The demographic situation in the European Union. 1997 Report

1997/2165(COS) - 12/03/1998 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

In adopting the report by Mr Jesús CABEZON ALONSO (PSE, E) on the demographic report 1997, the European Parliament expressed the view that the solution to the protection and preservation of the welfare society, or the European social model, was to maintain solid and sustainable economic growth, improve employment policies and consultations between the two sides of industry and combat social exclusion. Parliament considered it important to separate the sources from which social security benefits were funded, differentiating between those which were paid out of contributions from employers and workers and universal benefits funded by means of general taxation. It took the view, in particular, that private pension funds should remain voluntary and supplementary to public pension schemes. Social security systems should recognize years given over to care of the family (bringing up children and looking after the elderly). In view of the impact of demographic trends, Parliament urged the Commission to keep and add to demographic data and to make them available by means of new communications technologies. The Commission should also draw up an action plan indicating how it was thinking of responding to the changing age structure in the EU and, in future demographic reports, should analyse assistance to dependents and the impact of this trend. With regard to demographic trends and employment, Parliament considered it necessary to expand the participation in the labour market of available and non-active labour, namely women and the over-50s. Their experience and capacity for work should be put to use with the aid of collective agreements which took account of the changes in the organization of work. Measures should be taken to reconcile family life and work. Parliament called on the Member States, in particular, to ensure that rules governing early retirement and assignment to non-active status were not abused by undertakings in order to make older employees redundant. It believed, on the contrary, that early retirement should be a source of additional jobs, as young employees replaced those who retired. It considered that the European Union should look into employment management policies and family allowances in the Member States and make proposals in the light of demographic trends. At regional level, it noted that disparities were growing and that this phenomenon affected the distribution of jobs. It called on the Commission, therefore, to review these imbalances and support initiatives to promote mobility and intensify coordination or, if appropriate, harmonization of legislation on the social security of migrant workers. It called, in particular, for a detailed study of demographic disparities in the regions of the EU. Parliament called for greater attention to be devoted to social aspects of the demographic situation in the Central and Eastern European countries. Populations there had ceased to grow, or were even in decline, due to emigration, aging of the population and a fall in the proportion of young people, a lower fertility rate and higher infant mortality. Parliament therefore called on the Commission and Council to investigate ways in which the EU could help reduce mortality, particularly among children, in the CEECs, especially Romania. It took the view that the large number of 'dependents' in relation to those in work was bringing pressure to bear on social security systems in the applicant countries, which should be taken into account in the accession negotiations and the pre-accession strategy.