



26.10.2009

NOTICE TO MEMBERS

Subject: Petition 0629/2009 by Giacomo Castelli (Italian), concerning anti-earthquake precautions

1. Summary of petition

The petitioner is seeking the support of the European Parliament for legislation requiring all new buildings constructed in Europe following an earthquake to be made earthquake resistant and for the necessary funding to be made available.

2. Admissibility

Declared admissible on 16 September 2009. Information requested from Commission under Rule 202(6).

3. Commission reply, received on 26 October 2009.

Following major earthquakes with tragic consequences, like in L'Aquila, Italy in April 09, attention is drawn to the serious safety risks linked to the resistance of buildings and other works exposed to seismic activity.

The Commission has, over a long period, recognised the need to thoroughly take such risks into account when designing construction works in order to ensure a high level of safety for the citizens of the European Union. However, it must be emphasised that the issues of safety of the citizens, including safety of buildings/works and the related risk prevention and control measures fall exclusively under Member State competence.

Nevertheless, the Commission has, through a number of actions, contributed towards

advancing the technical ability to address such safety issues, developing improved “seismic design” methods. Notably, it has been a strong driving force behind the development of the Eurocodes¹, common European design codes for buildings and civil works. All Eurocodes have been agreed and published as European standards and the EU Member States are currently preparing to take them on board as national design standards by 2010. Among the ten design codes (based on latest available international scientific findings) an entire code - Eurocode 8 - is dedicated to the design of buildings and structures which are earthquake resistant. It also deserves to be noted that in connection with the development of Eurocode 8, the Commission has funded several research actions aimed at a better understanding of the behaviour, including the failure, of buildings and other works exposed to seismic activity. The findings of this research constituted a significant contribution to improved design competence of buildings and works.

To indicate the advantages of taking on the Eurocodes, the Commission issued already in December 2003 a “Recommendation on the Application and Use of the Eurocodes” (2003/887/CE) which strongly encourages the Member States to fully and swiftly integrate the Eurocodes into their national design codes. The Recommendation also explicitly points to the need for coordinated European research efforts towards an "increased level of protection of buildings and civil works, specifically as regards the resistance of structures to earthquakes and fire". As part of its efforts to ensure that the Eurocodes remain at the forefront of developments, the Commission actively supports, together with the EU Member States, a continuous updating of the Eurocodes, taking on board new scientific findings, not least in the field of seismic design.

Conclusion

In view of the very clear division of competences between EU-level and Member State level, legislation on EU-level regarding safety of citizens/safety of buildings and other works does not seem feasible. However, major steps towards the objective of more earthquake resistant new buildings in the EU can be taken with the Eurocodes being put into complete use in the Member States. The Commission will of course continue its work on facilitating and supporting the use of the Eurocodes in the Member States which should normally start to use these design codes in 2010 by gradually replacing the national codes.

¹ For info on Eurocodes, see site
http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/construction/internal/essreq/eurocodes/eurointro_en.htm