The demographic situation in the European Union. 1997 Report

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The Committee adopted a report by Jesús CABEZÓN ALONSO (PES, E) on the Commission annual demographic report. The report points out that the slow-down of population growth, the ageing of the population, longer periods of study and training as well as early retirement have strong impacts on the funding and organization of social protection. The Committee suggests that it is important to separate the services paid out of contributions from employers and workers and universal benefits funded by general taxation. Privately funded pension schemes should remain voluntary and supplementary to public schemes. Social security systems should recognize years devoted to family responsibilities (care of children and the elderly). The Committee considers it necessary to expand the participation of non-active labour, e.g. women and people over 50 years by making changes to the organization of work, ensuring the preservation of workers' capacity to work and their skills and by concluding collective agreements which take account the changes in work life. The Committee advocates a regional approach to labour market imbalances because of the differences in the mean age of labour in different regions. This should be acknowledged also in the education and training. The Committee calls for more attention to the social aspects of the demographic situation in Central and Eastern Europe. The Commission and the Council should try to help reduce mortality in those countries. The high number of "dependent" people compared to those at work puts pressure on social security systems in the applicant countries which should be taken into account in the accession negotiations and in the pre-accession strategy.