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LAW: Parliament fights terror

The rise of terrorism in Europe has left an enduring mark on the European psyche. When asked in a recent survey what worried them most, almost 70% of Europeans questioned answered "the increase in crime and terrorism". Recent events have done nothing to allay growing fears.

The international character of recent terrorist acts is even more perturbing. There are fears that the free movement of goods and people across EEC frontiers - the essence of the Common Market - could favour the emergence of a new type of "transnational" crime. It is not wholly impossible that criminals wanted in one EEC country could find refuge and shelter in a neighbouring country, thereby evading the law.

Now the European Parliament has called for the creation of a "European judicial zone" to close the loopholes. It has asked the European Commission to draw up a directive on the suppression of terrorism in Member States and the introduction of a clause allowing for the extradition of criminals and terrorists.

The idea is not a new one. A Convention for the suppression of terrorism was signed by some European states under the Council of Europe in 1976. It stipulated that certain crimes such as hijacking, kidnapping, the taking of hostages and the sending of letter bombs should not be considered political and exempt from extradition.

It was under an EEC initiative that a new Convention was signed in Dublin in 1979. Not all Community Member States signed, however, because the Convention appeared to run counter to traditional ideas of political "asylum". Both France and the Netherlands opposed the Convention, thus effectively ending hopes for the creation of a "European judicial zone".

Even though the idea is still not acceptable to all EEC countries, recent events in France have encouraged several countries to look into the possibility of stepping up cooperation to fight terrorism in the European Community.

FISHING: Salmon struggle for survival

Salmon, one of the world's most delicious and expensive fish may become a memory unless quotas on commercial fishing are introduced, according to a European Parliament report.

Salmon, which is highly prized by fishermen, is in danger of becoming extinct. Already rare in parts of Ireland and Scotland, salmon catches in some Icelandic rivers have dropped by 85 percent in two years.

Hardest hit by the disappearance of the salmon are some of Europe's most sensitive rural areas, whose economics have depended on the fish for centuries. Experts say that unless preventative action is taken soon, it could be too late.

Despite efforts to stem the decline, national governments are largely powerless to take effective action. Most salmon are caught at sea in international waters and catches can only be controlled under international agreements such as the North Atlantic Salmon Convention.

Atlantic salmon are born in freshwater streams, but spend part of their lives at sea, where they feed and grow, before returning to their birthplace.

Generally spawned in the rivers and streams of Britain, Ireland and France, they migrate to Greenland and the waters around the Faroe Islands, before returning home.

But the discovery of the salmon feeding grounds off Greenland has led to a boom in commercial fishing, with Greenland accounting for 1,200 tonnes of salmon a year, under existing international agreements. This has led to the virtual disappearance of adult salmon which would have otherwise returned to Scottish rivers. Long-line fishing for salmon has also intensified off the Faroe Islands, further depleting stocks.

In a report adopted in Strasbourg, the European Parliament has called on the European Commission to fix quotas for commercial salmon fishing in Community waters. Parliamentarians are also concerned about the threat to salmon posed by pollution and the use of monofilament nets, which often only injure the fish. They want to see a uniform size of net mesh for salmon fishing in Europe.

BUSINESS: Japan blocks chocolate imports

Japan, with a population of almost 120 million, imports fewer foreign goods than tiny Switzerland. European industrialists and businessmen run into a wall of tariff and administrative barriers every time they try to penetrate the Japanese market and as a result the EEC's trade deficit with Tokyo currently stands at a record 15 billion dollars.

A recent report drawn up by the European Parliament sheds light on another aspect of the EEC's trading problems with the Japanese: the fact that our friends in the Pacific even block imports of European chocolate.

Very curious. The Japanese love sweets in general and chocolate in particular. Their own confectionery industry is doing rather well. Production has almost tripled in twenty years. Japanese confectioners are also doing good business on world markets, particularly in the Middle East, showing themselves to be very competitive indeed. In Japan itself, consumption per head has grown by almost 260% in the past ten years. Given that the English eat five times as many sweets than the Japanese, and the Swiss eat eight times as many, there seems to be little risk of the market becoming saturated.

The Japanese confectionery sector is among the most protected in the world. For example, a 32% customs duty is applied to all chocolate imports - the highest tariff applied by any industrialised country - and a major obstacle for European exporters. The Japanese consumer is very susceptible to television advertising by domestic chocolate producers. This is a major disadvantage for European producers who cannot, once they have surmounted the tax barriers, afford to pay for the advertising campaigns necessary to attract the Japanese public, and still remain competitive in price terms.

This, of course, explains why imported products only represent 4% of the Japanese sweet market. Helped by the high tariffs, five or six major Japanese firms have cornered 80% of the market.

The Parliament has now called for cuts in existing tariff barriers, but the Japanese authorities contend that the poor performance of European chocolate on the market is because of the "specific tastes" of the Japanese public. But, we say, when it comes to the crunch, Japanese chocolate is not very different from the European variety ...

SPORT: Football and politics mix

Football fever has even reached the European Community institutions. The European Parliament has asked the International Football Federation to ensure that more Third World teams play in the next World Cup. And the European Commission is looking into the free movement of football players in the European Community.

Was it only a few weeks ago that the football world was shaken by the thrills and spills of the World Cup? When almost "unknown" teams gave well-established European football powers a run for their money? When Algeria beat mighty West Germany, or when tiny Cameroon drew Italy, the champions, and Honduras drew Spain?

The European Parliament thinks Third World nations should now be given a better chance to participate in international football. It has asked the International Football Federation to ensure that Third World teams come in greater numbers to the next World Cup.

The European Commission is tackling another football problem. It is investigating whether national football federations have eliminated the nationality clause from their regulations. Mr. Ivor Richard, Commissioner in charge of Employment and Social Affairs, is spearheading the investigation.

It was in February 1978 that national football federations agreed to progressively eliminate the nationality rules which limit the number of Community players allowed to play in teams from other EEC countries. The current survey is being carried out with the help of a questionnaire that has been sent to the Union of European Football Associations, and national football federations.

Mr. Richard has warned that if the nationality clause has been maintained, the Commission will study the different measures it deems necessary to put an end to discriminatory practices based on nationality.

ACCIDENTS: Road deaths soar

Europe's accident toll is soaring with more than 48,000 people killed and almost one million and a half injured in road accidents in 1980. Accidents have increased by more than 20,000 over a twenty-year period.

National statistics recently published by "Eurostat" reveal some horrific figures. West Germany, for example, had a total of 380,000 accidents in 1980, or one third of all accidents in the European Community. France had more than 240,000 followed by the United Kingdom, Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands. Denmark, Ireland and Luxembourg are at the bottom of the list.

Generally speaking there are more injuries than deaths on the road, notably in Germany, the United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark. But accidents are becoming increasingly serious in France, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg, where the number of deaths is higher.

As regards victims, the hardest hit were people travelling in cars (800,000) rather than those using two-wheel vehicles. But almost 125,000 of those injured were riding bicycles, and 33% of them were less than fourteen years old.

Contrary to popular belief, walking is not the best way to avoid accidents. More than 210,000 pedestrians were victims of traffic accidents in 1980.

Measures to reduce the number of road accidents were recommended at a recent meeting attended by justice ministers from twenty-one member countries of the Council of Europe. Proposals included the improvement of road networks, the separation of different vehicles and better road safety rules.

One participant called for the introduction of a mechanism to prevent a car from starting if the driver had had too much to drink. The device would be fixed on the dashboard and the driver would have to blow into it before starting the car. Over the limit? The car won't start!

SOCIAL: MEP's seek end to adoption rackets

Lonely couples wanting to adopt children and children seeking adoption should be protected from exploitation by the introduction of a system of government licences for adoption agencies, according to a European Parliament committee.

Although falling birthrates and the spread of contraception in Europe has meant that fewer European children are now available for adoption, high birthrates, poverty and war in the Third World have led to an ever growing number of children in need of homes, particularly from Asia and Latin America, and a corresponding rise in unscrupulous operators seeking to profit from the situation.

French Progressive Democrat MEP Gérard Israel, who drafted the Youth committee's call for a system of licences, would also like to see a code of practice on adoption throughout the European Community, geared more closely to the interests of the child.

Changes in society regarding marriage and family life have meant that children are being denied opportunities because of outmoded ideas, he says. For example, asks the committee, "why do we deny a child the chance of being adopted by a single person or a happily unmarried couple" in this day and age?

CULTURE: Poetry aid call

Closet literati may be lurking in the unlikely lobbies of the European Parliament with calls from a powerful group of MEP's to support a European poetry centre in the Belgian university town of Louvain.

The group want European Community sponsorship for Louvain's European Poetry Library, which opened in 1980 and which hosts a European poetry festival. As well as bringing poets together from all over Europe, Louvain also boasts a poetry research, documentation and translation centre, which may help to free poets from the narrow confines of national audiences and to make their work more commercial.

The MEP's, who represent a mixture of political groups and nationalities, all feel that Europe's literature could benefit from closer links between writers and poets from different countries and from publication of their works in other European Community languages.