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PRESS RELEASE

Summary of address by Prof. Levi Sandri, Vice-President
of the EEC Commission, to the European Parliament

(Strasbourg, 24 November 1965)

Speaking during the debate in the European Parliament on the report on social development in the Community, M. Levi Sandri began by saying that, in the present difficult political situation and with the approach of important dead-lines affecting the institutions, he thought this was the right time to review in general terms progress made in the field of social policy, now that eight years had passed since the Community was established. He proposed to take stock, he said, because he believed not only in the continuity of the integration process, but also in the validity of the method used to further it. "Everyone knows that in matters of social policy the Treaty provides for both a supranational method and an intergovernmental method, for strictly Community rules and procedures and for others which are based on the criteria of co-operation among States. After eight years' experience one conclusion seems inescapable: greater progress and better results have always been obtained where a Community procedure has been provided for, whereas the most pronounced shortcomings and the most disappointing results occur in the fields left to co-operation between governments. Here we have further proof - if further proof were needed - that intergovernmental co-operation is not the right instrument for the construction of Europe."

After outlining the Community's action in social matters, M. Levi Sandri said that the Commission had met with two main difficulties in implementing the social policy. The first lay in the essential lack of precision of its aims, despite their great importance. An example was Article 117 of the Treaty, which spoke of the need for an "improvement in the living and working conditions of workers so as to permit the equalization of such conditions in an upward direction". The second resulted from the inadequacy or - in some fields - inexistence of legal powers whereby the Commission could achieve these objectives and from the almost complete lack of funds accruing to the Commission as of right. These difficulties

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alone suggested how the social provisions of the Treaty could usefully be revised. Despite the difficulties, however, the Community's social policy had developed steadily and important results had been achieved, especially in the sectors where the Treaty laid down binding rules and time-limits and the Commission enjoyed the necessary powers. "Here we can claim as fields in which successes have been gained, without fear of contradiction, the free movement of workers, the social security of migrant workers and the European Social Fund."

The speaker then gave a wide-ranging account of social developments from 1958 to 1965 and pointed out how both in the legislative and administrative fields and in the matter of living and working conditions, there had been a distinct improvement and progressive harmonization towards higher levels. "From all this we may conclude - and we shall not be accused of undue optimism - that the Community's social policy is already a reality. The Commission can fairly claim that, within the framework and limits of the Treaty, it has carried out properly and punctually the tasks entrusted to it."

Turning next to the future prospects for the social policy, M. Levi Sandri described the three main lines of future development.

First of all, the need for effective Community co-ordination of national employment policies or, rather, for a true common employment policy. "Although the expression 'common employment policy' does not appear in the Rome Treaty, the components of this policy are supplied by numerous provisions of the Treaty which explicitly or implicitly concern employment."

Secondly the Commission would have to tackle the problem of the harmonization, as provided for in Article 118 of the Treaty, of social systems. On this subject the speaker reminded the House that the Commission held that Article 118 did not limit ways of attaining this objective merely to intergovernmental co-operation and that, consequently, the Commission did not intend to deprive itself of the range of additional opportunities for action offered by other articles of the Treaty. In the matter of harmonization, the Commission intended to go on pressing for fuller, and therefore more effective, co-operation between both sides of industry. "With this in view, every effort will be made to render more democratic the organs and instruments that contribute to the progressive harmonization of the social systems."

The third field of activity would cover the social aspects of the other common policies, in particular medium-term economic policy. "The Council's decision to work out a tentative programme for the co-ordination of the general economic policies of the Member States may have a decisive effect on social trends by setting a general pattern into which governmental and Community action must fit in matters of employment, vocational training, working hours, incomes, social security and, in particular, collective amenities."