

EDUCATION POLICY

Community education policy emphasizes the need for continuing or "permanent" education of persons who will have more than one career during their working years and who live in a multilingual Community.

Community activities in the field of education were at first limited to the European Schools (mainly for children of "Eurocrats"), vocational training and mutual recognition of professional diplomas. In 1974 a Council of education ministers resolved to tackle seven priority issues:

- better facilities for the education and training of nationals and the children of nationals of other member states of the Communities and of non-member countries;
- closer relations between educational systems in Europe;
- compilation of up-to-date documentation and statistics on education;
- increased co-operation between higher-education institutes;
- improved possibilities for academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study;
- greater mobility of teachers, students and research workers, effected particularly by the removal of administrative and social obstacles and the improved teaching of foreign languages;
- equal opportunity for access to all forms of education.

The Nine have set up in Florence the European University Institute, a post-graduate institution specializing in European integration. Arrangements between French-speaking and Quebec universities and between other Canadian and English-speaking universities ease the access of European graduates to Canadian universities.

CONSUMERS

Free trade has widened consumers' choice of food and other goods and heightened the need for consumer information and protection.

The Council of Ministers has adopted a preliminary consumer information and protection program that sets the following priorities for action:

- tightening health and safety standards for foodstuffs, dangerous products and other goods;
- eliminating unfair and misleading sales practices, such as supplying unsolicited goods, false advertising and unfair contracts;
- increasing protection for consumer credit and lease purchases;
- providing comparative price statistics and improving labelling.

Competition policy also helps consumers. For example, the Community has fined sugar-producers for depriving consumers of the benefits of free imports. The Community has also condemned agreements in the phonograph-record industry that made identical records cost much more in Germany than in France.

Competition policy has helped to narrow certain consumer-price differences from member country to member country, but retail prices of many goods still vary widely. Differences in transportation costs and tax-rates partly explain this situation, as do administrative complexities at internal borders and marketing strategies.

Some mail-order houses add 20 per cent to catalogue prices to cover these extra costs. The Commission is working with the national administrations to cut this red tape.

ENVIRONMENT

Some Community work has indirectly helped to improve the environment, but it was not until 1973 that an environmental program was established. Before that, programs to reduce technical barriers to trade by writing common product standards indirectly benefited the environment. Now Community law sets common restrictions on such diverse matters as pollution from auto exhausts and non-biodegradable detergents.

The Community environmental policy tries to "improve the setting and quality of life and the surroundings and living conditions of the Community population". The policy, based on the principle "the polluter pays", seeks:

- to prevent, reduce, and eliminate pollution where possible;
- to maintain the environmental balance and protect the biosphere;
- to tap natural resources without damaging the environmental balance unnecessarily;
- to persuade policy-makers to consider the environment when formulating other policies.

The environmental-action program got under way in 1974 when the Council adopted guidelines for the uniform application of the "polluter pays" principle.