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SUMMARY

De Lorean and Banco Ambrosiano are two big names that recently plunged into bankruptcy. 71,000 other firms collapsed in Europe last year and we examine the problem.

The European Commission has announced a new £190,000 scholarship fund to enable students to study in other Community countries.

Despite US calls for a ban on exports of western technology to the Soviet Union, following events in Poland, a European Parliament committee has recommended closer trading links with Eastern Europe.

Do they get married? Can they get jobs? Can they get good jobs? And are they paid less than men? We answer these questions and many more in a new survey.

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BUSINESS: Bankruptcies soar

Recently some of the biggest names of European industry and finance, including De Lorean and Italy's Banco Ambrosiano, have plunged into bankruptcy, making front-page news all over the world. But a large number of smaller companies all over Europe have also been forced out of business by the economic recession.

Figures released recently by the European Commission in Brussels have underlined the disastrous consequences of the recession on business operations. These figures, covering the last 5 years in the Community, revealed that bankruptcies and other forms of failure rose dramatically in the member states. In 1981, the Netherlands recorded the largest increase in number of bankruptcies over 1980, with a rise of 42.1 percent, followed by a 27.4 percent annual increase in the Federal Republic of Germany, 26.4 percent in the United Kingdom, 20.3 percent in France, 16.8 percent in Belgium and 7.9 percent in Italy. France with a total number of 20,895 bankruptcies in 1981 led the list of Community countries, followed by the United Kingdom with 14,210 and the Federal Republic of Germany with 11,653.

These harsh figures underline the importance of another area of business policy, namely the drafting of an agreement on the mutual recognition of the arrangements for bankruptcy and other related proceedings throughout the Community. The agreement is the result of negotiations which began in 1960 and resulted in an earlier Convention on Jurisdiction and the Enforcement of Judgments in Civil and Commercial Matters signed in Brussels in 1968, which covered court and contract decisions. However, as early as 1960, it had been decided that, because of the complexity and the special problems associated with bankruptcies, compositions and other similar proceedings, a separate convention would have to be drafted. A draft document completed in 1970 had to be completely renegotiated after Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom joined the Community.

The final result is a treaty which will be ratified and implemented by the Community members and future members, requiring them to recognise the bankruptcy judgments in other Community countries. While there have been relatively few bankruptcies in Europe in recent years which have had Community-wide impact, the growing trade, financing and contracting within the member states, along with the increase in the number of failures, make such an agreement increasingly necessary.

EDUCATION: Brain drain

There are fewer and fewer national frontiers for Europe's students and the 1982/83 academic year should be a milestone in cooperation in higher education. Among its new projects, the European Commission in Brussels has just awarded 93 new grants worth £190,000 for students to study in other European Community member states.

The primary objective of the grants, which are paid to institutions, is to stimulate and expand the mobility of students, lecturers and scientists among the ten member states of the European Community. A total of some 467 grants have been awarded under the plan, but this year for the first time, more than 60 percent of the programmes will involve student exchanges.

Some 5 million students are currently enrolled in the 3,400 institutions of higher learning in the European Community, many of whom will probably one day occupy responsible positions.

But despite encouraging cooperation in education, Community Education Commissioner Ivor Richard says that "there are still too few students benefitting from the experience of having pursued part of their studies in more than one Community country, although the links that unite the member countries are multiplying, making an awareness of the other countries more and more necessary".

The Commission grants are not strictly limited to helping students but are also designed to increase cooperation between institutions of higher learning. Because of them, universities as far apart as Cork, in Ireland, and Thessaloniki, in Greece, can collaborate in a programme in European law. Aarhus in Denmark and Consenza in Italy have started on a joint study in information sciences, and the universities of Montpellier in France and Copenhagen in Denmark are working together on a programme in agricultural economics. Chemists in Dublin, in Ireland, and in Padua, in Italy, are also running a joint programme.

As was the case in previous years, the 1982/83 grants cover a wide range of academic disciplines. Engineering and natural sciences get a large share of the new programmes, as do the social sciences, but there is a growing proportion devoted to the fine arts, a previously under-represented field. A number of projects also have a multidisciplinary approach. In one programme, architects, sociologists and legal experts will be studying the effects of modern urbanisation on juvenile delinquency in big cities.

TRADE: MEP's defy US ban

Despite US calls for a ban on exports of western technology to the Soviet Union, following events in Poland, a European Parliament committee has recommended closer trading links with Eastern Europe.

The European Parliament's External Economic Relations Committee also called for an easing of restraints on the exchange of persons and information between East and West, in compliance with the Helsinki Final Act and recognition of the European Community by the state-trading "Comecon" countries of Eastern Europe.

Trade with Eastern Europe in 1979 accounted for 7.6 percent of Community exports and 7.4 percent of Community imports. But since 1969, when the Community first assumed responsibility for trade with third countries, the relationship between the two trading blocs has been plagued with problems.

Economic planning in Eastern Europe has meant that Comecon countries have found it difficult to export things that the West wants. Because of the non-convertibility of their currencies, this has resulted in a chronic shortage of hard cash to buy much-needed imports of western technology.

The problem was compounded when high expectations of economic growth in the Eastern bloc in the 1970's led to an over-extension of credit by western bankers and heavy indebtedness amongst Comecon countries. Poland and Rumania were both forced to seek a rescheduling of their debts and the need to boost exports became even more acute.

Friction between the trading blocs has increased with accusations of "dumping" or selling at below cost price on foreign markets, levelled at state-subsidised Eastern European producers. European Community officials point to the steel, textile and finished product sectors as examples, in addition to complaining bitterly about the activities of the huge and heavily subsidised Eastern European fleets on world shipping markets.

But according to the External Economic Relations Committee's report and its author German liberal MEP Ulrich Irmer, closer links with Comecon and further trade agreements similar to the one signed between the Community and Rumania in 1980, could eventually ease tension and bring mutual benefits to both sides.

WOMEN IN THE 80's

Women in the 19th century faced the choice, in the words of the French trade unionist Proudhon, of becoming "housewives or courtesans". But times have changed and so has the role of women.

European Community statistics, in the form of the latest edition of "Women of Europe", provide an enormous amount of information about women in Europe today.

Marriages, for instance, seem to be working better in Belgium than in other European countries: about 52% of Belgian women are married, compared with only 38% of Irish women. Generally, Belgian and French brides are younger than their Italian or Danish counterparts.

Divorce rates are on the way up, doubling since 1960 in almost every country in Europe. Divorce rates have even tripled in the Netherlands and increased five times in Britain. In Catholic Italy and Ireland marriages last longest.

Birth rates, on the other hand, are declining all over Europe. The Italians and the Irish again led the field, ahead of the French and the Danes.

But the most striking development of the last twenty years is undoubtedly the increasing participation of women and especially married women, in the Community's workforce. The highest percentage (49%) of working women are to be found in Denmark, followed by the United Kingdom, France, the Federal Republic of Germany and Belgium. Only 13.6% of the women work in Ireland.

A recent survey by the World Watch Institute stresses that more and more women are finding work outside their homes, but still doing domestic tasks. This means that their working week may be fifteen to twenty hours longer than that of a man. At home, women work without being paid and contribute to society, but are never included in official statistics. Similarly, women working in small and medium-sized family-run farms, shops or businesses are not classified as having a "profession". Moreover, almost 60% of the family members working in similar concerns are unpaid.

Although domestic chores seem to weigh on working women, most of them seem to manage. Three-quarters of working married women have full time jobs, except in the Federal Republic of Germany and the Netherlands, where the percentage is smaller.

The economic sectors which employ women vary from country to country. Almost half of the agricultural work force in the Federal Republic of Germany is composed of women, almost a third in other European countries. The number of women working in the industrial sector is highest in Italy, followed by the Federal Republic of Germany. Generally speaking less than a quarter of the total industrial workforce is composed of women. But more than two thirds of women who work are concentrated in the services sector (almost 83% in the Netherlands).

More than 60% of women working in agriculture are part of farmer's families; but about 90% of those working in industry and 95% of service workers are wage earners. Women farm managers are mostly found in Ireland and the United Kingdom. In Italy, 15% of working women are employers or independent workers in the services sector compared with only 4% in Denmark. About 12% of employers and executives in the industrial sector in Italy are women, compared with only 1% in the United Kingdom.

Equal pay for men and women still does not exist, especially in the industrial sector where women mostly perform unskilled jobs. Education is an important factor in this area, and Community statistics appear to be encouraging. There are more women going to school and university than ever before and they represent almost half of all students. Women are also no longer tied to traditional courses like teaching (except in Belgium and Luxembourg where the percentage is increasing), the arts and literature. They are now turning in increasing numbers towards medicine, the social sciences and law.