



Summit preparations. As Community leaders meet in Edinburgh, President Jacques Delors gave the Commission's view yesterday on the challenges facing them, namely the issues of subsidiarity, the economic situation and attitudes to Maastricht. The Commission's main concern is that leaders will whittle down the compromise proposal on the Delors II Package of Community financing to agree more modest commitments. Delors praised the UK Presidency's text on subsidiarity and the Danish problem as "extremely subtle". The discussion at Tuesday's Foreign Ministers' conclave gave Delors the hope that a solution might be forthcoming to enable the Danes to hold a second referendum on Maastricht at the beginning of May. Delors said that if the UK and Denmark gave firm commitments to ratify the Maastricht Treaty before the summer, he saw no reason why accession negotiations with Sweden, Finland, Austria and eventually Norway could not begin next month. Asked what he thought the consequences of a failure at Edinburgh would be, the Commission President replied simply that he remained "optimistic".

Swiss No to EEA. A narrow majority of Swiss voters (50.3% against 49.7%) rejected the European Economic Area agreement in a referendum on Sunday. External Affairs Commissioner Frans Andriessen said the Commission respected Swiss democracy and would continue to apply the bilateral agreements already existing between Switzerland and the Community. The Swiss No vote was not a reason to abandon the whole EEA which was due to come into operation on 1 January. However, it was realistic to ask whether Switzerland was in a position to go ahead with its application for EC membership when it had opposed a "less ambitious move".

Oilseed affair. Foreign Affairs Ministers, gathered in Brussels for a two-day conclave on Monday, expressed their hopes for a "balanced and equitable" GATT agreement, but on condition that substantial concessions were made by third countries on non-agricultural aspects, such as liberalisation of the service sector. The French minister, supported by the Italian and Portuguese delegations, asked for Community participation in agricultural negotiations of GATT to be halted until a final analysis of the compatibility of the EC-US deal on Community agricultural subsidies with CAP reform. Commission Vice-President Frans Andriessen repeated that the Washington deal was fully compatible with EC agriculture reforms and said that the entire Uruguay Round would seize up if agriculture was excluded at this stage.

Fish stocks. The Commission and Member States have adopted new objectives for fishing fleet reductions over the next four years. These envisage a 20% reduction in catches of cod and haddock, the species most over-fished. The objectives seek a reduction of activity by an average 8% throughout the Community, a level which should minimise the social and economic effects on regions heavily dependent on the industry. The Commission proposes that financial aid could come from a new "objective 6" in the structural funds in the Delors II Package. The announcement comes at a time of increased tension in the Community fishing industry. The Commission is expected to fix the amount of Total Available Catches (TACs) shortly.

Competition policy improved. In a speech on Monday to the Centre for European Policy Studies, Competition Commissioner Sir Leon Brittan announced plans to enlist the help of Member States and accelerate procedures in the handling of competition policy. Since most complaints referred to the Commission concern almost exclusively single Member States it was natural, he said, that these should be dealt with by national courts. Sir Leon envisages the Commission taking a pro-active role in encouraging and assisting the courts to apply EC law speedily. As for national authorities granting individual exemptions to Treaty rules, the Commissioner said that the "time was not ripe to take such a step". There was too great a risk of divergent applications of EC law and of "forum shopping", companies setting up in the country with the most lenient interpretation of the rules.

Prize projects for the disabled. Three British projects aimed at increasing the mobility of the disabled were among 28 receiving prizes under the EC's HELIOS programme, dedicated to helping disabled people live independently. Madame Delors presented commemorative plaques to the winners, who ranged from companies and local authorities to charities. UK winners were: Strathclyde Regional Council for a programme of awareness of those with sight impairments; Margaret Blackwood Housing Association, Edinburgh, for an integrated housing project; and Tripscope, a London-based charity pioneering services to the disabled traveller.

Defence cuts. A Commission study released last week on the regional impact of defence cuts shows that areas reliant on the defence industry or military bases will be severely affected by the 10% cutbacks expected across the Community by 1995. Regional Policy Commissioner Bruce Millan commented that many regions likely to be affected were not eligible for structural funding under the present objectives of the Community's regional policy. However, the Delors II Package did envisage some "degree of flexibility". Member States would remain

primarily responsible for supporting affected areas. The report noted that UK defence companies, in contrast to other Member States, were pursuing a defensive strategy of lay-offs, closures and sales of industrial sites.

EC economic situation. A Commission analysis predicting a strong deterioration in the Community's 1993 economic outlook says it is crucial for Member States to act in concert on economic policy, rather than in isolation. The Commission report, out last week, says that hopes of an economic boost from the single market and monetary stability under Maastricht all but disappeared earlier this year. The analysis predicts an average Community growth of 1-1.5% in 1993 and a pronounced economic slowdown, if not real stagnation. The report warns that the economic situation will challenge the ingenuity of policy-makers.

Landing slots. EC transport ministers agreed on Monday to measures giving the Community's smaller airlines greater access to landing slots at major Community airports. Ministers agreed to tighten the rules under which airlines lose slots, but stopped short of agreeing to the confiscation of slots under-used by larger carriers in favour of the so-called "new entrant" airlines. An airline holding fewer than four slots at a given airport will gain slots made available under the new rules.

Think-tank on EC information. Commission President Jacques Delors and Information Commissioner Jean Dondelinger have set up a "think-tank" to come up with measures to improve the flow of information on the Community and its policies to the public at large. The think-tank, headed by former Commissioner Willy de Clercq, will comprise mainly advertising and communication experts from outside the Community institutions. Its remit is to examine the current communication policies of both the Commission and Member States; identify reasons for the lack of information; and recommend actions to redress the communication problems.

Tanker disaster in Spain. The Commission yesterday approved emergency aid for the fishermen and aquafarms of La Coruna, north west Spain, affected by the 80,000 tonne crude oil spillage from the grounded Greek tanker, Aegean Sea. Thousands of people in La Coruna region depend on fishing for their livelihood. The Commission's Civil Protection Unit has been assisting the Spanish local authorities to reduce the environmental damage.

Dangerous shipments. The oil tanker spillage off Spain brought home to EC Transport Ministers meeting on Tuesday the need for Commission proposals aimed at increasing information on the shipment of hazardous substances and pollutants. The Council adopted a Directive enforcing rigorous radio and electronic information systems making skippers liable to report on the nature of cargoes to Member States whose coasts they navigate.

Technical cooperation with eastern Europe. Under a new cooperation project aimed at preventing the scientific brain drain from east to west, the Commission has awarded some 2,531 study exchanges in the Community for east European researchers. For three months or more the researchers will work alongside western counterparts in high profile centres such as the Max Planck Institute and the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung (Germany) and the Royal Society (UK). The cooperation programme was set up on the initiative of the European Parliament in 1992 and mobilises some 55m ECUs for this year's exchanges.

Loans to eastern European nuclear industry. The Commission yesterday agreed to a 1m ECUs loan from the Euratom budget to finance safety improvements in the eastern and central European nuclear industry. The loan will support 10% of the estimated total needed to bring the ageing plants back into safe working order. This decision follows statements at the Lisbon Summit in June and the July G7 meeting in Munich on the importance for the whole of Europe of improving nuclear safety in the East.

European Year of Older People. The 1993 European Year of Older People and Solidarity between Generations in the UK will be launched by Virginia Bottomley, Secretary of State for Health, on 17 December in the presence of HRH The Prince of Wales. The launch takes place at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, London. Details, Katrina Webster or Amanda Bennett, UK Secretariat, Tel: 081 679 8000.

'New European' Quarterly. The latest edition is now available with articles by Robert Fox, Nora Beloff and J.J. Bossano, Chief Minister of Gibraltar. Contact John Coleman or John Rattray on 071 582 3996.

Is Bigger Better? The Economics of the EC Enlargement. The third report in an annual series from the Centre for Economic Policy Research on the benefits and costs to current and prospective members of Community enlargement. From CEPR, 25-28 Old Burlington St, London W1X 1LB, price £10. Tel: 071 734 9110.

Council meetings:

European Council	11-12 December	Edinburgh (Summit)
European Parliament	14-18 December	Strasbourg
Ecofin	14 December	Brussels
Agriculture	14-15 December	Brussels
Environment	15-16 December	Brussels
Single Market	17-18 December	Brussels

Our last briefing in 1992 is on Thursday, 17 December at 11.30am. We resume on Thursday, 7 January 1993.