Social aspects of housing policy

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In adopting the report by M. Brian CROWLEY (UPE, IRL), the European Parliament affirmed that the fundamental right of each citizen to decent and affordable housing should be realised through concrete policies and measures. It should be borne in mind that in the European Union some 18 million persons were currently considered as homeless or reduced to living in substandard or overcrowded conditions. Unfortunately, there was no preventive policy for housing protection. In the Member States, despite the wide range of policies in force, access to adequate housing, which is affordable on the basis of individual and family incomes, was becoming more and more difficult. Common action should be proposed at European level. Such a policy should not be problematic since, in ratifying the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, all Member States have recognised the right to adequate housing for all as a principle. It should be noted that the Structural Funds and other European instruments already have an indirect impact on national housing programmes and that, since 1955, housing programmes and assistance have been run for coal and steel workers on the basis of the ECSC Treaty. In view of these considerations, Parliament proposed a series of measures both at Member State and at EU level: 1) At Member State level Parliament calls for: - the inclusion, within the framework of the IGC, of provisions which lead to the progressive realisation of the fundamental rights of persons, including the right to decent and affordable housing, - the development of a housing policy based on the sufficient supply of high-quality housing of appropriate sizes, - preventive measures capable of guaranteeing a minimum level of security for persons facing serious social exclusion problems, - measures designed to prevent owners from leaving housing unoccupied, - the banning of all forms of discrimination likely to restrict access to public or private housing and the implementation of housing policies at all administrative levels. 2) At EU level, Parliament proposed that a European housing policy be directed to: - the collection and analysis of information on housing policy in the Member States; - the evaluation, exchange and promotion of examples of good practice in Member States, particularly towards the homeless and those whose economic situation means that they remain trapped in poor quality housing; - the establishment of minimum objectives for alignment with regard to ensuring access to housing for all; - the setting up of a Commission-based Task Force to monitor the impact of EU policies on the housing sector; - the coordination of actions in the housing sector by the granting of loans or other measures. In this respect Parliament is of the opinion that the mechanism employed by the ECSC could serve as a model for intervention by the European Union in the question of housing (including financing from the Structural Funds), - an increase in the funds provided under the SAVE programme, in order to promote energy-efficient housing. Parliament also proposed that the Commission should examine how a pilot programme could be launched (similar to the IGLOO project or other models) to finance projects in the housing sector, taking account of urban development, housing, education, training, employment, social services and health issues, with the participation of the population groups concerned. Parliament stressed that the specific needs of the disabled, the elderly and women and children in danger should be taken into account and called for a policy to promote the repopulation of rural areas.