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COMMUNITIES

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THE WEEK IN EUROPE

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British Presidency priorities. In a foreword to the brochure introducing the UK's agenda for its Council Presidency starting on 1 July, Prime Minister John Major says that the UK's term will be a demonstration of Britain in its proper place at the heart of Europe. There is a vast range of cooperation within Europe, he says, to which Britain contributes and often leads. The UK's agenda, launched yesterday (Wednesday), laid stress on extending the benefits of Community membership to central and eastern European states. The democratic traditions which the Community nurtured should take root in more and more countries. Britain would complete the preparatory steps to enable negotiations to begin with the first group of applicants, the Prime Minister said. The other main task awaiting the UK's Presidency was the completion of the Single Market and in particular, how it could be brought home to the ordinary citizen. Major singled out air fares as one area for action in which citizens would see the immediate benefits of the Single Market. The Presidency, the Prime Minister added, would not give Britain additional powers, but bring responsibilities and an opportunity for Britain to shape the future of Europe at a time of great change. At a press conference to promote the UK's Presidency agenda, FCO Minister of State Tristan Garel-Jones paid tribute to the work of the UK offices of the Commission in helping to promote Community awareness.

Rabies restrictions. Britain and Ireland are reported to have persuaded their EC partners to allow them to continue quarantine restrictions on pets, thereby avoiding the import of rabies even after the removal of all border controls next January. However, the small number of cats and dogs being imported for sale will be allowed in without quarantine provided they have been vaccinated and have the proper documentation. The agreement made at the EC agriculture ministers' meeting in Luxembourg on Tuesday, was heralded by UK Agriculture Minister John Gummer as a "major advance" on the schemes proposed by the Commission. The minister described the decision as another example of the sort of success made possible by Britain being at the "heart of the Community". The Council also agreed to continue with rabies eradication programmes in the Community.

GATT dispute. Ireland will be the most severely hit of all EC Member States by the US decision last week to suspend tariff concessions on EC agricultural produce, according to Agriculture Commissioner Ray MacSharry. He told EC farm ministers, meeting in Luxembourg on Monday, that the US "shopping list" of EC goods targeted in the row over subsidies to EC oilseed producers amounted to some \$2bn of which only around half would be retained by the US. The Commissioner described the US action as a blatant violation of the GATT rules. Speaking last week to the European Parliament, MacSharry stressed that if the EC's trading partners questioned the CAP reform arrangements or the new compensatory aids to farmers guaranteed in the so-called "Green Box", which is not negotiable in GATT, there would be no agreement on agriculture in the Uruguay round. EC Foreign Ministers gave the go-ahead earlier this week for EC negotiators resuming the GATT talks tomorrow (Friday) in Geneva to use the disputes procedure which can authorise compensation for an injured party.

Subsidiarity enshrined. Commission Vice-President Sir Leon Brittan, delivering the annual Robert Schuman Lecture in Florence last week, said he believed the Danes' rejection of the Maastricht Treaty was due to inadequate explanation of the Treaty's consequences and not outright dissatisfaction with the Treaty itself. If the process begun by Robert Schuman was to be successfully completed, public opinion needed to be carried along as Europe evolved, he said. Maastricht, ironically, had limited the powers and rights to be exercised at Community level by enshrining for the first time the principle of subsidiarity which would be applied without "caveat, limitation or exception" to every new piece of legislation. Sir Leon predicted that subsidiarity would be the most important change to the Community's constitution since 1957. Maastricht, contrary to Danish fears, had given the Community a means for long-term evolution that was both progressive and acceptable to its citizens.

Banks cajoled. Europe's banks must make swift moves to reduce charges for cross-border payments by the end of the year or face the Commission proposing legislation. Sir Leon Brittan, speaking to the European Banking Federation in Brussels on Monday, urged banks to rise to the challenge and avoid Community action, which, he said, would be a less satisfactory outcome for everyone concerned. Earlier this year the Commission issued a working paper outlining its objectives for a reduction in the cost of

cross-frontier payments which it sees as a prerequisite for the Single Market. At present, some cross-frontier transactions cost up to 20 times more than domestic transfers.

Fillip for HDTV. The Commission's plans for promoting EC standards for high definition television received unequivocal backing from television broadcasters, satellite operators and equipment manufacturers on Monday. After 18 months of disagreement, industry representatives reached a consensus and collectively signed the Commission's Memorandum of Understanding, a blueprint for the future of HDTV. Industry's support is imperative to the survival of HDTV, which will need a "critical mass" of viewers to succeed. The nascent HDTV industry is dependent now on EC finance to fund development. The EC's budget proposals include a commitment to provide some 850m ECUs (£596.7m) for HDTV development. Under the plan, industry must launch an operational project for advanced wide-screen television abiding by the Satellite Transmission Standards Directive agreed last December.

Gaza hospital. On Wednesday the Commission pledged 13m ECUs (£9m) towards the construction of the first major hospital on the Gaza Strip since 1967. EC North-South Commissioner Abel Matutes signed the deal with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency to build a new 232-bed hospital in Khan Younis opening in 1995 to serve the rapidly increasing Palestinian population. At present in the area, the ratio of beds to people is half the World Health Organisation's minimum.

Wimbledon tickets. The Commission has denied opening an inquiry into the way tickets are sold at the Wimbledon tennis tournament. A statement issued in Brussels on Wednesday also contradicted reports that Competition Commissioner Sir Leon Brittan had ordered the UK's Office of Fair Trading to carry out its own inquiry. The Commission had no power to do so. Sir Leon has received complaints about the alleged practice by the All England Lawn Tennis Club of selling share-holders' debenture tickets on to hospitality organisers at over-inflated prices. Sir Leon will answer the complaints shortly.

Trans-European networks. Transport Commissioner Karel Van Miert put forward plans last week for EC-funded transport schemes which will help put into action the commitment made at Maastricht to promote cohesion of Community periphery regions. Road networks, which take 70% of EC goods and 60-70% of passenger traffic across EC frontiers, are considered inadequate. A Commission communication states that cases of pollution and accidents will rise as traffic increases by a predicted 30% by the end of the decade, if trans-European routes are not improved. The increase in trade under the EEA agreement and cooperation accords with eastern Europe make the schemes more pressing. The Commission proposes co-financing 7,500 miles of roads within the decade to fill in missing links.

Car-free cities. Car-free cities could become between two to five times cheaper to live in than the present car-choked urban areas. A feasibility study released this week by Environment Commissioner Carlo Ripa di Meana suggests that planners should adapt transport systems to cities instead of simply carrying on adapting cities to cars. For a model city, in which people walk short distances and travel further on public transport, urban planners must persuade motor manufacturers to rethink their long-term policies and encourage private business to share responsibility for the system. Aosta, Amsterdam, Naples and Bath are among several European cities volunteering to join a club of "car-free cities" to pool ideas and planning approaches and eventually operate pilot schemes.

Regional development conference. The Commission is sponsoring a regional development conference in Inverness, in one of the Community's most peripheral regions, to discuss current regional policies and examine initiatives to diversify rural economies. Commissioner Ray MacSharry will be speaking at the conference on 2-3 July which will take stock of EC policies ranging from CAP reform to the LEADER programme. Details from Ian Fleming at Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Tel 0463 244 331.

Conference & Diary Dates:

Ageing in the European Community - This conference in London on 21-22 July looks at the effects of EC policies on the quality of life of the elderly. Contact Age Concern on 081 679 8000 for details.

Post-CAP reform - A first major conference examining implications of CAP reform takes place in London on 13 July. Details from Agra Europe on Tel: 0892 533813 or fax: 0892 544895.

Council Meetings:

Internal Market	18-19 June	Luxembourg
EPC	18-19 June	Lisbon
Transport	22-23 June	Luxembourg
Industry	24 June	Luxembourg
Social Affairs	24 June	Luxembourg
European Council	26-27 June	Lisbon

Our next briefing will take place on 25 June at 11.30am

NB: The Week in Europe does not necessarily reflect the official views of the European Commission.