would be issued with a "Certificate of Conformity", which they could presumably display alongside their AA, RAC and Egon Ronay stars.

Existing fire prevention regulations for hotels vary widely in different EC countries. The Federal Republic of Germany is the only member state with a system roughly comparable to the Commission plan.

The United Kingdom introduced a law in 1972 subjecting hotels with more than six beds to local authority inspection. France has had special construction requirements for small hotels since 1976 and for larger ones since 1982.

In the Netherlands hotels are subject to local authority controls and in Italy special construction requirements have existed since 1980. Draft legislation is currently being prepared in Belgium.

MEPs CALL FOR "COHERENT" EC REFUGEE POLICY

A European Parliament report has called for a more "coherent" EC policy to help the world's estimated 16 million refugees.

The report, which was compiled by Belgian Socialist MEP Raymonde Dury for the Parliament's Development Committee, says that the £104/IR£133 million spent between 1976 - 1982 helped in the short term, but should have been better suited to their long-term needs.

Future aid should concentrate on the three priority areas of encouraging refugees to grow their own food, providing education and training and funding health and hygiene projects, claims the report.

About 90% of the world's refugees are to be found in developing countries - seven million of them in Africa alone. Pakistan has an estimated 2.7 million, Thailand 193,000 and Central America over 200,000.

In terms of existing EC aid, the life of the refugee can be divided into two stages - the "emergency" phase, which lasts for the first five months, and the "resettlement" phase, during which the refugee settles in to make a new life. The first period is roughly covered by EC emergency aid such as food, blankets, tents etc. and the second by ordinary development aid from the European Development Fund, aimed at making them self-sufficient.

But according to Mme Dury, there is in fact a third so-called "subsistence" phase which occurs between the two and which is vitally important if the refugee is to become self-supporting in his or her new home. Currently EC aid at this stage is effectively limited to food aid but this should be expanded to other priority areas, says the report.

EC aid to refugees is still mainly composed of food aid and rose from £285,000/IR£365,000 in 1976 to £26.7/IR£34 million in 1982. About 80% of it is channelled through the United Nations programme (UNHCR).

INSURANCE CONTROLS TO BE LIFTED SAYS TUGENDHAT

Legislation to allow insurance companies to operate freely in other EC countries should become a reality in the fairly near future, according to European Commission Vice-President Christopher Tugendhat.

Speaking to the Comité Européen des Assurances (CEA) in Brussels, he said that a liberalization of insurance services was a step towards financial integration in Europe.

Referring to EC plans for financial integration to parallel the common market for goods, he said that "a fully integrated market for financial services would make for a much more effective use of savings in Europe".

However the "lack of progress" in a number of financial sectors including insurance was in "stark contrast" to the banking sector, where matters were developing more rapidly, he claimed.

Warning his audience that they should not let themselves be overtaken by events and new technology, he said that they should be "fully prepared" for the changes that were bound to come.

EC-ANDEAN PACT

A new chapter in Europe's relations with South America has opened with the signing of an EC-Andean Pact Cooperation Agreement, according to European Commission Vice-President Wilhelm Haferkamp.

It was at the beginning of 1980 that the Commission first advised the Council of Ministers to open negotiations with the five members of the Pact - Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela - with the aim of concluding a framework agreement for trade and economic cooperation.

The result is the Cooperation Agreement signed in Cartagena in Colombia in December.

"Bridges have been built at a political and economic level, offering a huge potential for future action", says Vice-President Haferkamp. He says that trade and industrial cooperation between the two regions should increase, along with European investment in Andean countries.

VIDEO PIRATE TAX?

A discussion paper on the implications of video and audio copyright piracy in Europe is soon to be published in Brussels, according to EC Commissioner Karl-Heinz Narjes.

Issues under discussion will include the possibility of an indiscriminate levy on blank video and audio tapes to make them more expensive, thereby discouraging the pirates.

But British Socialist MEP Ken Collins says that the move would be unfair to people using the equipment legally, putting up the cost of tape and failing to hit the real offenders - organized crime.

RECORDS FREED

European performing right societies have agreed to abandon geographical restrictions on where tapes and records can be sold in the European Community.

The German performing right society GEMA had blocked the development until recently by demanding extra fees for exported tapes and records. Copyright is granted for the manufacture and marketing of sound recordings by performing right societies on payment of a royalty.

FOOD AID

The European Commission has announced a new allocation of emergency aid to 16 countries in Africa, the Caribbean, South America and South Asia.

It includes 100,500 tonnes of cereals, 3300 tonnes of milk powder and 1110 tonnes of butteroil.

The largest allocation of cereals will go to Somalia (23,000), Indonesia (15,000), and Zaire (15,000). Somalia will also get the bulk of the butteroil (610), while most of the milk powder will go to Peru (1000) and Pakistan (800).