Social policy agenda for the period 2006-2010

2004/2191(INI) - 26/05/2005 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted its own-initiative report drafted by Ria OOMEN-RUIJTEN (PPE, NL) by 243 votes in favour to 131 against with 56 abstentions, on the Social Policy Agenda.

Parliament felt that the Commission gives a good analysis of the problems and tasks facing Europe, in order to preserve the unique European social model. This European Social Agenda must contribute to balanced implementation of the four pillars of the Lisbon Strategy, namely economic coordination, employment policy, social policy and sustainable development. However, because the proposals are so general and/or because of the lack of practical measures in the Social Agenda, the attainment of the ambitious Lisbon Strategy is not being tackled as vigorously as has been claimed elsewhere.

Parliament called on the Commission and Council, on the basis of this Social Agenda, to draw up a genuine social policy agenda, building upon the Social Policy Agenda for 2000 - 2005, with specific policy proposals, a timetable and a specific procedure (scoreboard) for monitoring its implementation. The Commission should enhance the Social Agenda by means of the proposals listed subject-by-subject in this resolution:

-demographics and access to employment: Parliament considered that the current demographic evolution puts pressure on the labour market and social security. It highlighted the urgent need forpositive measures to improve the position of older workers on the labour market, more flexibility in the choice of pension and retirement schemes,and positive incentives for increasing the years of active employment.

-More and better jobs: practical measures must be adopted in order to set up programmes to promote education and vocational training and to genuinely bring about lifelong learning with the aim of improving the use of knowledge and the information society, in keeping with the needs of the labour market. With regard to the new strategy for the period 2007-2012 for health and safety at work, Parliament asked for a more effective approach to the causes and consequences of accidents at work, and for revision of certain of the relevant legislation. In addition, Member States must improve the environment for start-ups and support existing SMEs. Parliament called on the Commission to adopt a clear headline target for the EU to reduce the levels of poverty measured against GDP by 2010.

-Mobility: Parliament called for a detailed report on the economic impact of denying workers from the new Member States access to employment elsewhere in the EU and for that report to be accompanied by proposals for solving the problems encountered. It also called for the improvement of Regulation 883/2004 /EC (the new coordinating regulation further to Regulation 1408/71), in such a way that the implementation measures make mobility a reality, rather than paying mere lip service to it as is the case in the text of the regulation itself.

-Promoting social inclusion and cohesion: while having employment is the most important element in people's integration into society, a sound social policy is needed to safeguard the right of all to social protection and the cohesion of the societies of the Member States. Parliament called on the Council to safeguard the implementation of all the elements laid down in the framework of the open method of coordination for measures against poverty and social exclusion.

Combating discrimination: Parliament expressed disappointment over the lack of effective proposals to promote and evaluate the progress of gender equality and the lack of policy measures aimed at facilitating the reconciliation of work and family life, and generally increasing the flexibility of working time. The Commission is asked to draw up a specific action plan for equality between men and women with a

specific emphasis on eliminating the wage gap. In addition, Parliament urged the Commission to supplement the Social Agenda with a directive banning discrimination against people with disabilities.

Social dialogue and social legislation: the Commission is asked to submit a proposal for revising Council Directive 94/45/EC, in order to expand the scope of information and consultation in the event of reorganisations, and improve working facilities for employees' representatives in European Works Councils.

The Lisbon objective of more and better employment which provides a stable income above the poverty threshold will be attained when structures are sufficiently modern and dynamic and afford the people of Europe social security and legal certainty. Therefore, Parliament called on the Commission to submit proposals for:

-a directive to protect the rights of workers in the event of restructuring;

-a directive concerning individual redundancies;

-a directive concerning social protection in connection with new forms of employment;

-a directive on monitoring compliance with minimum regulations;

-a directive on a minimum standard of social security.

Finally, Parliament called on the Member States to deepen cooperation and exchange best practise through the open method of coordination, which is an efficient instrument of policy making in the field of employment, social protection social exclusion, pensions and health care.