Older People: Community support for actions in favor of Older People 1995-1999

1995/0062(CNS) - 07/09/1995

The Commission must not allow itself to be "hamstrung by nationalist tendencies in the Member States", Mr Raphaël CHANTERIE (EPP, B) warned in his report on Community measures to help older people, which was adopted. The purpose of the report was to improve, through amendments, the current Commission proposal for a Council Decision on Community support for actions in favour of older people. The committee's report called for the establishment of a Community action programme for the period 1 September 1995 to 31 December 1999. Commenting on the Commission proposal in his explanatory statement in the committee report, Mr Chanterie said: "A feature of the proposed decision is its restraint. The document is imbued with considerable and exaggerated concern not to encroach on the Member States' territory." If it were the Commission's intention to abide strictly by the subsidiarity principle, it would be doing no more than its duty. "It must not, on the other hand, allow itself to be hamstrung by nationalist tendencies in the Member States. On no account must the Commission be persuaded to turn back the European social clock," he said. Demographic developments posed such serious common challenges for the Member States that European forces needed to be pooled. The Commission's proposals come in the wake of the European Year of Older People and Solidarity between Generations (1993) and in the run-up to the UN-designated International Year of the Elderly (1999). When he presented his amendments to the committee in June, Mr Chanterie said: "We want to give the ideas of the Commission a bit more umph." He argued that it was not enough for the Community simply to sponsor action in favour of older people."The Union itself must organize Community actions." Mr Chanterie criticized the amount of funding proposed by the Commission, which "wrongly" devoted only one short sentence to financial resources. The amount which the Commission proposed to release each year (ECU 5.5 million) would amount to a gradual decline in European support. In view of the progressive ageing of the population, this was unacceptable. The committee agreed that the four-year Community action programme should be funded to the tune of ECU 40 million rather than the ECU 23 million proposed by the Commission. The committee's amendments called, inter alia, for: .the introduction of a European Old People's Passport, which would entitle older people to reduced payments for travel, entry to museums, concerts, etc; .the establishment of a European Observatory on Ageing and Older People with the task of drawing up: = an annual comparative report on the socio-economic situation of older people and policy throughout the European Union towards older people; = annual report evaluating the implications for older people of implementing the Council's recommendations on social protection (including the convergence of objectives and policies and the establishment of common criteria for adequate incomes and benefits); . the development of the social role and independence of older people by identifying innovative roles for them within the family, within society and at work; . the drafting of a Commission Green Paper on demographic trends in Europe; . the preparation of a joint declaration by the European Parliament, the Commission and the Council of Ministers on the basic principles and general objectives of policy towards older people in the European Union and the Member States. Priority should be given to activities geared to the integration of older people in danger of isolation, especially older migrants, older people in urban and remote areas, sick and disabled older people, older people affected by poverty, older women and the very old, through an integrated network of social and health services. Policy and action in respect of older people should be coordinated with and integrated into other Community policy and measures. The committee was also concerned to promote the autonomy of older people by enabling them to live independently in their own houses instead of going into old people's homes. It also wants to promote solidarity between the generations. Priority should be given to activities organized by older people themselves. In the discussion of Mr Chanterie's report in June, Mrs Barbara SCHMIDBAUER (PES, D) told the committee: "There is too much representation of old people by others".