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EEC STRATEGY FOR THE HANDICAPPED: "SOCIAL INTEGRATION" THE KEY THEME

- Extracts of speech by Ivor RICHARD -

"Social integration" will be the key theme of the EEC's medium term strategy for the handicapped according to Mr Ivor RICHARD, Commissioner for Employment, Education and Social Affairs.

Mr Richard was speaking today in Noordwijkerhout (the Netherlands) at the Commission-sponsored Conference on "The Preparation of Handicapped Children and Young People for Adult Active Life", a conference to be attended by H.R.H. Princess Juliana of the Netherlands. He revealed that proposals for this strategy would shortly be made by the Commission in readiness for discussions by the Council of Ministers for Social Affairs, a meeting scheduled for December 8 in Brussels. This medium term strategy, stressed Mr Richard, would be a main contribution of the Community to the International Year of Disabled People (IYDP).

5-Year Programme for Integrated Planning and Local Coordination

"It is my intention that the Commission will present for consideration by the Council of Ministers for Social Affairs a new set of measures to promote at Community level the social integration of disabled people", said Mr Richard. "These measures", he continued, "would extend over a 5-year period starting, after a preparatory stage next year, in 1983". There must be no question, he emphasised, that the EEC's contribution to the IYDP be limited to this year, thereby "relegating the disabled to a lower position on our list of priorities on January 1 1982".

Cornerstone of the Community strategy must be improved coordination: coordination above all at the local level, because it is at this level that most of the local services for the disabled are situated. Coordination over a whole range of policy areas - health and welfare, employment, education and training, housing and transport, application of new technologies, information and public awareness was also underlined by Mr Richard.

"Our plan", indicated the Commissioner, "is to set up a network of locally-based development actions which will act as demonstration models for the whole Community on how to tackle social integration for all the disabled in a given district, in respect of all the policy areas involved - and to do this without

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the injection of vastly privileged resources which would make it in practice impossible to transfer any successful outcomes elsewhere. I am thinking, then, of a network of somewhere between 15 and 20 districts, each with a population of perhaps about a quarter of a million people".

Existing EEC Action for the Handicapped

Not to be forgotten in the call for future action are EEC measures already in hand for dealing with handicapped problems.

"In 1980", said Mr Richard, "no less than 70 million UA were granted from the Social Fund to training or retraining activities of the handicapped. In 1981, moreover, this figure has exceeded 90 million. Last year alone, over 100 000 disabled persons directly benefitted from these programmes". "Social Fund support", commented Mr Richard, "has made a vital contribution to innovations of worldwide significance - in the devising of new strategies for the disabled to enter the open environment for example, in updating methods for the training of trainers and in the creation of modular training systems".

In addition, other existing EEC measures include the Community's Network of Rehabilitation Centres, its Housing Pilot Projects, and a survey of developments and trends in the education of the handicapped throughout the Community.

The Noordwijkerhout Conference on the Young Handicapped

Aim of the Conference, to run October 20-23, is to identify and define policy orientations for further European cooperation in the field of preparing handicapped children and young people for active adult life.

With this objective in mind, eight distinct themes will be discussed by eight working groups:

- Group 1: the teachers - author: Karel Kluge
- Group 2: the parents - author: Hélène Zographos
- Group 3: new technologies - author: Prof. Dr. Kormann
- Group 4: administration and policies - author: George Cooke
- Group 5: integration - author: Antoinetta Laselva
- Group 6: personal development - author: Philippe Saint-Martin
- Group 7: the severely handicapped - author: Marcel Wolff
- Group 8: preparation and transition - author: Dr. de Ruijter