Report on the implementation, results and overall assessment of the 2012 European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations

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The Committee on Employment and Social Affairs adopted an own-initiative report by Eduard KUKAN (PPE, SK) on the Report on the implementation, results and overall assessment of the 2012 European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations.

Members recalled that the objective of the 2012 European Year (EY 2012) was to **raise awareness of the value of active ageing**, to stimulate the exchange of information, to promote active ageing policies and to create a framework for concrete action by the Union and its Member States, and by all stakeholders in the public and private sector.

They also recalled that it is expected that by 2050 the average age of people in the EU will be over 50.

Recognising that EY 2012 provided important political momentum which helped to open a discussion of the challenges of active ageing and intergenerational solidarity in Europe, Members welcomed the organisation of the year which has succeeded in its goal of mobilising relevant actors around active ageing and intergenerational solidarity and increased the number of initiatives for promoting active ageing in the Member States and strengthened the knowledge and skills of stakeholders involved.

They considered it regrettable, however, that the objective of establishing new networks for sharing resources, projects and ideas among the public sector, private sector and civil society was rarely achieved. They also regretted the fact that the involvement of social partners was variable and that private businesses were not reached to any significant extent.

Taking part in EY 2012: Members considered it very important that the initiatives launched as part of EY 2012 be followed up and transformed into a strong political commitment followed by **concrete action** to ensure social inclusion, active participation and the well-being of all generations.

Members called on the Commission to carry out a **study on demographic decline**, which is affecting an increasing number of regions in various EU countries, and to draw up a communication on the problem and on the steps that could be taken at European level.

In terms of implementation, Members considered regrettable that the relatively late approval of EY 2012 resulted in contracting and implementation delays.

Active ageing: Members recalled that active ageing is, inter alia, the process of optimising opportunities for health and for participation in society. They also highlighted the fact that active ageing also means better access to health, long-term care and social services, which have come under pressure in some cases during the crisis. They also recommended to all the Member States that, through their social security systems, they promote and strengthen high-quality public infrastructure for the elderly (homes, day centres and home support), where elderly people are seen as active participants.

These measures are necessary to:

- develop a European strategy on dementia;
- propose measures on the unemployment among people over the age of 50;
- implement incentives for businesses to hire more older workers;
- fight against discrimination against older people;
- stabilise the rules on retirement, taking into account actual unemployment rates among the population above the age of 50 before changing the mandatory pension age as Members believed that linking the retirement age only to life expectancy fails to take account of the importance of labour market trends;
- ensure sustainability of public pension schemes and to guarantee individual and adequate pension income and rights for all;
- promote accessible technologies for ageing European societies;
- promote access to European funding to provide financial assistance to self-help 7 programmes run by organisations for older people, who are sharing their energy, knowledge, experiences and wisdom with each other.

Data collection to improve the lives of older people: Members considered it vital to collect complete and reliable data allowing assessment of the needs of older persons. They recommended to the Member States that they draw up and implement public policies and programmes that will not only improve physical health but also promote mental health and social ties. They considered it essential to support older people in living independently and actively for as long as possible by developing and maintaining people-oriented and demand-driven public support. They called on the Member States to **ensure affordable, accessible and non-discriminatory health care** and to prioritise prevention in their health care policies. They called, therefore, on the Commission to implement the Social Investment Package, to keep healthy ageing and the adequacy and quality of long-term care **high on the political agenda**.

Integrating older people in society: welcoming the Commission background paper entitled 'Growing the Silver Economy in Europe', Members stressed that everything should be done so that older people be a fully-fledged part of society and that their participation in daily life, including public life, be supported. These in effect allow for imparting values and experience to others and providing pointers on how to approach community life.

Demographic change: Members welcomed the forthcoming EU Covenant on Demographic Change as a major outcome of EY 2012 and of the European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing. They asked the Commission to identify areas within the EU budget where savings and efficiencies can be made in order to provide funding for the covenant. They also called on the Commission to adopt an EU Strategy on Demographic Change to coordinate EU action in various areas while stressing that demographic change should not be advanced as a justification for the dismantling of social entitlements and services for older people. In parallel, Members believed that **a UN Convention** to protect the rights of older persons will improve the lives of older persons by guaranteeing them equal access to political, economic, health care and cultural rights, and would represent an important platform to create an attitude shift towards ageing on a global scale.

They regretted that the Commission has not yet addressed age inequalities in the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the Disability Strategy.

Volunteering by older people: Members stressed the importance of volunteering, which cannot be taken for granted and should therefore have its added social value taken into greater consideration. They supported active ageing and lifelong civic participation which enables older people to display a commitment to society, thereby improving their quality of life, well-being and general state of health. In this context, they regretted the discontinuation of the Grundtvig programme which supported older volunteers and urged the Commission to acknowledge the value of successful EU programmes which combined civic participation with EU-wide group exchanges involving older people.

In conclusion, Members underlined that a policy for justice between the generations must aim to create the necessary tools for conducting **an open and frank intergenerational dialogue** with a view to achieving win-win situations.