

Week of September 27 to October 2

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TRAVEL: Beating the border hassles

Crossing the European Community's "internal" frontiers, whether by car, train or plane is still a hassle for Europeans, who are often subject to strict and time-consuming border controls.

The fact that border formalities still exist and have even in some cases been reinforced, was denounced as "shocking" last year by European Commission President Gaston Thorn. "How can you expect European citizens to be enthusiastic at the prospect of new EEC passports if, when travelling inside the Community, they are subject to draconian controls?", he asked. Calling for "an urgent change in the mentality and customs of our administrations" he argued that European citizens should be made conscious of the "existence and dimension of our Community", by removing border controls.

So far, border checks have been scrapped between Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands and similar arrangements have been made between Britain and Ireland. Elsewhere in Europe customs controls continue to harrass travellers.

Initial attempts to ease border controls for Community citizens have been made at international airports in Britain where separate channels exist for Community nationals. This is meant to simplify procedures, and the European Commission has now proposed similar channels for other European airports and ports.

In a recent report submitted to the Council of Ministers, the European Commission argues that frontier formalities should be reduced for Community citizens but maintained for passport-holders from non-member states.

Special mention is made in the report of the problems facing people living in frontier zones. The Commission says that any measures to make frontier controls more flexible should also be applied to smaller border posts and local border traffic.

The Commission's proposals for the adoption of a European passport are also aimed at making it easier for Community nationals to travel in Europe.

The passport is expected to be introduced in January 1985 at the latest.

ENERGY: EIB energy investments soar

Last year the European Investment Bank, the European Community's bank for long-term loan finance, devoted more than 857 million £ or about 45 percent of its total lending in Europe to energy-related projects. Almost half of it went towards the construction of nuclear power stations in the Federal Republic of Germany, France, Belgium and Italy.

In addition to the 396 million £ nuclear programme, EIB loans from the Bank's own resources and from the New Community Instrument (NCI) for long-term finance, aimed at exploiting Europe's oil and gas reserves, reached a massive 237 million £. Other big loans went to the extension of power lines, thermal and hydroelectric power stations, combined heat and power generating plants and coal extraction, according to the Bank's recently published annual report for 1981.

EIB energy loans are primarily designed to further the triple Community policy objectives of developing indigenous resources, such as oil, gas, coal and alternative energies, diversifying energy imports and promoting savings through the more rational use of existing energy supplies.

Nuclear energy, which EIB experts see as central to future indigenous European energy supplies, dominated Bank lending and included power stations at Mülheim-Kärlich in the Rhineland, at Tihange and Doel in Belgium, at Montalto di Castro in Italy and at Belleville in the Loire valley. Other finance for French nuclear projects included funds for the Super-Phenix fast breeder reactor at Creys-Malville near Lyons and a loan to the Eurodif uranium enrichment plant at Tricastin in the Rhone valley.

Projects worth about 100 million £ aimed at furthering Europe's self-sufficiency in hydrocarbons, included finance for small oil and gas fields on Italy's continental shelf and around Milan and a submarine gasline from the Tyra field in the North Sea to a terminal at Nybro in Denmark.

Other areas of finance for projects designed to exploit indigenous energy resources were 21 million £ towards two hydroelectric power stations at Edolo and Calusia in Italy and another 21 million £ towards the development of peat resources in Ireland.

EIB projects to diversify energy imports centred on finance for a pipeline to supply Europe with gas from Algeria, while loans to rationalise energy use were primarily aimed at industry in Italy.

LAW: Conscientious objectors

Most of the European Community has special laws about conscientious objectors but they still differ widely between countries. The Legal Affairs Committee of the European Parliament has just proposed a gradual coordination of existing legislation in Community member states.

The problem of conscientious objectors does not exist in Great Britain and Ireland where there is no military conscription. In other Community member countries the practice of drafting young men into the armed forces is still followed, but legislation recognises the right of conscripts to refuse to bear arms for religious or moral reasons.

A further problem stems from the fact that most potential conscripts are not informed of their rights. For young Belgians, the law is fairly liberal because they are provided with abundant information explaining what they must do to obtain the status of conscientious objectors; German conscripts are slightly less well informed, as the military authorities prohibit the distribution of all information on the subject in camps and barracks. But in France the law prevents all propaganda aimed at encouraging people to avoid military service. The result is that information for citizens on their rights is virtually zero. Violators are subject to stiff fines, or even jail terms.

Among member states of the Community which have recognised the right to conscientious objection, the Federal Republic of Germany and the Netherlands have established alternative civilian service for conscientious objectors.

Currently conscientious objection appears to be more than just an objection to the military, war and violence in general, but also represents a more general opposition to contemporary values in society. Discussions are under way in the European Parliament and the Council of Europe for a legal definition to take into account what is in essence a conflict between institutional authority and individual conscience.

ENVIRONMENT: Endangered birds

Numerous birds in Europe are threatened with extinction and the European Community institutions have been working hard to protect them. A European directive on the "conservation of wild birds" was signed on April 2, 1979 and came into operation on April 6, 1981. The European Commission is responsible for monitoring the application of the directive and can undertake infraction procedures against countries who do not abide by its provisions.

Several European Parliamentarians in recent months have voiced their concern at the treatment of birds in the Community and have protested that the directive is not being observed in some member states. They include Meinolf Mertens (Germany), Ursula Schleicher (Germany), Vera Squarcialupi (Italy) and Hemmo Muntingh (Netherlands).

Wild birds are threatened in a variety of ways, but notably by pollution. Several hundred buzzards and song birds were found dead recently near Lake Constance in the Federal Republic of Germany. Tests carried out indicated that the birds had absorbed fatal doses of endrin, a chloro fluorocarbon similar to DDT. Hunting is also a threat and the European Commission's attention has been drawn to the fact that the French government has accepted an extension of the hunting season for thrush right up to the breeding season. Paris has also decided to authorize the opening of the hunting season for wood pigeons in May during the migratory season.

Some hunting methods have also been criticized and include one particularly cruel technique involving the luring of wood pigeons by means of other pigeons attached to trees with their eyes gouged out.

Several other countries have not yet updated their hunting laws to take account of the Community directive including Italy and Belgium and their infraction could ultimately mean that the European Court of Justice will have to intervene.

The European Commission intends to reinforce the conservation and protection procedures to include all animal species that are threatened with extinction.

DEVELOPMENT: All about coffee

Where would we be without our early morning cup of hot coffee? Legions of workers, housewives and dashing young executives depend on their first cup of coffee "to wake them up" and help them face the world. Students cramming for that crucial examination drink coffee to fight sleep and boredom. Where indeed would we be without our cup - or cups - of coffee?

But coffee is more than just an exhilarating drink. It is a vital source of income for a number of developing countries who grow and export the beverage on the lucrative world market to the tune of 10 - 11 billion dollars per year. The economies of countries like Brazil, Colombia, Kenya and Tanzania depend almost exclusively on the production and export of coffee. Over the years, revenues from Third World coffee exports have been much higher than their export earnings from sugar, cotton, copper or other commodities. In fact, today, only oil brings in more money to the developing countries than coffee.

World trade in coffee has not been without its share of problems. These include fluctuating production and volatile prices - factors which have created a series of economic problems for the coffee-growing countries. Efforts to regulate the world market were made on an international level in 1962 and an "International Coffee Agreement" was signed by all coffee-producing and importing countries. An International Coffee Organisation was also set up to manage the agreement which ran into problems from the first year of its creation.

Coffee-producing countries found it difficult to follow the agreement's provisions for curbs on their production and refused to introduce export quotas. It was said that without such quotas, production would exceed international demand for coffee and provoke a decline in world coffee prices. No one was in a mood to listen.

Although the international agreement has been in force for almost twenty years now - and quotas are drawn up and adhered to in some cases - the world market still faces its ups and downs every year. When prices increase, consumption tends to decline, even in the coffee-drinking Western countries. The European Community countries currently import one-third of world coffee imports or about 1,3 million tonnes of coffee per year. The most coffee is drunk in the Federal Republic of Germany, followed by France, Italy and the Netherlands.

As leading importing countries, the member states of the Community have played an important role both within the international agreement and outside it by giving financial aid and technical assistance to the African countries which produce and export coffee. Statistics show that the Community spent about 28 million £ on coffee production projects undertaken in the different African countries, who are also members of the Lome convention. The Community also transfers money to African countries largely depending on coffee for their economic existence when their export earnings from coffee have suffered either because of production cutbacks or low world prices.

CULTURE: A plan to save Europe's heritage

A new plan to protect Europe's cultural and architectural heritage has just been proposed by the European Parliament.

From the multitude of castles and historic buildings in Northern Europe to the archeological sites of the Mediterranean, many of the treasures of Europe's past are endangered by pollution, decay or destruction by urban development. But in a new effort to stem this deterioration of Europe's rich heritage, the European Parliament has just recommended a broad action programme that would unite the resources of the European Community including the national and regional authorities and the private sector. The Parliament plan was recommended by the Federal Republic of Germany's Wilhelm Hahn, a member of the European Peoples' Party, and by the Committee on Youth, Culture, Education, Information and Sports. It was adopted by the entire Parliament after a thorough debate and amendments, which did not alter the basic thrust of the original proposal which is to undertake a massive joint undertaking in this field.

The Parliament does not see safeguarding of monuments and historical properties as a luxury but as an economic investment for contemporary and future generations. The plan makes clear that the preservation of such sites generates considerable employment for small and medium enterprises and particularly tourist and service occupations. Another feature of the Parliament's proposal stresses the environmental aspect of such activities and underlines the need for urgent action to protect against pollution. At various times, European Community institutions have also seen the need for such programmes. The Parliament, for example, had previously backed resolutions, supporting the protection of individual sites in the Campania region, Orvieto and Todi in Italy, the Acropolis in Athens, piers in Britain, and bronze age remains in Holland. The European Commission has also allocated funds for individual projects and training programmes for young artisans to acquire various skills associated with restoration and preservation. About 50 scholarships a year were recently awarded to train specialist architects, engineers, town planners and other craftsmen in centres in Leuven, Rome, Munich, Venice and the island of Tinos.

The Parliament is now asking the Commission and the Council of Ministers for a commitment to create a "European Fund for Sites and Monuments" to begin a priority inventory of locations needing protection and to launch other aid programmes.