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 European Parliament adopted by 514 votes to 106, with 69 abstentions, a resolution following the publication of the Report on the implementation, results and overall assessment of the 2012 European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations.

Parliament 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.

It 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, Parliament 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.

Members 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: Parliament 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, while respecting the principle of subsidiarity and proportionality.

It 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, Parliament considered regrettable that the relatively late approval of EY 2012 resulted in contracting and implementation delays.

Active ageing: Parliament recalled that active ageing is, inter alia, the process of optimising opportunities for health and for participation in society. It 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. It 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;
- 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.

Creating 'generational mentoring': Parliament stressed that consideration should be given in this connection above all to programmes such as 'generational mentoring', in which exchanges are encouraged between older experts and the younger generation at work and in training. It considered that incentives for businesses to **hire much older workers** could be put in place by Member States, and that, as a matter of principle, older workers should not be treated less favourably than younger workers with regard to vocational and continuing training. The importance of adapting workplaces to the needs of older workers was highlighted and more opportunities for older workers to work part time in line with their preferences should be provided.

Data collection to improve the lives of older people: Parliament considered it vital to collect complete and reliable data allowing assessment of the needs of older persons. It 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. It 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. Members 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**.

Parliament further urged the Commission to assess the feasibility and added value of a new EU financial instrument to provide a minimum income for all EU citizens below the poverty line.

Integrating older people in society: welcoming the Commission background paper entitled 'Growing the Silver Economy in Europe', Parliament 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: Parliament 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. It 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. It 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.

Parliament 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, Parliament 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.