



COMMISSION
OF THE EUROPEAN
COMMUNITIES

Jean Monnet House
8 Storey's Gate London SW1P 3AT
Telephone: 071-973 1992
Fax: 071-973 1900

WE/1/93

THE WEEK IN EUROPE

7 January 1993

New Commission. The new European Commission met for the first time yesterday ushering in its term of office with seven new members. Commission President Jacques Delors distributed the portfolios just before Christmas. British Commissioners Sir Leon Brittan and Bruce Millan have been reappointed but with changes and additions to their responsibilities. Sir Leon moves from Competition Policy to oversee External Economic Affairs and Commercial Policy. Bruce Millan expands his Regional Policy remit to include relations with the Committee of the Regions to be set up under the Maastricht Treaty.

GATT goes on. Sir Leon Brittan, in his new role as Commissioner for External Economic Affairs, called yesterday for a swift conclusion to the GATT negotiations. The target date of mid-January laid down by US President George Bush, Prime Minister John Major and Commission President Jacques Delors represented a "formidable challenge" but not an impossible one, he said. Sir Leon was speaking after his confidential meeting outside London over the New Year with US Trade Secretary, Carla Hills. He said he was determined to take the challenge seriously and had already instructed Commission officials to reopen negotiations in Geneva as a matter of urgency.

Shetland tanker disaster. The new Environment Commissioner Ioannis Paleokrassas said yesterday that the Commission was ready to consider giving financial aid to the environmental groups working to prevent oil pollution causing widespread damage to the Shetland Islands after a Liberian-registered tanker went aground there in storms on Tuesday. The Commission may also contribute to an ecological survey to be carried out after the clean-up operation. The Commission is in permanent contact with the UK authorities to give assistance if needed.

Single Market celebrations. At midnight on New Year's Eve, Prime Minister John Major performed his last duty as President of the European Council by lighting a beacon in London to celebrate the advent of the Single Market. The beacon was the first of 700 in the UK and part of a chain of signals across the European Community. Beacon Europe not only provided a spectacular finale to the UK Presidency, the Prime Minister said, but also lighted the way to a new era of confidence and friendship in Europe. In a New Year message, President Delors said that the EC would have to display a more active presence in global affairs in 1993. However, "a certain sense of decency" prevented full celebration of the Single Market as the crisis in the former Yugoslavia overshadowed the Community.

Gambling and the Single Market. After an inquiry into the gambling industry, the Commission concluded in late December that while the sector was of substantial economic importance, there should be no EC legislation to regulate gambling in the Single Market. Existing regulations to prevent fraud, money laundering and social aspects of gambling were dealt with adequately at national level. The Commission did not preclude intervention as the Community markets become more closely integrated.

Euro 999 service. From 1 January, a pan-European emergency telephone number came into operation in all but two Community countries. Anyone dialling 112 will be linked to the police, fire and ambulance services in a scheme which runs parallel to the UK's 999 number. Spain and the Netherlands are expected to join the system by 1995.

Action committee on internal market. The Commission has set up an action committee made up of Member States' representatives and chaired by the Commission to tackle any immediate problems arising from the abolition of internal border controls on 1 January. Although the Community rules provide mechanisms in many sectors guaranteeing a rapid exchange of information and close cooperation, the committee will provide an unbureaucratic and rapid point of contact between the Member States and the Commission.

Britain and Europe. Representatives from local and regional government, the TECs, universities, Chambers of Commerce and information outlets began a two-day conference in Lincolnshire today to define a strategy for a public information service about the European Community in Britain during 1993. The conference marks the termination of a European Commission regional programme which has run for the past four years supporting locally-organised Europe weeks and festivals. Conference speakers included Ian Taylor MP, Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Duchy of Lancaster; Lord Richard QC, Leader of the Opposition in the House of Lords, and Colette Flesch, Commission Director-General for Information and former Foreign Minister of Luxembourg.

European Forests. The European Commission's fourth annual report on the state of Europe's forests shows that one fifth of all trees are affected by environmental pollution. In general, conifers are the worst affected with 27% of pines and 19% of firs damaged. The most damaged tree is the cork oak with 43% affected. The survey conducted in 1991 covered the Community countries plus seven non-EC states. In some mountainous areas in central and eastern Europe forest damage had reached alarming dimensions, the report said. Transboundary atmospheric pollution was the most important cause.

Exhaust emissions. The Commission has adopted a new draft Directive aimed at reducing car exhaust emissions by some 35% from January 1996. The Commission acknowledged that the proposed Directive would tax the ingenuity of car manufacturers and designers, but it predicted that any increase in production costs would be kept to a minimum in the competitive climate of the Single Market.

Environmental impact case dropped. The Commission has announced it is dropping formal proceedings against the United Kingdom for infringing EC environmental impact requirements at a BP industrial site in Kinneil, Scotland. The Commission argued that BP had gained planning permission to increase its liquid gas installation without a prior assessment. However, last autumn BP put forward plans for public consultation on the plans which now satisfy the EC Directive.

Aid to Palestinians. The Commission announced a package of food aid for Palestinians living in poor conditions in the Gaza strip. Some 6,000 tonnes of wheat flour will be distributed by the United Nations Relief Works Agency. For strict humanitarian considerations, the Commission is making a grant available through non-governmental organisations to alleviate the hardship of the 415 Palestinians expelled by the Israeli government and their families who remain in the Occupied Territories.

Ford admonished. In late December, the Commission ordered Ford's tractor operation, Ford New Holland, to allow its dealers to sell their products anywhere in the Community after the company was found to have been infringing Commission rules on parallel imports. Ford had been attempting to stop its dealers selling its products across the Community. Among other measures, Ford had threatened to cancel dealerships and put up prices for dealers found trading in parallel imports.

Media concentration. In response to requests by the European Parliament, the Commission has launched a Green Paper to discuss the need for Community action to counter concentration in the media. Since the need for action at EC level is complex and sensitive, the Commission has said it will consult all parties concerned. The Green Paper stresses that pluralism in the media is first and foremost a matter for Member States. However, disparities between national rules could potentially interfere with the proper functioning of the internal market. The paper considers three options: no Community action; a recommendation on transparency; and harmonisation of laws restricting media ownership.

Visegrad free trade area. The Commission has praised the initiative of the governments of the so-called Visegrad countries, Poland, Hungary and the Slovak and Czech Republics, to form a free trade area. The four states signed the accord on 21 December. The new economic area should revitalise commercial ties and stabilise the states' economies. The Commission views the agreement as another step towards the pan-European free trade area called for in the Edinburgh Summit communiqué.

Profile of the New Commission. A profile of the new Commission, providing biographical reference material and analysis of the team, Cabinets, departmental reorganisation and future political priorities has been published by Market Access Europe SA. Copies at £120 from Aisling Byrne, Market Access Europe SA., Rue de la Loi 99, 1040 Brussels. Tel: 010 322 230 0545, fax: 010 322 230 5706.

Conference & Diary Dates:

"After the ERM" - A series of seminars on questions related to ERM, EMU, currency exposure and financial implications of the Single Market will be organised during the year in selected locations around the UK. Further information from Lynwood David International Ltd on 0737 778169.

"Combined Heat & Power - the impact of Europe" - A one-day seminar on 26 January in Birmingham organised by the Combined Heat & Power Association to examine the impact of EC energy and environmental legislation from small scale to large city applications. Details from Chris Hancock, RGO Exhibitions & Publications Ltd, Oakapple Cottage, Furnace Lane, Broad Oak Brede, Rye, E. Sussex. TN31 6ES. Tel or fax: 0424 882702.

Meetings:

Ecofin	18 January	Brussels
Fisheries	18 January	Brussels
Agriculture	18-19 January	Brussels
European Parliament (plenary)	18-22 January	Strasbourg
Social Affairs (informal)	27-28 January	Copenhagen

Our next briefing will be on Thursday, 14 January 1993 at 11.30am.