

ADDRESS BY DR. PATRICK J. HILLERY, VICE-PRESIDENT OF
THE COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES, TO THE
PLENARY SESSION OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE

ON THURSDAY, 25 NOVEMBER, 1976, in Brussels

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Thank you, Mr. President, for your welcome and good wishes.

A member of the Commission of the European Communities and the President-elect of a member State have at least one thing in common. They both must have a keen practical awareness of the opinions, problems and aspirations of the people they are to serve. May I, very briefly, recall on this occasion how I have experienced your Committee's contribution to the shaping of this awareness.

One of the many progressive features of the Treaties establishing the European Communities is the prominent position they give to the involvement of the social partners in the development of Community initiatives and policies. Both through my meetings with you here in Plenary Session and with the Section for Social Questions, and through my appreciation of the range and depth of your opinions on topics relating to my particular responsibility as Commissioner for Social Affairs, I have come to appreciate in a special way the foresight of those who engineered the close working relationship between the Economic and Social Committee and the Community Institutions.

Unemployment and inflation are the central political concerns of the Community today, concerns for which there is no easy cure or analysis. What seems certain, and this is a conviction I think we would share, is that there are structural factors in the current economic and social situation which will only be changed by that common consent which comes from shared responsibility. I believe that some of the contacts created and ideas stimulated through the membership and work of this Committee have done much to encourage the acceptance of this concept of shared responsibility in the Community.

This Committee's support for the Social Action Programme has also helped to ensure its implementation and indeed, in some instances, to suggest practical priorities for the years ahead. I am thinking, for example, of the likelihood that a number of your contributions to the discussion of the Commission's Memorandum on the Equality of Treatment between Men and Women will find a place in future Community initiatives.

During my term as a Member of the Commission we have seen the extension of your membership in line with the enlargement of the Community and I have also noted with interest your keen use of the power to present own-initiative opinions. This morning's agenda is for me a good example of the scope and competence of your work - with Mr. Carroll's draft "own initiative" opinion on measures to help some of the categories of unemployed workers most affected by the present economic situation, and with Mr. Marvier's draft opinion on a Commission

I regret, Mr. President, that I am unable to remain for the course of your discussion during the morning but because of the friendly and fruitful working relationship between the Commission and the Economic and Social Committee I welcomed an opportunity to meet with you briefly before leaving the Commission to take up office as President of Ireland.

I thank you again for your good wishes and your kind words which I am happy to accept as a tribute to the work of the Commission in the past four years. May I in turn wish you continued success in your important Community role and in its continuing development.

Thank you, Mr. President.