European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations (2012)

2010/0242(COD) - 06/09/2010 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: to establish the European Year for Active Ageing (2012).

PROPOSED ACT: Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council.

BACKGROUND: the European Union is in a process of significant population ageing. According to Eurostat's latest projections released in 2008, there would be only two people of working age (15-64) for every person aged over 65 in the EU by 2060 compared to a ratio of four to one today. The strongest push in this direction is expected to occur during the period 2015-35 when the baby boom cohorts will be in retirement. This shift is due to a combination of low birth rates and rising life expectancy. These demographic changes present both challenges and opportunities. Population ageing may increase pressure on public budgets and pension systems, as well as on the staffing of social and care services for older people. There is a fear that the older generations might become too heavy a burden on younger, working-age people and that this could result in tensions between generations. This view neglects, however, the significant actual and potential contribution that older people — and the baby-boom cohorts in particular — can make to society. A key opportunity for tackling the challenge of demographic ageing and preserving intergenerational solidarity consists therefore in ensuring that the baby-boom cohorts stay longer in the labour market and remain healthy, active and autonomous as long as possible.

In the framework of the Employment Strategy, Member States have started to reverse the trend to early retirement so that the EU-27 employment rate for people aged 55-64 has increased from 36.9% in 2000 to 46% in 2009. Encouraging older workers to stay in employment requires notably the improvement of working conditions and their adaptation to the health status and needs of older workers, updating their skills by providing better access to life long learning and the review of tax and benefit systems to ensure that there are effective incentives for working longer.

Active ageing is also an effective tool for tackling poverty in old age. In 2008, 19% of people aged 65+ in the EU were at risk of poverty. A considerable number of older people experience old age as a time of marginalisation. While better employment opportunities for older people could help tackle some of the causes of poverty among this age group, active participation in voluntary activities could reduce the isolation of older people. The huge potential that older persons represent for society as volunteers or carers could be better mobilised by eliminating existing obstacles to unpaid work and by providing the right framework.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT: current activities at EU level do not seem properly geared to dealing with what needs to be done:

1. raise awareness among the general public, policy makers and other stakeholders of the importance of active ageing and of the need to do more to mobilise the potential of the baby boom cohorts;
2. foster an exchange of information and experience between Member States and stakeholders;
3. give Member States and stakeholders an opportunity to develop policies by way of specific activities and by committing to specific objectives.

The Commission considers that broad-based support will be required at all levels of society and from a wide range of stakeholders. The key challenge is to mobilise stakeholders in a way that will generate significant action at national, regional, local and company levels across the EU. With greater political

momentum and visibility for active ageing policies, policy makers can be encouraged to take more ambitious initiatives. It is for this reason that implementation of the European Year for Active Ageing could be useful.

LEGAL BASE: Article 153(2) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU.

CONTENT: the year 2012 shall be designated as the European Year for Active Ageing.

Objectives: the overall purpose of the European Year shall be to encourage and support the efforts of Member States, their regional and local authorities, social partners and civil society to promote active ageing and to do more to mobilise the potential of the rapidly growing population in their late 50s and above, thereby preserving solidarity between generations. Active ageing means creating better opportunities and working conditions to enable older workers to play their part in the labour market, combating social exclusion by fostering active participation in society, and encouraging healthy ageing. On this

basis, the objectives shall be:

- to raise general awareness of the value of active ageing in order to highlight the useful contribution older persons make to society and the economy, to promote active ageing and to do more to mobilise the potential of older persons;
- to stimulate debate and develop mutual learning between Member States and stakeholders at all levels in order to promote active ageing policies, to identify and disseminate good practice and to encourage cooperation and synergies;
- to offer a framework for commitment and concrete action to enable Member States and stakeholders at all levels to develop policies through specific activities and to commit to specific objectives related to active ageing.

Activities:the measures to be taken to achieve the objectives the following activities at Union, national, regional or local level:

- conferences, events and initiatives to promote debate, raise awareness and foster the making of specific commitments;
- information, promotion and educational campaigns;
- exchange of information, experience and good practices;
- research and surveys on a Union or national scale, and dissemination of the results.

The Year should be seen as the highlight of a major effort spanning the period 2011-2014, during which the EU would focus many of its programmes and policies on the issue of active ageing and put in place a framework in which new initiatives and partnerships supporting active ageing at all levels (Member State, regional, local, social partners, civil society) can be encouraged and publicised.

In 2011, public authorities, social partners and civil society organisations at all levels would be encouraged to commit themselves to specific goals related to active ageing; the focus would be on achievements during the European Year. The goals would be documented on a European website which would then become the website for the European Year and would also serve as a tool for monitoring and evaluation.

In 2012, the focus of the European Year would be on starting to implement the commitments made during 2011, on raising awareness among the general public, publicising these initiatives through media activities and the involvement of other multipliers. Results of active ageing projects funded under existing budget lines and programmes would be presented.

The primary intention is to promote active ageing in employment by creating better opportunities for the participation of older workers, and to promote active ageing in society, by combating social exclusion through voluntary work, healthy ageing and autonomous living.

Coordination at Union level: the Commission shall convene meetings of the national coordinators for the purpose of coordination at Union level and to exchange information, including on commitments made and their implementation in the Member States. The European Parliament, the Member States, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions will be associated in the activities.

Evaluation: by 30 June 2014, the Commission shall submit a report to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the European Committee of the Regions on the implementation, results and overall assessment of the initiatives provided for in this Decision.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS: no additional funding is sought for the European Year. The flexibility for annual or multiannual priority-setting based on the budget lines and programmes of the Directorate General for Employment and other relevant programmes provides sufficient financial margin for running the Year on a scale similar to previous European Years. The administrative resources can also come from existing administrative budgets.