

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2004



2009

Committee on Petitions

10.11.2006

NOTICE TO MEMBERS

Petition 0023/2006 by Mrs Luigina De Santis (Italian) on behalf of the European Federation of Retired and Older People (FERPA), bearing over 400,000 signatures, on measures at European level to uphold the rights of pensioners

1. Summary of petition

The petitioner, the Secretary-General of the FERPA, calls on the European Parliament to ensure that European policies take account of the needs of the elderly and encourage their active participation in the decision-making process. She calls on the European Parliament to take action to meet the expectations of retired and older persons, upholding and improving their health and pension entitlements, and their right to a minimum income guaranteeing a decent standard of living, access to public services, measures to combat social exclusion, education and training and public care services.

2. Admissibility

Declared admissible on 21 April 2006. Information requested from the Commission under Rule 192(4).

3. Commission reply, received on 10 November 2006.

Briefing note, summary of facts, background

FERPA (European Federation of Retired and Older People) is a member of the European Trade Union Confederation.

Complaints

The petition from FERPA is calling on the European Parliament to pay greater attention to retired and elderly people in Europe. In particular, it is calling for measures to meet the expectations of elderly and retired people, notably in the areas of health, pensions, minimum income and access to basic services.

Commission's comments

The Commission and the Member States deal with the issues raised by FERPA essentially via the open method of coordination (OMC) as far as pensions are concerned.

The open method of coordination (OMC) in the field of pensions

The issue of pensions has gradually become a part of the European debate. Successive European Councils have, in fact, put the issue of pension reform on the agenda. Following the Commission communication on a concerted strategy on social protection (1999) and the Lisbon European Council (March 2000), a flexible, non-binding open method of coordination was established.

The Member States coordinate their policies on the basis of exchanges and a mutual learning process known as the 'open method of coordination' (OMC). The OMC involves learning from the experience gained in the various Member States in order to meet the common challenges posed by a changing economy and society; this is done in a coordinated way, whilst respecting national differences. This principle of cooperation was first applied to the area of social inclusion and later to pensions.

The OMC for pensions is based on three general key objectives which were approved by the Laeken European Council in 2001: to maintain social cohesion and solidarity; to safeguard financial viability, and to adapt pension systems to the development of societies and labour markets. These three general objectives are included in the new objectives of the OMC, which was streamlined in 2006. In March 2006, further to the Commission Communication 'Working together, working better: a new framework for the open coordination of social protection and inclusion policies in the European Union' (COM(2005)706), the European Council adopted a new framework for the social protection and inclusion process.

One of the general objectives of the streamlined OMC is to improve governance, transparency and the participation of all parties concerned in the framing, execution and follow-up of policy. To achieve that, the Commission recommends that all parties concerned be consulted at the appropriate level in the Member States. At the European level, the Commission meets European representative organisations at their request. FERPA is represented at these meetings as a member of the European Trade Union Confederation. The Social Protection Committee meets the social partners on a regular basis.

Substance of the 'synthesis report' on adequate and sustainable pensions

The Member States submitted their national strategy reports in mid-July 2005. The synthesis report, together with country summaries and a horizontal analysis can be found at the following address:

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_protection/pensions_en.htm

The national strategy reports submitted by the Member States show that the numerous pension

reforms under way reflect in a balanced manner the three key objectives of the open method of coordination. They stress that these three objectives are not independent, but on the contrary, are mutually supportive.

Future work on pensions under the streamlined open method of coordination in 2006 will include an updating of the reports on pensions and the development of horizontal analyses on specific topics, such as the a guaranteed minimum income for pensioners, retirement age flexibility and the development of private pensions.

Portability of supplementary occupational pensions

The Commission would also point out that in 2000 it set up a Pensions Forum, of an advisory nature, the purpose of which is to provide technical assessments or opinions on issues affecting in particular supplementary occupational pension schemes (sometimes known as 2nd pillar schemes); above all, it is interested in the difficulties encountered in respect of the portability of the relevant rights, since this issue is not covered by the compulsory coordination of social security schemes. The ETUC, of which FERPA is a member, has seven representatives in this forum. On the basis of the technical support provided by the Pensions Forum, in October 2005 the Commission adopted a proposal for a directive on improving the portability of supplementary pension rights; the aim of this proposal is to ensure that future pensioners who have exercised their right to occupational mobility are not penalised with regard to their supplementary pension entitlements.

Minimum income and access to basic services

A consultation is currently under way on active inclusion, which also affects minimum income. The aim is to encourage greater integration of people who are excluded from the labour market, by means of measures to support labour market access and career-related measures, including minimum income schemes and access to social services. The text on which it is based is the ‘Communication concerning a consultation on action at EU level to promote the active inclusion of the people furthest from the labour market’, COM(2006) 44 final of 8 February 2006. The consultation can be found on the following site:

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/consultation_en.html

Conclusions

Powers with regard to pensions generally remain at the national level. Within its area of responsibility, the Commission promotes mutual exchanges between Member States through the OMC. FERPA contributes to the OMC both nationally, through its members, and at European level, through the ETUC.’