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SPEECH

by

DR. PATRICK J. HILLERY,

VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES,

ADDRESSING

THE CLOSING SESSION OF A WORKSHOP ON THE ASSESSMENT OF  
SOCIO-MEDICAL CONSEQUENCES OF MENTAL DISORDERS OF MAJOR PUBLIC  
HEALTH IMPORTANCE HELD UNDER THE AEGIS OF THE COMMUNITIES'  
COMMITTEE FOR MEDICAL RESEARCH AND PUBLIC HEALTH AND  
ORGANISED BY IRELAND'S MEDICO-SOCIAL RESEARCH BOARD AT  
BROC HOUSE, DUBLIN.

Mr President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are living through a period when many people speak of the European Community as being at a turning point. While recognising that budgetary constraints demanded by economic recession have inhibited the possibilities of major change and development, I share the view that we may be about to see a much wider appreciation of the potential of the Community experiment than has been experienced since the early days of the Common Market concept.

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The possibility that direct elections for the European Parliament will rally the peoples of the Community to the greater democratisation of Europe is one headline for future change. But there are many less spectacular indications.

As the legislative powers of the Community become more and more familiar, for example, there is a natural tendency for people concerned with social disadvantage to turn to the European Institutions for help - no matter how painfully aware those of us directly involved in the Institutions may be of resource limitations. This pressure of demand cannot be turned away. Already, it is clear to me that where public health is concerned, European Parliamentarians will become more and more insistent that all issues of immediate relevance to the health and welfare of every citizen have to be the legitimate concern of the Community. There have been recent calls for Community initiatives on smoking and health and vaccination against the most virulent forms of influenza, for example.

I would hope that the holding of this workshop on the medico-social consequences of psychiatric disorders will be taken as an example of the Commission's participation in this groundswell recognition that the Community has a responsibility to become more and more involved in tackling real problems of immediate interest to ordinary people. It is the first occasion on which a research workshop under Commission auspices has examined problems relating to mental health at a European level. Successful initiatives in the field of public health must be underpinned by the best contemporary research and, as in other fields, a Community approach must be built on a framework of co-ordination and of consensus as to what are genuinely common problems amenable to trans-national treatment.

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It has been of value to the Community that this workshop has attracted outstanding expert participation from outside Europe as well as from the member States. I am glad particularly to thank Dr. Norman Sartorius, Chief Officer for Mental Health with the World Health Organisation in Geneva, who has been your President, and the Medico-Social Research Board who have been your hosts. On behalf of the Commission may I say how much we look forward to studying the Report of the workshop and considering how our contribution in this crucial area of public health may be extended in the years ahead.

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