



COMMISSION
OF THE EUROPEAN
COMMUNITIES

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THE WEEK IN EUROPE

Toxic Waste impasse. Environment ministers spent a day arguing on Monday about proposals on the supervision and control of toxic waste exports across both internal Community and international frontiers. A compromise last minute proposal to overcome reservations on the movement of waste for elimination within the EC is to be discussed further by Member States' permanent representatives in Brussels. The argument is between those who wish to keep the market open and those wishing to retain the right to refuse waste imports for elimination. The Portuguese Presidency said there was a good chance that agreement would be achieved at the May environment Council in time to allow a united Community front at the UNCED conference in Brazil next June and also hasten ratification of the Basle Convention on the transfer of dangerous waste. A consensus was reached on several other areas such as extra-Community import and export of waste for recycling and elimination and on the monitoring of waste in transit. Summing up the outcome of the council, Environment Commissioner Ripa di Meana launched an urgent appeal to delegations to bring the debate to a speedy conclusion.

Fifth Environment Programme. The Commission adopted its new environment programme which seeks to shift the pattern away from regulatory instruments and towards the promotion of collective responsibility. Ripa di Meana, recalling the success of the range of EC directives in force (about 200 since 1972), emphasised the need to invoke social responsibility among consumers, industry and public administrations. The programme will look at ways of using economic measures to influence consumer behaviour, building on the success of price reduction on lead-free petrol. The Commission proposes to create an advisory forum for dialogue with social partners who will play an influential role in Community policy-making. The Commissioner expressed hope that this new approach would overcome the often reluctant cooperation of industry, demonstrated in the past on such issues as the CFC ban and vehicle emissions. A site for the European Environment Agency, a key instrument in this plan, has still to be finalised. Three official candidate cities are in the running: Copenhagen, Milan, Madrid or Seville.

Cheaper money transfers. Commission Vice-president Sir Leon Brittan presented a work programme in Brussels on Wednesday aimed at getting banks to charge less for cross-border payments for both individuals and business. Sir Leon said that the full benefits of the single market would be lost if the flow of goods across borders was hampered by a sluggish and costly payment system. Commission research shows that sending funds across frontiers can be up to 20 times more expensive than within one country. The Commission's role will be one of catalyst to organisations already able to resolve the problems. Coincidentally, this week saw the launch of a network of European Cooperative banks (TIPA-Net) which charge low fees for electronic clearing facilities. Sir Leon sent a message welcoming this first initiative in putting his recommendations into action.

EC Energy Reserve. Energy Commissioner Antonio Cardoso e Cunha renewed his call in London today for the creation of an EC strategic oil reserve to provide greater security of supply. The Community, he told the Institute of Energy, was still over-vulnerable to outside sources of energy supply especially of oil. A strategic reserve could support demand for oil at a time when supply especially from troubled areas of the Middle East could be jeopardised. It would also help in the EC's relations with other large industrial powers and provide the Community with increased credibility in the international oil market.

Nuclear Accident in Russia Questioned about the latest nuclear accident in a power station near St. Petersburg, a Commission spokesman emphasised the Community's commitment to providing technical assistance to the former Soviet states to increase nuclear safety at outmoded installations. A total of £37,6m has already been set aside for the RBMK reactors at Chernobyl and St. Petersburg. Initially, the Community will have to fund research teams to gain knowledge of the how these reactors operate before serious safety problems can be resolved at the remaining twelve RBMK sites.

More aid to Russia The EC promised this week a third tranche of £71m destined for three more cities in addition to Moscow and St. Petersburg. The cities of Nizhny Novgorod, Saratov and Cheliabinsk were identified as needy recipients due to widespread poverty and meagre salary levels. On average 1,2m people are on monthly wages of under 600 Roubles. The three cities will each receive 1000

tonnes of baby food, milk powder and sugar. The second package was funded with profits from the sale of EC food aid to provide Russian pensioners and 33,000 students in St. Petersburg with a monthly income grant of 150 roubles, increasing their incomes by a quarter.

Security in Europe Commission Vice-president Frans Andriessen, speaking at the CSCE meeting in Finland, welcomed the independent states of the former Soviet Union into the "Helsinki process". He stressed that both the reformers and states assisting them would need to concentrate on key areas of stabilisation and reconstruction. The Commissioner was concerned that progress towards economic growth might be hindered by the independent states erecting barriers against each other and he called for greater regional cooperation. Andriessen, who went on to visit Moscow, warned that hesitation or ambiguity on the part of new governments could jeopardise peaceful transition to working democracies.

Defence industry dilemma. Major differences of opinion have emerged among the Twelve about whether EC structural funds should go to areas hit by a decline in defence industry expenditure. Commission Vice-president Martin Bangemann, speaking after an informal industry ministers' meeting in Lisbon at the weekend, explained that financial aid from the Social Fund would be "difficult to defend" as defence firms were often based in the Community's more prosperous regions. But all Member States were favourable to greater competition in public procurement and technical harmonisation of dual use products (military & civil).

Health & Safety Year. The national launch of the Community's European Year of Safety, Hygiene and Health at work took place in London last week. 1992 has been specially designated for this campaign aimed at increasing awareness of the social dimension of Community policies in a year dominated by information for business in the single market. The campaign will concentrate on safety in high risk workplaces as well encouraging youth training. A conference later this year will assess the development of legislation in these fields. For further information on events in the UK, contact George Dyson at the Health & Safety Executive on: 071 243 6912/6447.

European Transport Safety. Commissioner Karel Van Miert has announced he agrees with a recommendation from the Dutch Transport Safety Council that an EC-level safety council be set up this year. The report advocates a watchdog council with advisory powers on policy-making with the right to demand independent enquiries into serious accidents. The report points out that present transport policies fail to give high enough priority to safety issues. An EC-wide consultative council could unblock the deadlock by promoting greater coordination among Ministries, from planning to justice, across all twelve Member States.

Recognition for Georgia. The Community recognised the independence of the ex-Soviet republic of Georgia in accordance with the EC's guidelines adopted last December. The republic which remained outside the Commonwealth of Independent States, was not recognised previously along with other CIS states because of the civil strife.

Boost to harmonising qualifications. Cross-frontier recognition of standards in foreign language testing has been boosted with the setting up of a European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG) of language testers. The association aims to establish a common system of proficiency guidelines for employers and teachers. The grouping includes several national language institutes and heralds the initiative as vital to the principle of freedom of movement for persons. Details from: Glynne Stanfield 0223 64422.

Treaty on European Union. The full Maastricht text has now been published by the Commission's Office of Official Publications and is obtainable from HMSO, price 9 Ecu. Tel: 071 873 9090.

Conference and Diary Dates.

EDIT- European Databases Information and Training is hosting a one day training on ECHO (EC database) on 24th April. Details from Tony Inglis on 0203 838730

Council Meetings:

Agriculture	30-31 March	Brussels
Internal Market	31 March	Brussels
Fisheries	3 April	Luxembourg

Our next briefing will take place on Thursday 2nd April at 11.30am