

S U M M A R Y

p. 2-3 INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY: "Who dares wins?"

We look at the information technology challenge and report on a major conference at London's Barbican centre, attended by British PM Margaret Thatcher and European Commission Vice-President Etienne Davignon.

p. 4 TRANSPORT: New links urged

New road, rail and inland waterway links between European Community countries may soon get a 358 million pound boost from a 5-year transport plan proposed by the European Commission.

p. 5 EMPLOYMENT: Moonlighting

Millions of people have two jobs, only one of which they declare to the taxman, according to a report just released by the European Community Statistical Office.

p. 6 LAW: Euro-patents and trademarks

The European Community may be about to launch a new assault on plagiarism in industry and business.

p. 7 MEDICINE: Baby-care

A British socialist MEP has called for closer European cooperation in the field of perinatal medicine.

p. 8 WOMEN: Nairobi conference planned

Europe is planning to take part in a conference in Nairobi in 1985 to mark the end of the United Nations Decade for Women.

p. 8 JAPAN: Executive programme

Applications close on February 18th for the European Commission's 18 month Executive Training Programme in Japan.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY: Who dares wins?

"The information revolution is our revolution: Let us make the most of it" British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher told the recent IT '82 conference in London's Barbican Centre. European Commission Vice-President Etienne Davignon vigorously nodded his agreement in the background.

Information technology, which is the art of building machines and systems to store, process and transmit information, is probably the biggest challenge that Europe will be facing in the year 2000. It's a boom sector with world sales already worth about 94 billion dollars and growing at a rate of about eight percent a year.

But it's a race in which we clearly aren't doing too well. Although Europe accounts for 30 percent of the world market for information technology, European firms only produce about 10 percent themselves. The rest of the market is dominated by fiercely competitive firms from Japan and the United States.

Foreign competition is concentrated in a number of key sectors. In micro-electronic components, for example, the Japanese and the Americans dominate the field, both in ideas and in products.

In computers it's the American multinational IBM that dominates the market, with IBM Europe maintaining a larger turnover than the ten biggest European firms put together. Micro-computers have been another major field of American success and in telecommunications the US firm ATT is far and away the market leader. But the Japanese still lead in the electronics sector.

American success has been no accident. Nearly 16 percent of US government-funded research and development spending in 1981 was devoted to electronic-related industries. In other words, about 11 billion dollars out of a total budget of 68.6 billion went into the industries of the future.

Europe, which in the past made a significant contribution to electronic research, started losing ground to her competitors when research and development costs began to mushroom.

As a result, European firms have been forced to choose between becoming increasingly dependent on imported technologies or using inferior technologies to produce less sophisticated products. Obviously, there are exceptions, as Mrs. Thatcher hastened to point out in her speech, but overall, Europe just isn't investing enough in research and development.

But, according to Etienne Davignon, it's not too late to change all that. The European Commission wants to bring together the combined efforts of industry, universities and research centres in a frontal attack on the information technology sector.

That's going to be the job of the ESPRIT joint research programme, which starts this year. It's based in the idea that national programmes are insufficient and, like individual firms, individual states don't have the necessary means to compete with the Americans and the Japanese. A united effort could help Europe to catch up and that's why the Community is financing ESPRIT to the tune of 40 million dollars.

Europe still has time to catch up, was the message that Mrs. Thatcher and Mr. Davignon were trying to put across at the Barbican conference. The prospects for the information technology sector are immense. The Commission estimates that, just in terms of employment, the sector could create as many as two million new jobs.

Europe has to live up to the challenge. "There are glittering prizes for success, but severe penalties for failure", Mrs. Thatcher told the conference.

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TRANSPORT: New links urged

New road, railway and inland waterway links between European Community countries may soon get a 358 million pound boost from a five-year experimental transport programme proposed by the European Commission.

The main objective of the programme, according to European Transport Commissioner Giorgios Contogeorgis, is to fund projects which, by nature of their size, could not be carried out by national authorities, without Community help.

The first part of the two-stage programme would begin this year, with nearly 30 million pounds of Community money earmarked for four major projects in five countries.

Road improvements head the list and include the route between Athens and the Yugoslav border in Greece and the Rosslare-Dublin-Belfast road in Ireland, which needs a number of by-passes. Improvements to the North West - South East transit route through Austria would also be funded under the scheme.

The fourth project for 1983 would be a modernisation of the Rotterdam - Cologne - Stuttgart rail link between the Netherlands and the Federal Republic of Germany.

Part of the programme has already been approved by the Council of Ministers and the Commission would like to see annual expenditure double to fifty nine million in 1984.

Projects for 1984 would include modernising the Zuid-Willemsvaart canal between Belgium and the Netherlands, improving the North-South rail link between Copenhagen, Frankfurt and Milan and electrifying the Colchester-Harwich railway line in the United Kingdom.

Modernisation of Britain's east coast ports, a motorway linking Luxembourg to Trier in Germany and further projects aimed at improving communications between northwestern and southeastern Europe are also planned.

Projects will also have to benefit the Community as a whole, for example by eliminating bottlenecks and increasing intra-European trade.

If the programme is approved at ministerial level, it could eventually form the basis for Europe's long-awaited Common Transport Policy.

EMPLOYMENT: Moonlighting

When a taxi driver talks to you about nuclear physics or high finance, you often get the impression that he actually has another job and he's only driving a cab for money on the side. If he is, he certainly isn't an exception.

The number of people in the industrialised countries who have two jobs, only one of which they declare to the taxman, probably runs into millions, according to a report just released by the European Community Statistical Office.

Second jobs and "moonlighting" form the backbone of the so-called "black economy" of undeclared income, which in Europe and America now accounts for between 7,5 and 20 percent of Gross National Product, if the difference between national income and national expenditure accounts is to be believed.

Although precise figures for double job-holding are extremely difficult to calculate, the highest rate in Europe is believed to be found in Ireland and Luxembourg, at over 3 percent of the workforce, according to the report, which was compiled by the University of Wales Institute of Science and Technology.

Italy, the Netherlands and Belgium also showed high rates and the lowest were to be found in the Federal Republic of Germany and the United Kingdom.

The study showed that throughout Europe, with the exception of Britain, many more men than women had second jobs. In the Federal Republic of Germany, there were about nine times as many men as women with two jobs, compared to a ratio of about one to one in the United Kingdom.

The researchers also found that 60 to 90 percent of second jobs in European Community member states, with the exception of Italy, were regular, rather than occasional, but said that there appeared to be little or no correlation with high rates of unemployment.

In most of Europe people tend to devote on average 11 to 14 hours a week to their second jobs, says the report, but in Ireland and the Federal Republic of Germany the figure can go up to as much as 20 hours.

Longest hours tend to be worked in the agricultural sector, which accounts for nearly 70 percent of second jobs in Germany and 50 percent in Ireland. In the United Kingdom, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg most double-job holding occurs in the services sector.

LAW: Euro-patents and trademarks

The European Community may be about to launch a new assault on plagiarism in industry and business.

Traditionally industrial and commercial property has always been protected at national level by a system of patents and trademarks. But legislation varies from country to country and anyone wanting to use an invention or a trademark in a particular country has to go through all the legal steps which apply in that country, if he wants to cover himself against people copying him.

The creation of a unified market for patents and trademarks in the European Community would be good not only for inventors, but also for industry and the consumer.

The idea certainly isn't a new one. The first national convention to harmonise international patent law was signed in Paris in 1883 and has been amended several times since.

The European Community has already created a European patents office in Munich and the first European patents came into effect in 1980. The cost of European patents is still relatively high, but they offer inventors the opportunity to protect an invention in sixteen countries at the same time.

Registered trademarks, on the other hand, provide legal protection for consumer goods and can consist of words, names, pictures, letters, numbers, combinations of colours and so on. There are currently about 2 million of them in the European Community countries.

In November 1980, the European Commission made two proposals on registered trademarks. Firstly, it called for a harmonisation of existing Community legislation and secondly for the introduction of a Community trademark, which could only be issued by a Community office.

The future location of such an office remains in doubt. French Socialist MEP Yvonne Theobald-Paoli has proposed the French Mediterranean town of Toulon, which, she says, will be in the middle of Europe, after the enlargement to include Spain and Portugal.

MEDICINE: Baby-care

A British Socialist MEP has called for closer European cooperation in the field of perinatal medicine - the period of child-birth.

Scots MEP Kenneth Collins made the plea to European Social Affairs Commissioner Ivor Richard in Brussels.

Perinatal research has been coordinated at European level since 1978, under the European Community's medical research programme.

Two projects stand out in the existing programme. The first consists of a register of congenital deformities, which has been in operation since 1980 and gives doctors access to the details of 200,000 births recorded in twenty national registers.

The second project is a list of "criteria for perinatal monitoring" derived from close collaboration between thirty obstetrics clinics in different Community member states.

Further cooperation is expected in the near future, following a decision made by the Council of Ministers last August. Future links are expected to include an exchange of information about pre-natal and post-natal care.

CORRECTION:

We have to apologise to readers for an error which appeared in an article entitled "Drunk driving" in Eurofocus 43/82. Irish readers tell us that we were misinformed in saying that Ireland has no alcohol limit for drivers. It is in fact 1 gramme/1000 cm³ of blood.

WOMEN: Nairobi conference planned

The United Nations Decade for Women is to end in 1985 with a major conference in Nairobi, Kenya, to review the results of ten years uphill struggle.

Themes to be discussed will include employment, education, health and the problems of women in the developing countries.

The European Community is expected to play an important role in the proceedings, following its adoption last year of a five-year action programme on equal opportunities for women.

European Directives on equal pay and treatment and on equal social security benefits have also been adopted in recent years, and Community officials are already preparing material to share Europe's experience with her United Nations partners in Nairobi.

At the conference the European Commission will be supporting calls from the UN Secretariat for civil services to set an example by improving career opportunities for women employees.

But the damaging effect of the recession on job opportunities and training for traditionally disadvantaged groups like women and young people means that, almost without exception, delegates will be urging tougher action in the future.

JAPAN: Executive programme

Companies wanting to break into the Japanese market may be interested in sending their executives on the European Commission's Fourth Executive Training programme in Japan, which starts in October.

Thirty places are available on the eighteen month course, which includes twelve months of intensive language tuition, followed by six months in-house training with a Japanese company.

The cost of the programme is met by the Commission and UK and Irish applications should be sent to the following addresses by February 18th, 1983.

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