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## **REPORT**

on the Commission communication ‘Towards a Europe for all ages - promoting prosperity and intergenerational solidarity’  
(COM(1999) 221 – C5-0185/1999 – 1999/2159(COS))

Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

Rapporteur: Luciana Sbarbati



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## PROCEDURAL PAGE

By letter of 25 May 1999, the Commission forwarded to Parliament a communication 'Towards a Europe for all ages - promoting prosperity and intergenerational solidarity' (COM(1999) 221 – 1999/2159(COS)).

At the sitting of 25 October 1999 the President of Parliament announced that she had referred the communication to the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs as the committee responsible and the Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities for its opinion (C5-0185/1999).

The Committee on Employment and Social Affairs appointed Luciana Sbarbati rapporteur at its meeting of 14 October 1999.

The committee considered the Commission communication and the draft report at its meetings of 18 September and 11/12 October 2000.

At the last meeting it adopted the motion for a resolution unanimously with 1 abstention.

The following were present for the vote: Michel Rocard chairman; Winfried Menrad, vice-chairman; Luciana Sbarbati, rapporteur; Sylviane H. Ainardi, Jan Andersson, María Antonia Avilés Perea, Regina Bastos, Philip Rodway Bushill-Matthews, Luciano Emilio Caveri, Alejandro Cercas Alonso, Brian Crowley, Danielle Darras (for Elisa Maria Damião), Proinsias De Rossa, Harlem Désir (for Fiorella Ghilardotti), Den Dover (for Luigi Cocilovo), Harald Ettl, Carlo Fatuzzo, Ilda Figueiredo, Marie-Hélène Gillig, Philippe A.R. Herzog (for Herman Schmid), Stephen Hughes, Rodi Kratsa, Jean Lambert, Elizabeth Lynne, Toine Manders (for Daniel G.L.E.G. Ducarme), Mario Mantovani, Bartho Pronk, Peter William Skinner (for Claude Moraes), Miet Smet, Ilkka Suominen, Helle Thorning-Schmidt, Ieke van den Burg and Anne E.M. Van Lancker .

The opinion of the Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities is attached.

The report was tabled on 26 October 2000 .

The deadline for tabling amendments will be indicated in the draft agenda for the relevant part-session.

## MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

### **European Parliament resolution on the Commission communication ‘Towards a Europe for all ages - promoting prosperity and intergenerational solidarity’ (COM(1999) 221 – C5-0185/1999 – 1999/2159(COS))**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to the Commission communication (COM(1999) 221 – C5-0185/99<sup>1</sup>),
- having regard to the Commission communication (COM(2000) 079) on building an inclusive Europe<sup>2</sup>,
- having regard to Recommendation 1074 (1988) by the Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly on family policy, and specifically paragraph 5 thereof<sup>3</sup>,
- having regard to the Council Recommendation of 24 June 1992 on common criteria concerning sufficient resources and social assistance in social protection systems<sup>4</sup>,
- having regard to the Council Recommendation of 27 July 1992 on the convergence of social protection objectives and policies<sup>5</sup>,
- having regard to the Council Resolution of 30 June 1993 on flexible retirement arrangements<sup>6</sup>,
- having regard to the Declaration of principles of the Council of the European Union and the Ministers for Social Affairs, meeting within the Council of 6 December 1993 to mark the end of the European Year of the elderly and of solidarity between generations (1993)<sup>7</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 24 February 1994 on measures for the elderly<sup>8</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 16 February 2000 on the communication from the Commission on a concerted strategy for modernising social protection<sup>9</sup>,
- having regard to Council Decision 2000/228/EC of 13 March 2000 on guidelines for Member States' employment policies for the year 2000<sup>10</sup>,

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<sup>1</sup> not published in OJ

<sup>2</sup> not published in OJ

<sup>3</sup> Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly, 3 May 1988 (3<sup>rd</sup> session)

<sup>4</sup> OJ L 245, 26.8.1992, p. 46.

<sup>5</sup> OJ L 245, 26.8.1992, p. 49.

<sup>6</sup> OJ C 188, 10.7.1993, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> OJ C 343, 21.12.1993, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> OJ C 77, 14.3.1994, p. 24.

<sup>9</sup> not published in OJ

<sup>10</sup> OJ L 72, 21.3.2000, p. 15.

- having regard to the United Nations General Assembly resolution of 16 October 1992 on the proclamation of an International Year of Older Persons in 1999<sup>1</sup> ,
  - having regard to its resolution of 16 April 1999 on senior citizens in the 21<sup>st</sup> century - a new lease of life<sup>2</sup> ,
  - having regard to the EC Treaty, in particularly Articles 2, 3, 13, 127 and 137 thereof,
  - having regard to Rule 47(1) of its Rules of Procedure,
  - having regard to the report of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs and the opinion of the Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities (A5-0319/2000),
- A. whereas the ageing of the population, which is one of the greatest achievements of our times, will nevertheless, in the next decades, lead to changes in the structure of society in some Member States,
- B. whereas the Commission's strategy to encourage states and citizens to create the necessary conditions for a healthy and active old age must be targeted not only on the age group of 50 to 75, which is mainly in the period of transition from working life to retirement, but also on the age group of over 75, whose situation would require a special report;
- C. whereas supporting a policy for an active old age calls for concerted action between Community policies and strategies and coordination of national social security systems, public health systems and measures to combat discrimination,
- D. whereas further measures to combat discrimination on grounds of age and exclusion from work and from society in general could be justified by a more generous interpretation of Articles 13 and 137 of the Treaty,
- E. whereas preventive action should be backed up by specific measures for those older people, especially women, living in poverty and precarious conditions,
- F. whereas older workers are amongst those hardest hit by unemployment and technological development, which are factors common to all the Member States,
- G. whereas there is a lack of official statistical data on unemployment among older workers of both sexes,
- H. whereas there is now a reference to older workers in the employment policy guidelines and the protection of these workers is one of the priority areas of the Council's recommendations to the Member States,
- I. whereas the organisation of work and working conditions are often unsuited to older workers' real needs and capabilities,

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, General Assembly, Resolution 47/5/1992.

<sup>2</sup> OJ C 219, 30.7.1999, p. 506.

- J. whereas older workers need assistance to adapt to technological developments and whereas the current retraining and specialisation programmes are based on the wrong approach,
  - K. whereas lifelong learning has a role to play in professional employment but also all through life,
  - L. whereas older people cannot be thought of as a homogeneous group and the diversity of older people must be respected and taken into consideration through specific policies as far as individual needs are concerned,
  - M. whereas the ageing of the population is one of a number of significant factors causing pressure on some Member States' social protection systems,
  - N. whereas there is no empirical evidence for a sharp rise in health care costs due to demographic change in the age group of 55 to 75, as health care costs increase only slightly more than the increase of the Member States' GDP,
  - O. having regard to the large number of older people without the capacity to lead an active social life, who are totally dependent on their families, and the impact this has on the other members of their families,
  - P. whereas the burden of caring for older people is not shared equally between family members, but is borne by women, and whereas there is a lack of accessible social infrastructure,
  - Q. whereas older people wish to lead active lives after retirement,
  - R. whereas promoting intergenerational solidarity cannot be reduced merely to questions of financial solidarity (or 'socio-economic adjustments'), but must be achieved through holistic support of family structures and the unofficial links that make up intergenerational solidarity,
1. Stresses that the process of adapting society to the ageing of the population should be viewed as a means of recognising the true value of older people and not simply a unilateral adjustment to labour market conditions, in view of the fact that older people contribute to society in many ways other than by means of paid employment, and calls on the Commission to explore better ways to make use of the vast experience and skills of older people;
  2. Endorses the strategy for a healthy and active old age, but calls on the Commission to ensure that this is not the only criterion for acceptance of older people in society; Calls on the Commission and the Member States to promote information campaigns at local, national and European levels on the embeddedness of ageing in economic, social and cultural life with a view to disseminating the idea that older people constitute a valuable resource, combating negative stereotypes and to consolidate equality and solidarity between the generations as a basis for social peace and a European social model;

3. Welcomes a holistic approach towards ageing, based on coordinated action between the strategy for employment, measures to combat discrimination and social exclusion, making public pensions safe for providing a decent retirement income and providing high quality health care for all;
4. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to develop special policies and specific programmes for each category of older people, given that older people are not a homogeneous group but have varying qualities of life and degrees of economic self-sufficiency;
5. Welcomes the Commission's recognition that older women form a particularly vulnerable group, which is often discriminated against in many ways and situations and requests that preventive action should be backed up by specific measures for those older people, especially women, living in poverty and precarious conditions,
6. Considers that the proposal for a Council directive establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation is not an adequate means of guaranteeing the rights of older people; calls therefore on the Commission to submit a proposal for a directive on the basis of Article 13, for the specific purpose of combating age-based discrimination;
7. Calls on the Commission to give due consideration to the scale and gravity of discrimination against older people at work in the context of the EQUAL Community Initiative;
8. Calls on the Council to implement measures aimed at monitoring compliance with the recommendations made to Member States on employment policies, with specific reference to older workers and methods for exchanging information and best practice between Member States;
9. Considers that action on 'age-proofing' of policies and measures is required in the same way as gender-proofing has been mainstreamed in structural fund programmes and in the employment guidelines of Member States;
10. Considers that the EU should, as part of the ESF's activities, encourage Member States to promote the creation of special posts designed to help older people and to set up new occupational retraining programmes for older workers, aimed at:
  - adapting them to the different training requirements,
  - making full use of the experience of older workers in training young people,
  - enabling older workers to take advantage of the opportunities offered by new technologies;
11. Calls on the Member States to support flexible models so as to adjust working hours in such a way as to optimise the occupational input of older workers;
12. Endorses an active strategy of improving health and safety at work adapted to the needs of older employees, thus benefiting all employees and calls on the Commission to examine the health and safety regulations from the perspective of older workers, with a view to amendment,



13. Calls on the Member States to take practical steps to promote, by means of professional updating and retraining measures, the reintegration of older people – both men and women - into working life;
14. Takes the view that life long learning must be recognised as being important throughout life and not only in relation to paid employment or the labour market; the notion of life long learning should also apply to the time after retirement and the access of older people - either retired or employed - to life long learning schemes should be facilitated;
15. Calls also on the social partners at national and European levels to provide appropriate opportunities to older workers to adapt to technological developments and to make provision for flexible arrangements for working hours, industrial relations and retirement;
16. Makes the compatibility of family and working life one of its goals and calls for a better division of family duties between men and women and for an employment and social protection policy that takes better account of women's and men's obligations in the care of older people and of children; greater use should be made of family policy and tax policy to promote labour force penetration by women;
17. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to give due consideration to the special circumstances of people who are prevented from continuing their occupational life because of severely disabled family members or involuntary unemployment, and who – as a consequence - suffer a loss of income and greater economic dependency, because of inadequate pension cover;
18. Calls on the Member States to undertake the task of caring for older people who are in hospital and unable to look after themselves, or to reimburse the expenses of doing so to families who help them;
19. Calls on the Commission to promote medical and social studies and research work, exchanges of findings and projects to improve the quality of life of older people who are no longer independent, disabled or suffering from diseases, including disorders that undermine their human dignity, such as people who are ostomate or who suffer from Alzheimer's disease;
20. Points out that the economic need for older people to remain in the labour market does not necessarily coincide with the true interests, wishes and preferences of all older people and encouraging "active old age", must not be used as an excuse to diminish, or fail to develop, adequate support services and pensions for older people;
21. Welcomes the Commission's proposal to limit compulsory early retirement; endorses however the idea of encouraging voluntary gradual or partial retirement and takes the view that when people reach pensionable age they should have an option to continue working or retire from work;
22. Believes that the challenge to society is to sustain a pensions policy based on the solid principle of inter-generational solidarity which will help sustain the cohesion of society and maintain the principle of earnings-related pensions;

23. Takes the view that the Commission should avoid desperate and draconian measures to cut back on hard-won gains on pensions; comprehensive, long-term policies are needed to meet the challenge of a slowing ageing population over the next two decades and beyond; the contribution that different elements such as higher levels of employment, extended working lives, increased savings, changes in social benefit structures and new immigration policies can bring to closing the pensions funding gap, needs to be assessed;
24. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to give older people the opportunity to participate in planning and implementing programmes on economic, social and cultural life; Welcomes in this context the Commission's intention to support a Europe-wide Forum on older people, bringing together the existing organisations, thereby strengthening the representation and involvement of older people at EU level;
25. Considers that the independence of older people is essential for guaranteeing a high quality of life and that, therefore, more emphasis has to be laid on psycho-social factors and self-respect with a view to overcoming the sense of loneliness and abandonment which leads many older people to lose motivation and therefore their independence; calls therefore on the Commission and the Member States to identify ways of promoting greater mobility for older people, especially in rural areas and insular regions, the use of new technologies and a more suitable urban environment, which is geared to the needs of a society which will include increasing numbers of older people;
26. Urges the Commission to increase Member States' awareness, not only of the need to improve the working lives of older people, but also of the need to promote their active involvement in social and cultural life, which represents a valuable contribution to society, both by setting up neighbourhood centres, facilities to provide social activities combined with the social security needed, services dedicated to the special needs of older people, facilities to promote active citizenship and participation, senior citizens' universities as well as leisure and hobby facilities, and also by supporting volunteer work and participation in associations by senior citizens, also with a view to demonstrating solidarity with those who are older than themselves; particular attention should be paid to how involvement by older people in the social economy i.e. Third System, would help to strengthen and enhance the social cohesion of communities;
27. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to develop appropriate methods enabling them to foresee in good time coming demographic changes;
28. Calls on the Commission to collaborate closely with the countries which have applied for membership, particularly those with similar demographic trends to the European Union's, in order to collaborate closely in tackling the professional and social integration of older people;
29. Hopes that the Commission will prepare a communication on the growing economic significance of tourism by senior citizens and will promote tourist travel in the European Union by older citizens;
30. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Commission and Council.

## EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

### I. Introduction

As a result of the ageing of the population in Member States, the EU is having to reconsider the role of older people in society. In 1999, which was proclaimed by the United Nations 'International Year of Older Persons,' the European Union showed that it intended to tackle the problem of an ageing population by putting forward a long-term holistic approach.

Both the European Parliament and the Commission have stressed that, in order to ensure greater solidarity between generations, coordination is needed between the different policy sectors relating to employment, social protection, public health and the planning of Community initiatives and pilot projects.

The first contribution in support of the United Nations' initiative came from the European Parliament, which organised a conference, in cooperation with the Commission, on policies for older persons on 1 and 2 October 1998. On the basis of contributions made at the conference, the European Parliament's report was drawn up and adopted on 29 March 1999<sup>1</sup>. Parliament's requests were partly taken up in the following:

- the Commission communication 'Towards a Europe for all ages' (COM(1999)221 final) of 21 May 1999,
- guideline No 9 for the employment policies of Member States in 2000,
- the package of measures to combat discrimination, established on the basis of Article 13 of the Treaty of Amsterdam,
- the strategy for an active old age, proposed by the Commission at the conference held in Brussels on 15 and 16 November 1999.

### II. Commission approach

The Commission communication 'Towards a Europe for all ages' sets out the broad lines of an integrated strategy based on areas:

- a. protecting the position of all the workers on the labour market,
- b. relieving the pressure from the ageing of the working population on pension systems,
- c. keep in check the growing demands on health protection systems
- d. combating all forms of discrimination and social exclusion based on age.

#### 2.1 General considerations

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C 219, 30.7.1999, p. 7

The Commission's aim is not to establish a new policy for the elderly but to offer them a better quality of life by adapting employment, social protection and health protection strategies to needs arising from demographic trends.

This type of holistic approach is certainly necessary and to be welcomed. However, we must avoid overdiversification and the risk of undermining the effectiveness of individual measures. The action taken must be coordinated not only with a view to reintegrating elderly people in working life but also to create a society that is more respectful of the needs of the older generations and capable of fully recognising their skills and experience.

The rapporteur therefore asks the Commission to propose that the Council introduce measures to monitor the actual impact of Community action for the elderly, Council recommendations to the Member States on employment policies and guidelines on reform of social security systems.

Such monitoring measures are essential if we wish to support and contribute to genuine convergence between national policies. Although these measures concern areas under the responsibility of the Member States, the process of modernisation of pension and health systems which is common to virtually all European countries can enable the Union to be more incisive and to influence restructuring processes by disseminating good practice and supporting initiatives which comply with the broad lines of Community policies and strategies.

## **2.2 Ageing of the population and European strategy for employment**

As a result of the high levels of unemployment and constantly changing needs of the Labour market, the ageing and reduction of the labour force are giving rise to direct or indirect forms of discrimination against older workers.

In order to counter the loss of market value of the skills of older workers, the Union should modernise:

- lifelong learning programmes,
- the organisation of work,
- organised leisure time.

### Training

The Commission's communication highlights the risk of the 50-65 age group being excluded from the labour market. It therefore emphasises the need to reconsider management of human resources and to promote the extension of training throughout working life to all sections of the workforce.

However, it does not take sufficient account of the specific needs and potential contribution of older workers.

First of all, the methods and general approach should be adjusted to older people, given that their learning capacity is different from that of their younger colleagues. Secondly, insufficient attention is given, when establishing training and learning programmes, to the

experience which older workers have built up.

The rapporteur therefore reiterates Parliament's call for occupational training, further training and retraining to be adjusted to older workers, while at the same time calling for the skills they have acquired over the years to be considered as a source of training for younger workers.

We are therefore asking for teaching programmes in which exchanges between generations are not seen as a one-way process and in which the needs and skills of older people are considered as complementary. It would, for example, be useful for apprenticeships to include contributions from workers who have reached the end of their careers.

### Organisation of work and working environment

The adjustment of the organisation of work to the ageing of the population is an essential means of promoting the role of older people in modern society. This would contribute to an active old age and gradual retirement, ensuring that older workers did not feel unsuited to working conditions and thus obliged to distance themselves from the working population. It is therefore important to realise that the natural physical limitations of older people do not necessarily mean that they are less able to engage in work.

The rapporteur therefore hopes that the Commission proposal to support measures guaranteeing working conditions adapted to older workers will be pursued with determination.

The Commission could take action to this end as part of the management of the Structural Funds and the Fifth Framework Programme by giving priority to projects aimed at adjusting public and private structures to the daily needs of older people.

### **2.3 Ageing of the population and social protection strategies**

Constantly increasing life expectancy should not be seen as a threat to intergenerational solidarity in the social security context. Efforts to promote the contribution of older workers should be coordinated with measures aimed at adapting pension systems to the new demographic situation.

The European Parliament has already endorsed the Commission's call for limited access to early retirement. However, it also recommends that this should not impose an unbearable burden on older people, who are often physically weaker.

Measures aimed at gradually raising the pensionable age should be accompanied by specific measures to improve the quality of life of older people and to guarantee more favourable working conditions for them and due respect for human dignity.

To this end, the Commission should, when establishing the strategy for convergence of social protection, provide for coordination between the planning of various forms of transition from working life to retirement and measures to modernise the organisation of work, such as greater use of partial retirement or reduction of working time.

The rapporteur calls on the Commission to urge Member States to provide adequate support for older people who are obliged to stop working before they reach pensionable age and for their families if they are no longer independent.

The Commission's plan to raise the pensionable age is actually a preventive measure, which will only have an impact in the long term. Increasing life expectancy and disparities between the life expectancies of men and women could lead to discrimination, for which specific compensation measures are necessary.

#### **2.4 Ageing of the population and health care**

The Commission communication mainly highlights the extra cost to which the ageing of the population will give rise in the field of health care. It reiterates its concern for a preventive approach aimed at promoting healthier lifestyles from an early age and supporting measures to improve the working environment, including all possible forms of prevention that can contribute to a healthier old age.

Although this approach is certainly worth supporting, it could lead to a dangerous attitude in society whereby only healthy old people would be considered useful and active. We must realise that, despite medical progress and improved living conditions, older people, and especially the very old, are always liable to fall ill and be affected by physical problems.

It is only by promoting a culture that accepts old people as such that we can hope to make full use of their potential and acknowledge their essential contribution to society. In other words, although the measures aimed at guaranteeing a healthy and active old age for everyone must be given full support, we must also ensure that this does not become a condition for acceptance of old people in society.

The rapporteur therefore calls on the Commission to give stronger backing to the third sector's action aimed at encouraging Member States to apply the method it has proposed, namely to convert new needs into new job creating activities with a view to improving the intergenerational balance.

#### **2.5 Measures against discrimination and social exclusion**

In view of recent developments in the Commission's position on combating age-based discrimination, such as the measures taken as part of the strategy for employment and the proposed package of measures based on Article 13, we can be optimistic about the Commission's actual commitment to seeing through the proposed policies on the promotion of the role of older people. However, the steps taken so far are still inadequate.

The rapporteur calls on the Commission, while respecting the principle of subsidiarity, to submit specific legislative proposals to supplement the Council directive for the establishment of a general framework to promote equal treatment on the labour market with a view to ensuring that older people can fully exercise their rights as citizens.

Given the ineffectiveness of declarations of intent and the difficulty in guaranteeing the right of individual citizens to court action, the fight against discrimination requires legislation and must be complementary to action against social exclusion on the labour market.

### III. Specific remarks

The rapporteur welcomes the Commission's desire to promote a new approach to old age by placing the emphasis on the valuable role which old people can play in modern society. However, some of the Commission's aims need to be supplemented and clarified.

Although the Commission communication proposes a new holistic approach aimed at promoting a new culture with regard to old age, it focuses almost exclusively on the limited section of the population which is potentially active on the labour market.

Solidarity between generations must also entail taking account of the situation of the very old and, hence, seeing older people not merely as potential older workers but as individuals who can play different roles in the life of the Community.

The Commission should state firmly and clearly that solidarity between generations does not mean unilaterally adapting older people to conditions in an ageing society but should involve mutual recognition of the different roles to be played by the various age groups within society.

Improving the quality of life of older people should be pursued with the same determination once they reach pensionable age.

To this end, the Commission should promote certain pilot projects which can combine the creation of new jobs and the improvement of older people's quality of life, such as holidays for older people as part of the promotion of tourism and the production of equipment to adapt housing and public transport to the needs of people with mobility problems.

Retired persons should also be provided with alternative means of involvement in the work environment so as to be able to play an active part in society, e.g. through involvement in policy decisions directly affecting the protection of their rights. The Commission should also look more closely at the possibility of establishing intergenerational groups with regard to the modernisation of urban environments in the context of such Community programmes as URBAN.

Older people's quality of life and degree of involvement in the development of society is in fact dependent on their living environment, which should be adapted to their specific needs. Coordination is also necessary between different projects to modernise the urban environment taking account of older people's needs so as to avoid inconsistencies such as situations in which schools or office blocks are built to accommodate the needs of the disabled but are inaccessible owing to the absence of appropriate public transport facilities.

The Commission's action to make the Union and the Member States more aware of the role which older people can play in the modernisation of our societies is only the first step in the implementation of a strategy to build up a society for all ages, showing due respect for the dignity and capacities of older people.

The European Parliament is committed to ensuring that the strategy for an active old age is implemented effectively through holistic and coordinated action within the Community's

sphere of competence and a stronger EU influence on national policies with a view to coordinating efforts in this field.



25 April 2000

## **OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES**

for the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

on the communication from the Commission 'Towards a Europe for all Ages – Promoting Prosperity and Intergenerational Solidarity'  
(COM(1999) 221 – C5-0185/1999 – 1999/2159(COS))

Draftsperson: Christa Prets

### **PROCEDURE**

The Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities appointed Christa Prets draftsperson at its meeting of 25 November 1999.

It considered the draft opinion at its meetings of 22 March 2000 and 18 April 2000.

At the latter meeting it adopted the amendments below unanimously with 1 abstention.

The following were present for the vote: Theorin, chairperson; Eriksson, vice-chairperson; Prets, draftsperson; Gröner, Izquierdo Rojo (for Ghilardotti), Klass, Kratsa, Lulling, Müller E.F., Sörensen and Swiebel .

## SHORT JUSTIFICATION

### Introduction

In its communication marking the UN International Year of Older Persons the Commission considers a complex subject which, given the likely future demographic trend, will have a major impact on the economic and social cohesion of society in the EU. The Community's competence in this field arises from numerous provisions of the Treaties concerning the promotion of economic and social development, social protection, the prevention of discrimination on the grounds of age or gender, for example, and matters relating to education, training and health. Only if an overall view is taken of the various factors, such as employment, initial and continuing training, provision for old age and health care against the background of the available statistics and the likely future scenarios will it be possible to formulate sectoral policies that lead to a generally satisfactory solution to the problem of the progressive ageing of society.

This committee has the task of considering the implications of this societal situation for women and submitting proposals.

### 1. Employment sector

The relative decline in the size of the working population and the cohorts with low birth rates create opportunities for both younger and older women, as the growing proportion of women in working life already demonstrates. In the 1998 employment guidelines the Commission rightly describes increasing labour force penetration by women as a precondition for a rise in employment and the maintenance of living standards.

Women can seize these opportunities, however, only if a number of requirements are satisfied. On the one hand, the task of combining work and family life must not be left entirely to them. Husbands, or partners, must also be prepared to take on this task. The vertical and horizontal occupational segregation that is frequently encountered can be overcome only if equality of opportunity is achieved, i.e. if there is fair burden-sharing between men and women when it comes to looking after the family. A wider range of flexible forms of work for women and men is therefore needed.

If it is to be possible for older working women too to remain employed longer, workplaces should be designed appropriately with the aid of modern technology and ergonomic measures such that capacity for work is maintained. Any opportunity for gradually leaving the labour force or for working part-time should be seized, with account taken of the individual's capacity for work. Responsible cooperation between the social partners that is committed to the common good and appropriate encouragement from the legislature are needed here, in the interests of the individual and of the general public.

Provision should also be made for further training and retraining schemes to enable women to return to working life after periods of bringing up children or otherwise looking after the family. The growing need for better qualified and versatile workers in the future will give women additional opportunities, since, on average, they are already better educated than young men. In its opinion on jobs of the future (Sornosa Martínez) this committee has

indicated a wide range of opportunities, especially in the tertiary sector, the main area of growth.

## **2. Provision for old age**

Women's provision for old age has unfavourable features compared to men's because women usually have different 'biographies'. The new family structures and the increase in the number of one-person households and sole-earning single mothers often result in women having an inadequate pension entitlement because the work they have done has been less skilled, their employment has been interrupted or they have been economically dependent on their partner or the pension he has acquired. The problem of elderly women living on the poverty line is widespread. This raises the question of basic provision, an idea approved by Parliament in its report of March 1997.

## **3. Health care**

It cannot be women's task to perpetuate traditional patterns of behaviour by being left to take most of the responsibility for the welfare and care of the elderly and disabled, especially as more and more women are pursuing professional careers and so have less time and energy for such responsibilities. The result would be an unreasonable multiple burden. However, where a woman forgoes a more highly skilled occupation to look after the family, she not only suffers a loss of income and so increases her economic dependence during the active period of her life, but is also left with inadequate provision for her old age. The question is whether society then shows its appreciation for the enormous costs that have been saved. In the United Kingdom alone the cost of the informal care of family members was estimated some years ago at over ECU 100bn p.a.

More demanding tasks and therefore more favourable occupational prospects would follow vocational training schemes or, where they do not yet exist, from the creation of occupational profiles geared to the care of the elderly.

## **4. The care of elderly women**

Women are in the majority among the elderly and, as they grow older, they find themselves living alone and needing care facilities themselves.

The elderly, like the young, must have access to appropriate health care. It must also be geared to their specific needs. Rehabilitation plays a particularly important role in this context if the elderly are to remain physically mobile. There will be a very sharp rise in the demand for low-cost facilities in this area in the near future.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities calls on the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following points in its draft resolution:

1. Welcomes the Commission communication marking the International Year of Older

Persons and advocates a broadly based debate with and between the social partners, civil society and representatives of the concerned group on this important social topic, so that the necessary political inducements for reform may be given without delay at Community and Member State level;

2. Draws attention to the consequences for women's retirement pensions of their greater participation in part-time work, insecure jobs or atypical forms of work;
3. Notes that, with society growing older, the situation of women as regards employment, provision for old age and preventive health care has features which should be borne in mind so that discrimination may be avoided;
4. Calls on the governments of the Member States and the social partners to facilitate women's access to more secure and better paid careers, a necessary concomitant of this being equal treatment in continuing education and training and in measures to increase their knowledge throughout their working lives;
5. Makes the compatibility of family and working life one of its goals and calls for a better division of family duties between men and women and for an employment and social protection policy that takes better account of women's and men's obligations in the care of the elderly and of children; greater use should be made of family policy and tax policy to promote labour force penetration by women;
6. Calls on the government of the Member States and on the social partners to put into effect the principle set out in Article 141 of the Treaty of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value; the principle of equal treatment must also apply to recruitment, career advancement, further training and promotion;
7. Calls on the Member States and the social partners to take specific measures to enable women (and single mothers) to return to, and reintegrate in the labour market following career breaks;
8. Calls for specific measures to compensate for the fact that pension schemes are not adequately geared to women's needs, with account taken of women's deeper involvement in care activities and of the consequent gaps in their professional careers;
9. Emphasises the need for the capacities of older workers, male and female, to be maintained by ergonomic and technological means;
10. Refers to the growing need for preventive health care, rehabilitation, nursing and social service facilities and calls for them to be accessible to everyone and within everyone's means; advocates the promotion of the development of networks at local and regional level that will promote social integration and solidarity among the generations.