

SPEECH BY

DR. PATRICK J. HILLERY, VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE

COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES,

ADDRESSING THE OPENING SESSION OF THE 24TH CONGRESS

OF THE INTERNATIONAL UNION OF PROPERTY OWNERSHIP IN

FLORENCE, ITALY, ON THURSDAY, 30TH SEPTEMBER, 1976

AT 10.45 A.M.

Mr President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

INTRODUCTION:

A European Community whose objectives include the raising of living standards and the improvement of living conditions has to become involved in housing questions. While housing policy in the Community today is primarily a matter for national member State Governments, the Commission cannot overlook the importance of housing as a part of social policy, of housing provision as a key element in the building industry, and of housing finance and legislation as important factors in economic development and social justice. Because of this focus of interests I am glad on behalf of the Commission to bring greetings to your Congress and to wish it every success. Experts from the Community will participate in your working sessions. My task in contributing to this opening ceremony as Commissioner for Social Affairs must be to sketch the landscape in broad perspective.

/cccc

Meeting Real Needs

The Community today is a sophisticated mixed economy in which the structural changes which will be the key to future development and the containment of inflation and unemployment can only be brought about through a process which implies mutual understandings between social partners and public authorities. In this dialogue situation we all must learn to master a language of priorities which expresses itself naturally in terms of right and needs. These difficult concepts are the key to political motivation and no debate on the further development of the European Community can hope to carry the people of Europe unless it is clearly seen to offer a real possibility of meeting the felt needs of its citizens.

Where housing is concerned
I believe that not nearly enough attention has been paid
to the meaning of need. For too
long housing problems have been seen as something which
increased prosperity or the streamlining of existing
policies would resolve. The complexity of the challenge
of urban renewal and advances in understanding the social
and psychological mechanisms of our society suggest that
housing must be treated as part of an overall effort to
tackle structural inequality. This is the type of
thinking behind the Commission's Report on the Social
Situation in the Communities in 1975 when its review of
housing trends concludes:-

"There is no guarantee that crude housing shortages may not
once again emerge, and the general and necessary preoccupation
with maintaining house production at all costs may well
militate against the sophisticated programming needed to
adjust supply to the demands of specific problem groups
and areas".

/...

THE COMMUNITY AND HOUSING:

While my broad perspective may be taken as arguing that an outline housing policy may prove an essential part of the Community of the future, the Communities' present involvement in housing is at a relatively early stage in its evolution.

Where actual housing provision is concerned, the Commission's main activity is through the European Coal and Steel Community's programme of financial assistance for the construction and modernisation of publicly funded housing. Through this assistance, which takes the form of long-term loans at a low rate of interest, by the end of last year it ^{had} helped to finance the building or renovation of more than 142,000 dwellings. The eighth programme which covers the period 1975 to 1978 will facilitate a similar contribution for approximately 20,000 dwellings at sites selected in the light of the expansion, re-organisation or rationalization projects currently in progress in the two ECSC sectors.

/...

Other Commission initiatives in the housing area spring from basic Community principles. Only when enterprise and individuals can pursue their affairs throughout the Community with a facility similar to that enjoyed within the boundaries of a single member State will industrial and commercial activity develop fully across the boundaries of the member States. Only in this way can a free trade area mature into a robust commercial, industrial and social Community.

/...

The implications of this Treaty-based approach are of course the establishment of a genuinely competitive market for the construction industry, agreement on common standards for building materials and the dismantling of fiscal and legal barriers preventing the balanced regional development of the Community. Current progress in each of these areas will be dealt with later in your Congress programme. Suffice it for me to say that, as in every field of Community activity, all work on common standards and harmonisation must have as its first priority the real needs of people. In respecting this priority it must also be able to take account of the particular needs of its least well-off citizens and I am glad to put on record here the Commission's continuing interest in the housing of migrant workers and its recent initiative to work out minimum standards for the housing of handicapped persons.

/...

Much of the European Community's advance has been due to its capacity to act as a catalyst where member State policies and attitudes are concerned. Through research not least within its schemes for coal and steel workers, studies and pilot projects, the Commission has been able to stimulate new thinking and to encourage the use throughout the Community of whatever has proved most successful in member State experience.

This approach will be increasingly important where housing is concerned in the years ahead. Relevant studies already nearing completion include for example, a critical analysis of means and systems for helping to provide publicly funded housing in the Community. Aspects of housing policy will also fall within the ambit of the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions which is just getting under way in Dublin.

/...

CONCLUSION:

Mr President, in concluding, may I thank you for your welcome and express the hope that part of the success of this Congress may lie in its potential to act as a catalyst and to bring forward new ideas. You have taken as your theme public initiative and private initiative in the housing sector. The relationship between government intervention and individual freedom and enterprise is at the heart of almost every political discussion today and the Commission will examine with interest whatever conclusions you may reach.

Thank you.