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EUROPE PESSIMISTIC SAYS EUROBAROMETER

Eurobarometer has been taking Europe's pulse for nearly a decade. Hopes, fears and state of mind are just three factors that the six-monthly polls regularly investigate. The last survey was taken in October 1983, ten years after the first oil crisis and eight months before the second direct elections to the European Parliament.

European morale was not high, even if there was slightly less pessimism than the previous year. 35% of people questioned thought that 1984 would be worse than 1983 and 26% thought that it would be better. Greece, Denmark and the Federal Republic of Germany all had more optimists than pessimists. But the Belgians and the Irish were extremely gloomy about future prospects. Morale was highest in Denmark.

As far as social harmony was concerned, again pessimism seemed to prevail. 45% of Europeans thought that strikes and social conflicts would increase in the coming months. People were also worried about the economic situation. Negative views outnumbered positive ones everywhere except in Denmark and in Greece, where they were evenly balanced.

Although the poll was taken at the time of big anti-missile demonstrations, the fear of nuclear war did not seem to be increasing. Concern was actually slightly lower than in the spring of 1981. On average one European in five thought that another World War was "probable".

In response to the question "Are you happy with the life that you lead?" 95% of Danes said yes, with varying degrees of enthusiasm. Italians and Greeks were the least satisfied. The Dutch claimed to be the most happy people in Europe in general terms. Overall 16% of Europeans said that they were "very happy", the same percentage as in 1975. The percentage of people who said that they were "not very happy" fell from 27% to 21%.

The main concern was unemployment, followed by the suppression of terrorism (Belgium, France, Ireland, Italy and the United Kingdom), environmental protection (Denmark, the Federal Republic of Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Greece), energy and the reduction of inequality. At the bottom of the list was aid to the Third World and defence (except in the United Kingdom and Greece).

EURO-POLL SHOWS ELECTION INDIFFERENCE

European election fever is not sweeping Europe, according to a Euro-barometer poll taken in 1983 and just published. Though interest in the June elections is expected to rise sharply with extensive media coverage of European affairs in the months running up to the event.

Only about 14% of people questioned knew about the June Euro-elections, half as many as eight months before the first direct elections to the European Parliament in 1979.

When told about the elections, 49% of those questioned said that they would definitely vote and 24% said that they would probably vote. 42% thought that they would have "important consequences" and 32% thought that they were an "unimportant event".

Only about one person in two had recently seen or heard something about the Parliament in the media - showing that the general level of public awareness about its activities has remained largely unchanged over the past four years.

But despite the lack of informed opinion about the elections, the Parliament is not generally viewed with hostility. 67% of those questioned agreed that it should have a greater say in running the Community and more power. However opinion as to whether it could actually solve Europe's major problems was more or less equally divided.

MEPs came out of the poll badly, with 65% of the voters agreeing that they were "too remote from the problems of the people who elected them". Only 11% disagreed. The British and Irish were the most critical, and the Germans the least critical.

The Luxembourgers and Danes tended to be the best informed about the activities of the Parliament, but the Belgians knew more about the elections. Oddly enough very few Belgians, only 35%, admitted to having recently heard or read anything about the Parliament.

The importance of the elections was rated highest by the Greeks and the Italians and lowest by the Germans and Dutch. 87% of Greeks and 82% of Italians questioned said that they would definitely or probably vote, compared to only 48% of Belgians.

CONSUMER UNIONS TV ADS WARNING

The satellite and cable TV of tomorrow will not just increase viewers choice. It will also let loose a flood of advertising and concern is growing about how to control it. The European Bureau of Consumer Unions (BEUC) has just published a report on the problem.

When one talks about the perspectives opened by Direct Broadcasting By Satellite (DBS) and cable TV, one usually thinks in terms of technical achievement and a breakthrough for the industry. People are less concerned about the interests of the viewers and the quality of programmes, says the BEUC. However the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) and the European Commission have expressed urgent concern.

DBS will provide television with an international dimension and in technical terms will allow stations to broadcast across national borders. But to avoid a "war of the wavelengths", in 1977 the World Conference on the Administration of Radio Communications fixed certain limits. So if a country does not want to receive a particular foreign satellite it is entitled to occupy the satellite's wavelength.

But there remains a risk of supranational advertising making a mockery of national legislation, if commercial objectives supercede public interests. In its interim report on television in Europe, the European Commission said that it was "not difficult to imagine the kinds of pressure to which small countries could be subjected by powerful commercial interests".

"In our eyes the freedom to advertise cannot be equated to freedom of expression and advertising rules in receiving countries must be respected until they are harmonised", says the BEUC. At the moment no agreement is in sight between EC countries and rules on ads vary widely.

Neither Danish nor Belgian TV allow any advertising. All channels in EC countries are limited in the amount of time they can allot to adverts. In Britain the IBA allows 80 - 90 minutes a day, in Ireland RTE is limited to 10% of transmission time, in the Federal Republic of Germany ARD/ZDF are allowed 20 minutes a day, France allows 18 - 24 minutes, Luxembourg 20% of airtime, in Italy RAI is allowed 5%, Greece has 30 minutes a day and the Netherlands allows 3 hours a week.

(TV ads contd.)

Toughest controls exist in the Federal Republic of Germany, where no ads are allowed at peak times between 6 - 8 in the evening. There are no ads on Sundays and public holidays in the Federal Republic or the Netherlands. Only purely commercial stations like RTL and ITV allow ads to interrupt programmes. Tobacco ads are banned in France, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, but are allowed in the United Kingdom, Ireland and the Federal Republic of Germany.

Legislation also varies widely on issues like pharmaceutical products, treatments and paramedical products. Dozens of products and services are banned for reasons of health, morality or competition. For example marriage bureaus are not allowed to advertise in the United Kingdom, Ireland or Italy, loan agencies are not allowed ads in Italy, employment agencies cannot advertise in France, Italy, Ireland or the United Kingdom and if you want to advertise a war toy in the Federal Republic - think again.

The variety of legislation in operation testifies to the need for closer cooperation. The BEUC says that an EC directive designed to establish international advertising standards could be the guarantee needed. In the meantime the European Court of Justice has already backed the maintenance of existing legislation.

NARJES PLEA

"Twelve years of confusion over European Union, five years of budget quarrels and urgent economic and social problems mean that Europe can no longer afford to waste time", according to European Internal Market Commissioner Karl-Heinz Narjes.

"No one in Europe can doubt the close economic interdependence of the member states, but the political consequence of that interdependence steadily looks less attainable. Even the original member states have lost their enthusiasm over the past ten years, perhaps blindly counting on the course of history to achieve the goals set by the founding fathers of the Community.

Now is the time to end the period of paralysis and stagnation and to decide clearly whether the whole of the EC or just some states can overcome the current phase of confusion and lack of direction with dynamism and determination".

RICHARD REJECTS US STRATEGY

The Reagan Administration approach to unemployment in the US is not relevant to the situation in Europe, according to EC Social Affairs and Employment Commissioner Ivor Richard.

He rejected American claims that higher unemployment is caused by higher dole payments, training and job subsidies that restrict the flexibility of the job market in Europe.

"I do not believe that there are many people on unemployment registers who are there because they are receiving high benefits. There are currently almost 12½ million unemployed in the Community and there are only about 400,000 registered vacancies at any particular time. The jobs are simply not there", he said.

Comparative figures show that the employment situation has developed very differently in the USA and Europe. Between October 1982 and October 1983 unemployment increased by 6.4 percentage points in Europe and decreased by 14.2 percentage points in the United States. Industrial production in the Community only increased by 1.1% compared to a 12.9% increase in the US.

"The problem is not just one of shifting manpower into growing labour intensive sectors - it is to ensure there are sufficient growing labour intensive sectors", says Mr Richard.

AUSTRIA TO JOIN EURONET DIANE

Austria is to join the Euronet-Diane data communication network. The addition of the Austrian national data bases to the system follows similar arrangements with Switzerland in 1979, Sweden in 1981 and Finland in 1982.

Euronet provides instant access to a vast range of scientific, technical, economic and social data from databanks throughout the European Community.

EC FORECASTS RECORD INVESTMENT FOR 1984

Investment in the European Community will increase by 4.7% in real terms this year, according to forecasts just published by the European Commission.

The increase would be the highest since 1973, reflecting an increase in total demand and bigger profits for companies.

The rate of growth of industrial investment in Denmark and the Netherlands will be "unprecedented" and France, the United Kingdom and Ireland will all experience "significant increases", says the report.

Conversely industrial investment will decline slightly in the Federal Republic of Germany following substantial increases in 1983, and will fall markedly in Italy.

The biggest increases will be in the engineering and metals sectors, reflecting restructuring plans for the steel and car industries, claims the report, which was compiled by the Commission's Economic and Financial Affairs Directorate.

PARLIAMENT CALLS FOR NEW NORTH SEA CONVENTION

International law does not provide guaranteed environmental protection for the North Sea and a single, all-embracing convention is needed to plug existing loopholes, according to the European Parliament.

Euro-MPs want the European Commission to look into the idea of drawing up a convention offering total cover in time for the forthcoming Conference on the North Sea.

The composition of such a pact would be extremely complex, to take into account issues as diverse as fisheries, shipping, oil and gas exploitation, sea-bed mining, land reclamation and defence.

The main pollution threats to the North Sea come from oil tankers and drilling rigs, and the dumping of dangerous chemical and nuclear wastes. The European Community countries surrounding the sea are all signatories of the Bonn Agreement and the Marpol Treaty, which are designed to encourage anti-pollution cooperation.

PARLIAMENT AND UNIONS BACK NEW AIRBUS

The European Parliament has asked the Council of Ministers to provide financial backing for the new Airbus A320 aircraft.

Orders for the plane, which would be the third to be built by the jointly-owned European consortium, have already come from Air France, Air Inter and British Caledonian.

The project, which the Parliament describes as "a prime example of Europe working together in an industrial cooperative venture", is also an important source of jobs.

At a meeting in Brussels in January, the European Metalworkers' Federation said that 1983 had seen an increase in redundancies and the introduction of short-time working in the aircraft industry in Europe.

"The only way to maintain the competitiveness of Airbus vis-à-vis the US companies Boeing and McDonnell Douglas and avoid redundancies is to take the decision to launch the Airbus A320 right now", it claimed.

TUGENDHAT WHISKY MISSION

European Commission Vice-President Christopher Tugendhat has been to Rome on a mission of mercy - on behalf of Italian whisky drinkers.

The February visit, which included meetings with senior ministers, was aimed at persuading Italy to comply with a European Court ruling ordering it to end taxes that discriminate in favour of home-grown wine-based spirits like brandy and grappa, and against imported cereal-based booze like whisky.

He also took the Italian government to task for failing to apply EC directives on the harmonisation of tobacco taxes.

Some of the directives date from 1973 and the European Court of Justice has repeatedly condemned Italy for failing to put them into effect. The most recent condemnation came in December 1982.

Hard drinking and smoking Italian consumers could hope to see price cuts in imported brands of spirits and cigarettes if the EC legislation was applied.

RESEARCH COOPERATION APPROVED

The European Commission is to exempt research cooperation agreements between European firms from EC competition rules. The move should be introduced by the autumn of 1984.

Speaking at the end of January, European Competition Commissioner Frans Andriessen said that the scheme was vital to the future of European industry. Future economic growth basically depends on research. But developing new technologies requires heavy investment and a high level of specialisation. Few firms can create these conditions on their own, given the fragmentation of the market.

The new ruling will help large numbers of industrialists wanting to pool their research efforts without falling foul of the EC's tough anti-trust laws.

HUNGER PROGRAMME GRANTS APPROVED

The European Commission has approved special aid worth £28.5/IR£36.5 million for nineteen major projects designed to combat world hunger.

The biggest grant of £4/IR£5.1 million will go to Bangladesh to buy fertilizers needed to increase grain production. Part of the money will also go towards improving grain storage facilities.

Four projects in Mali, Rwanda, Kenya and Zambia will each get £2.3/IR£2.9 million to help them to increase food production and agricultural self-sufficiency.

Another project to receive funding is "Operation Fuelwood", the programme designed to help Third World countries overcome the shortage of firewood and the spread of desertification, particularly in the Sahel region of Africa.

Other individual grants will go to the five Sahel countries to fund reforestation schemes and to the European Space Agency to study the desertification process from the Landsat satellite.