

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

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Committee on Regional Development

2007/2156(INI)

20.12.2007

OPINION

of the Committee on Regional Development

for the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

on the demographic future of Europe
(2007/2156(INI))

Draftswoman: Elisabeth Schroedter

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SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Regional Development calls on the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions in its motion for a resolution:

1. Considers that the adverse demographic changes currently taking place represent serious problems and challenges for the European Union, the governments of the Member States and the regional authorities; points out that the crisis which these changes might generate could lead to the breakdown of many European policies, including the cohesion policy; stresses that, in order to respond appropriately to these challenges, a thorough analysis is needed of the causes and possible effects of the crisis, with particular reference to its influence on regional policy;
2. Notes that the impact of demographic change on individual regions is serious and requires different adjustment strategies depending on whether the region concerned is a region of migration or of shrinking population; notes that quality of life is defined differently in regions of shrinking population, which are mostly rural regions, from the way in which it is defined in regions with a growing population, and therefore considers that different support strategies are needed;
3. Notes, however, the situation of some of the remotest regions such as French Guiana and Réunion which, in spite of sharply contrasting migration balances, share a strong population growth marked by far higher birth rates than the EU average and a population which - while not untouched by the ageing trend - is still much younger than that in the remainder of the EU, therefore calling for a differentiated approach;
4. Notes that all regions, including regions of net emigration, have specific potential in a variety of fields; calls for them to be given help in developing that potential to the full in the interests of their regional prosperity; calls on the Member States and regional authorities, therefore, as part of their regional policy, to give priority to autonomous development strategies in such regions, since experience shows that this can stimulate local and regional economic activity, thereby making shrinking regions more attractive again;
5. Notes that, particularly in shrinking regions, innovative and decentralised infrastructure actions, together with a high degree of active citizenship, improve the quality of life and are factors which strengthen economic stability and ties to the region concerned, including among young people; calls on the Member States, in cooperation with their regional and local authorities, to support programmes to be set up for such development plans; calls on the Commission and the Member States to create opportunities in shrinking regions for cooperation between business, the public sector, schools and universities with a view to creating regional innovation systems, and for participation in national and international skills networks;
6. Notes that the constantly growing population of older people, with their specific needs in terms of goods and services, can provide a fresh economic impetus for regional

development, which can in turn unlock new potential for regions with growing numbers of older people; points out that this situation can be seen as an opportunity for new jobs in a growing market for new products and services which improve the quality of life of older people, for economic growth and for improving the EU's competitiveness, this being the so-called 'silver economy' approach; encourages the Member States and regional authorities to make use of the Structural Funds to this end, and calls on the Commission to support, within the framework of Territorial Cooperation (Article 7(3) of Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund¹, the exchange of experience between regions in which the 'silver economy' already plays a major role or where it will do so in future;

7. Stresses that in shrinking regions the voluntary sector and social networks make a significant contribution to meeting the needs of local people but cannot replace the essential role played by the public authorities in providing services of general interest in the regions; considers that this active citizenship must be recognised and the bodies involved supported as regional policy partners; stresses that this sets in motion learning processes that enable a region to meet the challenges of demographic change;
8. Calls on the Member States to assist regions of net emigration by guaranteeing a high level of services of general interest (e.g. education including pre-school and child care, welfare and health services, postal services) and accessibility (e.g. of public transport, transport infrastructures and telecommunications networks) and to safeguard economic participation and skills (e.g. through training including methods of lifelong learning and use of and investment in new technologies); calls for the practical framework for fulfilment of these tasks to be adapted to local needs and local actors and to improve their adaptability; draws particular attention to the situation of islands, border areas, mountainous regions and other areas remote from centres of population;
9. Welcomes the proposal for the establishment of a European Integration Fund; calls on the competent national, regional and local authorities responsible for drawing up and managing Cohesion Policy and Rural Development Policy to work even more closely together to encourage people to move to rural regions with a shrinking population, by improving the living and working conditions in these regions;
10. Welcomes the fact that, in the fourth report on social and economic cohesion, the Commission has identified the growing demographic imbalance as one of the challenges facing it; awaits with interest the results of the social consultations and the definition of the role of regional policy in combating the adverse effects of demographic change in the next programming period;
11. Also urges that advantage be taken of opportunities within the regional policy framework for co-financing various activities designed to meet the challenge of demographic change during the current programming period;
12. Proposes to the Commission that it should promote, as part of Territorial Cooperation,

¹ OJ L 210, 31.7.2006, p. 25. Regulation as amended by Regulation (EC) No 1989/2006 (OJ L 411, 30.12.2006, p. 6).

Europe-wide networks in which regional and local authorities and civil society bodies can learn from one another in tackling the problems resulting from demographic change.

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

Date adopted	18.12.2007
Result of final vote	+: 39 -: 0 0: 1
Members present for the final vote	Emmanouil Angelakas, Stavros Arnaoutakis, Elspeth Attwooll, Jean Marie Beaupuy, Rolf Berend, Wolfgang Bulfon,, Bairbre de Brún, Petru Filip, Gerardo Galeote, Iratxe García Pérez, Eugenijus Gentvilas, Ambroise Guellec, Gábor Harangozó, Marian Harkin, Filiz Hakaeva Hyusmenova, Mieczysław Edmund Janowski, Rumiana Jeleva, Gisela Kallenbach, Tunne Kelam, Evgeni Kirilov, Miloš Koterec, Constanze Angela Krehl, Jamila Madeira, Mario Mantovani, Miroslav Mikolášik, Lambert van Nistelrooij, Jan Olbrycht, Maria Petre, Markus Pieper, Pierre Pribetich, Wojciech Roszkowski, Elisabeth Schroedter, Grażyna Staniszevska, Catherine Stihler, Margie Sudre, Kyriacos Triantaphyllides
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Jan Březina, Brigitte Douay, Den Dover, Emanuel Jardim Fernandes, Samuli Pohjamo, Nikolaos Vakalis, Iuliu Winkler
Substitute(s) under Rule 178(2) present for the final vote	