Reconciling professional, family and private lives

2003/2129(INI) - 09/03/2004 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted with 424 votes in favour, 51 against and 37 abstentions a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Regina BASTOS (EPP/ED, P) on a survey of the situation regarding family policy in the different Member States. In particular, the report sets out a number of ways in which progress could be made toward 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. Among other suggestions, Parliament 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. It proposed additional awareness raising measures by both the Commission and the Member States, and call for Member States to avoid taxation measures which penalise families and larger households. Parliament considers 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. To achieve these objectives, MEPs say there must be greater public investment in providing affordable, high-quality childcare. Member States are 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 resolution also stresses the importance of flexible working hours and distance working for both male and female employees. Care for children is the most prominent aspect of this resolution but not the only one. Europe's population is ageing, with 17% of the population of the EU over 65 years old, and this percentage is growing fast, so steps have to be taken now. Parliament urges the Member States to provide the elderly with high quality care and domestic help, and to ensure adequate training for staff working in this area.