

newsfeature

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EUROPE -- UP THE DOWN STAIRCASE

At least in Europe, 1975 is beginning to look less gloomy, thanks to some recent events in the European Community -- the Common Market.

1975 will bring Europe a bonanza regional development fund, a long-awaited common energy policy, greater equality for women, and the start of a move to elect the European Parliament by universal suffrage.

The threat of a British exit from the Community was diminished when the EC heads of state or government -- at their December 9-10 Paris summit -- agreed to renegotiate the size of economically ailing Britain's contribution to the Community budget. The door opened for international cooperation on energy with the merger of US and European positions at the Martinique meeting between French President Valery Giscard d'Estaing and US President Gerald R. Ford.

The European Regional Development Fund, approved at the EC summit, will be endowed with nearly \$1.6 billion over the next three years. The monies will help underwrite projects to stimulate development and raise the standard of living in Europe's backward or industrially depressed regions.

Italy will reap most of the fund's benefits, getting 40 per cent or about \$627 million of the total allotment. Britain and France are next: getting about \$439 million (28 per cent) and \$235 million (15 per cent), respectively. Ireland will receive proportionally more -- about \$94 million (6 per cent plus \$7.23 million). Germany was allotted 6.4 per cent, followed by Holland (1.7 per cent), Belgium (1.5 per cent), Denmark (1.3 per cent), and Luxembourg (0.1 per cent).

The EC common energy policy is designed to reduce Europe's dependence on imported oil, enabling the continent to "go nuclear" over the next 10 years. On December 18, the EC Council of Ministers laid the groundwork by setting precise objectives for 1985, based on Commission proposals. They include: reducing EC dependence on imported energy sources to between 40 per cent and 50 per cent (63 per cent in 1973); developing a 160-200 gigawatt annual nuclear energy capacity; producing 180 million tons of coal annually; reducing imported oil's share of total EC energy needs to between 28 per cent and 38 per cent (61 per cent in 1973); and stepping up natural gas production to between 175 and 225 million tons annually.

The Council also called for measures to rationalize EC energy use and drop the energy consumption level 15 per cent below pre-energy crisis forecasts. The EC Commission will follow through with proposals for meeting those goals.

Pinpointing inflation and unemployment as Europe's number one enemies, the summiteers resolved to work toward a convergence of member state economic policies and called on the Council to draft appropriate guidelines. They also agreed to take coordinated Community level action to combat rising unemployment. They reaffirmed the goal of economic and monetary union -- meaning, among other things, a common European currency.

Aiming to speak with one voice abroad, the EC chiefs vowed gradual adoption of common positions and coordination of diplomatic action in all international affairs affecting the Community. The Council's president in office will speak for the nine EC nations on questions of international diplomacy which affect the Community.

To beef up the Community's internal solidarity, Europe's leaders resolved to strengthen EC institutions. The European Parliament, for instance, is to be more involved in the activities of the Council. A 1978 target date was tentatively set for direct election of the Parliament. The Parliament, whose members complain that it is little more than a debating club, currently consists of members coming from the legislative bodies of each of the nine EC countries.

Community decisions and action will be easier to come by -- the summit agreed to abandon the need for unanimous consent for Council of Ministers decisions.

The Community heads also decided to institutionalize their meetings. They agreed to meet at least three times yearly, accompanied by their foreign ministers,

To give greater public awareness of the existence of the Community, agreement was made to develop plans for setting up a Common Market passport union and introducing -- around 1977 -- a uniform passport for EC citizens.

Women's equality in the Community was placed on firm footing with the Council's December 18 adoption of a directive for harmonizing member state application of the principle of equal pay for men and women. It provides legal recourse for women workers in cases of discrimination. The Council also adopted measures to strengthen and harmonize laws protecting workers in cases of mass layoffs.