

SPEECH BY VICE PRESIDENT HILLERY
TO THE FIFTH INAUGURAL SESSION
OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE ON
MONDAY, 7 OCTOBER AT 3.00 P.M.

Mr Chairman,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The present phase in the development of the European Communities should be seen as a time of opportunity - not crisis.

The threat to living standards presented by the twin pressures of inflation and the rising cost of energy will, I believe, accelerate a number of important developments in the political development of Europe. Chief among these is likely to be a wider appreciation that none of our major social and economic ills can be solved by national governments acting on their own.

This new awareness can have two important effects. First, to give a new impetus to the work of Community Institutions. Secondly, to promote the greater involvement of the social partners in the progressive development of the Community and its member States. In short, the art of politics will become less and less about the exercise of power, and more and more about the capacity of institutions to bend conflicting interests towards a sense of common purpose.

Granted this perspective, I am particularly glad that it has fallen to me to address this fifth inaugural session of the Economic and Social Committee on behalf of the Commission of the European Communities.

A number of changes which took place during the last four-year term of the Committee will, I believe, help to enhance the effectiveness of your work in this present term. I note, for example, that a large majority of the members for this session carry the confidence and experience of service during the last session.

Continuity of this kind is important in any organisation and it is particularly useful that a number of the members who were first appointed two years ago on the enlargement of the Community have been reappointed. Because of their recently acquired mastery of the working of the Committee, I am sure their advice and encouragement will be extremely valuable to those of you who find yourselves new members of this occasion.

I hope too that by the end of this present session we will see the Committee working with a full complement of members so that its role of representing, as an advisory body, the various categories of economic and social activity throughout the Community may be fulfilled - as intended under the Treaties.

At times of anxious political debate on specific issues - such as inflation and energy - it is easy to forget the importance of the Communities' detailed Treaty framework and that its full potential is still far from realisation. Nor will it help the evolution of the Communities if the search for ways of advancing political union produces little more than an exchange of criticism between the various Institutions and consultative bodies as we find them at present.

"People who live in glass houses should not throw stones" - and the first onus on everyone involved in the work of the Communities must be to try to get ones own house in order.

During the last session, in embarking on a review of its role, organisation and influence, the Economic and Social Committee lead the way for the Communities. By winning, for example, the right of initiative in the expression of opinions and in meeting the President of the Council and the President of the Commission in plenary session the Committee has become much more closely integrated into the Community framework.

The Commission welcomed these changes and has valued the Committee's opinions. In assuring you of the closest possible cooperation and interest during the session ahead I know I am speaking for the Commission as a whole. May I add that, as Commissioner for Social Affairs, I have found the practical experience you bring to your review of Commission proposals particularly fruitful and I am confident that forthcoming Social Action Programme proposals will prove worthy of your continuing support and encouragement.

It remains for me, Mr Chairman, formally on behalf of the Commission, to thank former members for their major contribution to the Committee, to congratulate you all on your present appointments and to wish the Economic and Social Committee these gifts of courage, persistence and imagination without which it may be difficult to make the most of that climate of opportunity I sense around us.