Reconciling professional, family and private lives

2003/2129(INI) - 19/02/2004

The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Regina BASTOS (EPP-ED, P) on reconciling professional, family and private lives. MEPs pointed out that policies and measures aimed at reconciling professional and private life would make a decisive contribution to tackling the demographic problem faced by the majority of the Member States. They added that family policy should make it possible for parents to spend more time with their children, and that better contact between parents and children would have a positive impact on family formation and family stability. The report welcomed the targets set at the Barcelona summit in 2002, namely the elimination of obstacles to the participation of women in the labour market and the provision, by 2010, of childcare facilities for 90 per cent of children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age, and for 33 per cent of younger children. However, to achieve these objectives, it said that there must be greater public investment in providing affordable, high-quality childcare. A new way should also be found to offer parents greater freedom of choice, for example in the form of cash benefits or vouchers (for childcare, the recruitment of home helps, etc.). Moreover, those who opt to work within the family and to bring up children must enjoy the same social protection in old age as those who have been gainfully employed. Among the other recommendations made in the report, MEPs urged the Commission to draw up a framework directive on reconciling professional, family and private lives and to organise an annual conference on the issue. They proposed additional awareness-raising measures by both the Commission and the Member States, and called for Member States to avoid taxation measures which penalise families and larger households. The Member States were also urged to facilitate access to paid parental leave and other forms of long-term leave, including career breaks, as well as special short-term leave (e.g. for breastfeeding or for the illness of a family member). The committee also stressed the importance of flexible working hours and distance working for both male and female employees. Lastly, MEPs called for family-friendly housing and town-planning policies which would create "human urban environments with a sense of community and space" in order to meet the basic needs of households consisting of several generations and ensure the compatibility of the lives of all family members.