

POLAND

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

POSED IN THE COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION:

GREEN PAPER “CONFRONTING DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE: A NEW SOLIDARITY BETWEEN THE GENERATIONS”

The position of the Government

The Green Paper includes a list of specific questions which have been answered in accordance with the Green Paper format. The content of questions and answers, which would be submitted to the European Commission upon the approval of the Government, is presented below:

- Do you take the view that the discussion of demographic trends and managing their impact should take place at a European level?
- If so, what should be the objectives, and which policy areas are concerned?

Discussion of demographic trends and managing their impact should take place at the European level.

The objectives should be to:

- (1) Stimulate research into demographic trends and their socio-economic impact and disseminate its key results;
- (2) Mainstream the demographic concern into all policies pursued under the Lisbon Strategy;
- (3) Develop policy guidelines which the Member States could utilise in accordance with their particular national circumstances;
- (4) Discover areas of possible common action at the European level;
- (5) Exchange information on best practices.

To reverse the decline in the fertility rate and to extend periods of working life, among others, due to increased longevity, adequate adjustments will be necessary not only in the area of social policy, but also in other areas covered by the Lisbon Strategy. Coherent and continuous actions are needed. The citizens' sense of confidence as to their future is one of the necessary factors (albeit not sufficient) for making decisions about reproduction. It will be supported by growth and employment promotion in accordance with the re-launched Lisbon Strategy. Furthermore, the exchange of information on best practices in such areas as:

- family policy,
- migration policy,
- policy towards elderly people,

will contribute to more accurate actions in each Member State.

Actions taking place at the European level, however, should not lead to the harmonisation of social and employment policies of the Member States. They should support the Member States in their activities focused on reversing negative demographic trends and in necessary adjustments in social and employment policies.

Over many years, the Union has been making considerable efforts to achieve equality between men and women and has coordinated national social protection policies.

- How can a better work/life balance help to tackle the problems associated with demographic aging?
- How can a more balanced distribution of household and family tasks between men and women be encouraged?
- Should the award of certain benefits or advantages (leave, etc.) be linked to an equal distribution of tasks between the sexes? How best to ensure an adequate income for both parents on parental leave?
- How can the availability of child care structures (crèches, nursery schools, etc.) and elderly care structures be improved by the public and private sectors?
- Can a reduced rate of VAT contribute to the development of care services?
- How can parents, in particular young parents, be encouraged to enter the labour market, have the career that they want and the number of children they want?

The key challenge in this regard is twofold:

- (1) How to reverse the current low fertility rates while preserving the woman's option to have a career and supporting as high a level of participation of women in the labour market as practicable;
- (2) How to ensure that the family remains the focus of child upbringing with the state playing but a supporting role.

Under the circumstances, longer periods of work over the course of life should result in the utilisation of the European workforce as close to optimal as possible. Currently, the European shrinking workforce is grossly underutilised. This has to change by first removing the regulatory and fiscal barriers in access to the labour market. Such barriers are especially harmful to persons with low qualifications. Other barriers should also be lowered, for example, those which hinder the reconciliation of professional and family duties or impede the employment of elderly people. On one hand, better workforce utilisation will contribute to the mitigation of effects of declining workforce, caused by a drop in the fertility rate; on the other hand, it will contribute to the improvement in the situation of retirement schemes – both in view of financial stability and adequacy of future benefits.

The proper way of encouraging a balanced distribution of family and household tasks between men and women is by raising the awareness of existing inequalities. Independent studies on task distribution in families over successive stages of family development (prior to the appearance of children, after the appearance of children, after the children becoming independent, prior to and after the withdrawal from professional life) should be periodically conducted. Regular publicising of results showing the evolution in the distribution of family and household tasks between spouses/partners over successive stages of marriage will confront partners with the problem of an unbalanced distribution, to the extent that it may exist in any family, allowing relevant conclusions to be drawn.

Social policies should be focused on supporting the family. Obviously, benefits or advantages should not be linked to a balanced distribution of tasks between partners, while it is fully appropriate to facilitate the distribution of family tasks. A good example is the possibility to share maternity leave by the child's parents, or the parental leave which gives both parents a chance to participate in raising the child. As regards family income, at the time of using parental leave, it should be supplemented subject to the income criterion. In Poland, persons on parental

leave who meet the income criterion for granting the family allowance, receive the child-care allowance which supplements their income.

As regards the availability of care services for children and elderly people, it seems of supreme importance to establish the structural framework conducive to increased access to such services, no matter whether provided by the public or private sector. Therefore, it seems necessary to:

- (a) increase demand for care services, subsidising individuals who meet the income criterion rather than institutions (care providers). The subsidising of individuals increases demand for care services. The subsidising of care providers directly subsidises all users of such services, regardless of their financial status;
- (b) observance of minimum care service standards, established by law, or opt for self-regulation of the care services sector;
- (c) ensure adequate regulations on the public-private partnership to make application and selection procedures relating to project implementation and selection of projects and private partners to implement them, as well as any financial settlements, transparent and accurate;
- (d) facilitate the provision of care services by private entities and organisations (including religious and non-governmental ones). Legal regulations on volunteerism and public benefit organisations have been adopted in Poland, which facilitate, *inter alia*, the carrying out of such services.

The reduction of VAT would reduce the prices of care services, thus increasing the demand for such services. However, the general reduction of VAT for care services will serve the interests of all persons, irrespective of their affluence. The direct subsidising of the purchasers of such services who meet the income criterion would be a more equitable solution. The balance of advantages and disadvantages of both options should be carefully considered.

A wide public discussion is necessary on the best incentives which would decrease the age of women at the birth of their first child and encourage parents' decisions to have subsequent children. Such a discussion should take place in each Member State and at the European level. Recently, some expert conferences on European demographic trends have been held; however, the problem of reversing negative fertility trends in Europe does not seem to occupy its proper place in the public's awareness and governments' priorities.

As mentioned already, aggressive pro-employment and pro-growth policies are the key to encouraging young persons to succeed on the labour market, set up the family and raise children. Few things may be more frustrating than no job after graduation or upon the completion of a skill-upgrading training (often publicly-funded). Therefore, structural changes on the labour market allowing for an increased supply of jobs should be made concurrently with the development of educational and training opportunities. With adequate support, even a high participation of women in the labour market does not need to lead to a fall in the fertility rate, with Sweden being the best example to prove the above.

In this context, the availability of care services and affordable housing is of significance. Facilitated access to housing credits, especially for prospective first-time buyers, may serve the latter goal. Furthermore, working hours of child care facilities should be adjusted to flexible working time and longer working hours of parents. That would suggest the need for more flexible work organisation of care centres.

The reconciliation of professional and motherhood duties may also be encouraged by revising the stereotype about women's employment being more costly than the employment of men.

The Thessalonica European Council in June 2003 declared that an EU integration policy for immigrants should help to meet the new demographic and economic challenges currently facing the EU. This is the debate initiated by the Green Paper adopted last January.

- To what extent can immigration mitigate certain negative effects of demographic aging?
- What policies should be developed for better integrating these migrants, in particular young people?
- How could Community instruments, in particular the legislative framework to combat discrimination, the structural funds and the Employment Strategy, contribute?

It still remains to be demonstrated that no alternative courses of action allowing for massive immigration to Europe are available. There are demographers and economists who believe that if productivity could be somewhat increased and retirement age delayed, Europe could develop without massive importation of labour.¹

Immigration, in any case, should not be looked upon as a quick fix for Europe's demographic problems. Immigration policy should be an integral part of sustainable employment policies. It should take into account equitable interests of the EU Member States and third countries. The elimination of barriers to job creation by employers and efficient encouraging of the unemployed to pursue employment should be the priority for the EU Member States. Importation of foreign labour may be temporarily more attractive to employers, thus gaining younger, cheaper, and often also more dedicated workers than the local workforce. But it also burdens all taxpayers with costs of migrants' social integration. Proposals to extend immigration from third countries should be considered versus restrictions which continuously reduce free movement of workers within the EU.

Selective immigration policies might be easily questioned as discriminatory. Yet, socially excluded migrants may constitute a breeding ground for xenophobia, nationalism and social radicalism – sentiments detrimental to the stability of democracy and continuity of European integration.

Having a job and a stable income is the best “policy” for social integration of migrants. It once again underscores the need for a decisive push towards economic growth and employment, as envisaged by the re-launched Lisbon Strategy. Apart from that, the Member States should actively support the cultural integration of individual migrants and their groups. Such policies should both offer opportunities for cultural integration and be premised on the expectation thereof.

Discrimination combating policies are important as they represent core European values. Yet, antidiscrimination policies should be seen in the context of integration policies. The more successful the social and cultural integration of migrants, the less ground there will presumably be for discriminatory practices and therefore the need to combat them.

¹ Cf., e.g., Ronald C. Schoenemaekers, „Population Ageing and Its Challenges to Social Policies”, Keynote Speech at the European Population Conference 2005, *Demographic Challenges for Social Cohesion*, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 7-8 April 2005.

Apart from integration policies focused on migrants, it is also important to cherish such values as tolerance, non-discrimination and respect towards other cultures in hosting societies.

European objectives have been laid down for the prevention of long-term youth unemployment, combating early school drop-out and raising the level of initial training. The structural funds help to attain them at grass roots level.

- How can initial training and adult training schemes be improved? What can non-formal education and voluntary activities contribute? How can the structural funds and the instruments for achieving better access to the knowledge society contribute?
- How can the bridges between school and working life and the quality of young people's employment be improved? What role should social dialogue play? What can dialogue with civil society, in particular youth organisations, contribute?

Since the transition to democracy and market economy, i.e. since 1989, Poland has witnessed a national rush towards education. The number of higher education students has risen steeply. The structure of demand for education has also changed quite drastically towards economics, business, marketing, finance and law. Given the very high unemployment rate in Poland (especially since 2000) and unsatisfied aspirations for a better life, parents invest heavily in their children's future which they see in better, possibly university-level, education. In that respect, the aspirations of both parents and their children seem to overlap. The government has been supportive of those changes. Over the last 5 years, Poland has reformed its primary and secondary education systems, with the view to endowing students with the skills needed in the new labour market. In 2005, Poland has instituted a reform of its higher education system to conform to the precepts of the Bologna process. Three levels of higher education have been introduced: the undergraduate, master's degree and doctoral studies. Also, as a new EU Member State, Poland will be able to receive support from the European Social Fund, which should spell out a quantum leap in funding for vocational training and continuous education programmes. One should expect that those developments will result in improving the flexibility and overall skill levels of Poland's workforce. Favourable effects of changes which have been instituted so far will, however, require some time to become visible. Thus, it would now be premature to evaluate them or already suggest changes.

It is requisite to increase the flexibility of the labour market so that the employment of young and inexperienced workers would not be too costly for employers. The application of flexible forms of employment is also necessary. Over the last 4 years, Poland has instituted certain measures (some of them temporary) towards smoothing up the school-to-job transition. There is a wide variety of forms of employment, such as temporary jobs, part-time jobs, temporary employment agencies, etc., which are used by employers. They also facilitate the employment of young persons, young mothers, in particular. The minimum pay was lowered in regard to young job seekers. Voluntary work opportunities have been created (the Act of 2003), whereby young persons may gain work experience through unpaid voluntary work. Persons who pursue this type of activity have their health and accident insurance ensured.

Cooperation with social partners is critical to make the inevitable transition towards a more flexible labour market, with the service sector offering the majority of jobs and the highly capital-intensive production sector, as smooth as possible. Poland has developed structures for social and civil dialogue at the national, regional, sectoral and even company levels. There are many instances of agreements reached between social partners at the company level in the

private sector, which reconcile employees' aspirations for job security (including the retention of older employees) and pay increase, with the need for greater productivity and overall competitiveness. It seems that the completion of privatisation would positively contribute to the quality of social dialogue, including at the national level.

- How can Community policies contribute more to combating child poverty and poverty among single-parent families and to reducing the risk of poverty and exclusion among young people?
- What forms of solidarity can be fostered between young people and elderly people?

Similarly as in the case of a widely understood population policy, it is critical that the policy towards children and combating child poverty constitutes a significant element of the open method of coordination (OMC) in the area of social policy. The scale of poverty amongst children is currently one of the most important indicators monitoring the level of social integration in Member States. Hitherto experience proves that poverty mostly affects children in large families. The implementation of support systems for those families is necessary, covering not only cash benefits, but also benefits in kind (child care, above all) and actions in the labour market area, which will consequently result in increased employment opportunities for both parents. Ensuring conditions conducive to households in which both parents pursue employment is an efficient method for combating poverty. Furthermore, such actions will also counteract the inheritance of poverty and passivity.

It is critical to lay down the principles of solidarity between the generations. A recently published survey covering 13 European countries revealed the relative preference for eliminating the early retirement schemes or increasing old-age pension insurance premiums. The option to increase the retirement age was significantly less preferred. Yet, the least preferred were the options to lower the retirement benefits and to charge children with the costs of supporting their parents.²

From another recent study we also know that most Europeans consider the family to be the best environment to care for the elderly. The elderly also seem ready to shoulder the increased cost of care themselves and are not in favour (more frequently than the young) of shifting it to the younger generation. The younger generation, in turn, seems to accept the need to absorb the increased costs of care within the family, in spite of the fact that they will be disproportionately affected by such an increase.³ Those preferences, in a way, set out a broad perimeter for solidarity-building between the generations in Europe. At the same time, they also show insufficient awareness about the direction of inevitable changes, e.g. the awareness that the continuation of early retirement schemes is no more possible is not accompanied by the awareness of the need to retire later than according to the current statutory retirement age in many countries.

Actions for growth and employment, if pursued aggressively in Europe, should facilitate social accommodation between the generations which would sustain solidarity between them. In this

² Irena Kotowska, "Older Workers in the Labour Market and Social Policies," *Conference Report for the European Population Conference 2005 "Demographic Challenges for Social Cohesion*, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 7-8 April 2005. "Population Policy Acceptance Study: The Viewpoint of Citizens and Policy Actors Regarding the Management of Population Related Change (DIALOG)", EC Project (HPSE-CT-2002-00153).

³ *Perceptions of living conditions in an enlarged Europe* (Dublin: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2004).

context, those government actions which remove barriers in access to the labour market or to staying there, compounded with sufficiently strong incentives to pursue and to keep official employment would be very helpful. All in all, a new solidarity between the generations has to emerge from the bottom up, rather than from the top down.

The same applies to the provision of care services for children and the elderly, especially the long-term care. The regulatory framework should allow all interested parties to respond to the increasing demand for these services (be they the elderly themselves or the young, and in all forms, as paid workers, volunteers, social and solidarity-based economy entities, NGOs, religious organisations, or businesses, etc.). Should the public policy aim at the reduction of black job market in the care sector, it may be necessary to commence subsidising such services for those who otherwise would not be able to afford them. It is also worthwhile considering introducing nursing insurance within the social insurance system, in the situation where forecasts indicate that the scale of risk will grow up to the level at which social insurance will be relatively the cheapest form of financing these services, ensuring the maintenance of solidarity between generations.

The policy of solidarity between generations should cover all three generations – in pre-working age, working age and post-working age. The distribution of demographic risk connected with the aging society should take place between generations in the working and post-working age. On the other hand, the development of retirement scheme promises for the future should reflect the burden acceptable on a long-term basis for the working age generation.

In order to promote the transition to a knowledge society, EU policies promote the modernisation of work organisation, the definition of lifelong learning strategies, the quality of the working environment and “active aging”, in particular raising the average retirement age. Demographic changes reinforce the importance of these policies, whilst raising new questions:

- How can the organisation of work be modernised, to take into account the specific needs of each age group?
- How can young couples’ integration in working life be facilitated and how can we help them to find a balance between flexibility and security to bring up their children, to train and update their skills to meet the demands of the labour market? How can we enable older people to work more?

Not giving up basic protective functions, regulations should hinder neither external flexibility, i.e. the possibility to adjust the size and the structure of employment to the needs of a company, nor internal flexibility, i.e. proper organisation of working time. In countries with a well-developed statutory labour law system, some “decentralisation” measures might be considered, i.e. the extension of possibilities to regulate the terms of employment and remuneration on a contractual basis. It would allow for a better adjustment to sector- or region-specific requirements.

Under the re-launched Lisbon Strategy, employment security should not be equalised with the security of a concrete job. The security of employment is indeed predicated on the worker’s adaptation skills – ability to adapt to qualification and organisational requirements of the labour market. Modern economy creates demand for highly skilled, flexible workers. The governments together with social partners should create opportunities which would facilitate gaining education as well as constant skill upgrading and updating. To allow for employees’ access to

such opportunities, it is necessary to develop care services for children and elderly people. These solutions will also serve the needs of young persons who will decide themselves how to best balance the time they devote to work, family and training.

The elimination of early retirement schemes and granting disability pension benefits in the case of actual incapacity for work only, should increase the pressure on the employment of elderly people who will actively aim to stay in employment. Another critical factor is to regulate the benefit system towards a system that would be performance-based rather than based on the length of service. Age management in companies and investments in the development of the skills and competence of elderly people should be promoted. Such actions may also increase the level of employment of older workers.

- How can work organisation best be adapted to a new distribution between the generations, with fewer young people and more older workers?
- How can the various stakeholders in the Union contribute, in particular by way of social dialogue and civil society?

It is of fundamental importance to make working conditions and organisation of work easily adaptable to the age of employees. With the aging population, the demand for older employees should increase. Adequate regulative and information policies may serve a better utilisation of skills of elderly people on the labour market. In particular, combating the myth of low productivity of older workers is of crucial significance.

Meanwhile, at least two directions of action at the national and Community levels may be suggested which could ease the intergenerational accommodation. One could be labelled “Mature Workers Are Good for Business” and indicate various business and job opportunities for workers, emerging due to the aging of the society, i.e., newly established or expanding industries connected with the needs of older customers, or higher efficiency of mature workers in developing age-sensitive products and in winning and retaining the loyalty of elderly customers. That would also allow for stressing the effectiveness of upgrading and updating vocational skills of mature workers. Research into those issues should be commissioned, good practices identified and publicised. The other direction should focus on promoting healthy life-styles. As much as continuous education empowers people to adjust to the needs of the flexible labour market, healthy life-style promotion would empower them to stay in employment well into their older years. With the development of the open method of coordination in healthcare, a thorough thought should be given to adequately include public health issues, being also of importance in respect to the labour market.

Flexible forms of employment and gradual retirement are the obvious examples of eliminating, through better regulation, some of the barriers keeping people away from the labour market. Defined contribution retirement schemes provide strong financial incentives to delay retirement, i.e. to stay in employment. Reduction in regulations guarding access to service provision in many EU Member States would open up gainful employment opportunities for many young people (incidentally, it could also slow down the increase in the cross-border service provision). There are also other possibilities to reduce the forcing out of younger and generally lower-skilled workers from the official labour market. From the economic standpoint, we know what we should do to make it easier for businesses to hire people and create more official jobs. So far, however, social consensus in favour of such changes has been successfully reached in some EU Member States only. There is an important EU role in forging this kind of a consensus.

The European coordination of retirement scheme reforms is promoting more flexible bridges between work and retirement.

- Should there be a statutory retirement age, or should flexible, gradual retirement be permitted?
- How can elderly people participate in economic and social life, e.g. through a combination of wages and pensions, new forms of employment (part-time, temporary) or other forms of financial incentive?
- How can activities employing elderly people in the voluntary sector and the social economy be developed?
- What should be the response to pensioner mobility between Member States, in particular with regard to social protection and health care?
- How should we be investing in health promotion and prevention so that the people of Europe continue to benefit from longer healthy life expectancy?

There should be a minimum retirement age at which retirement pension benefits may be paid out, but it should not mandate anybody to retire, being a point in time rather as of which retirement is possible.

Defined contribution retirement schemes provide a strong financial incentive to delay retirement. Part-time or temporary employment is a good way to facilitate gradual retirement. Retired persons should be allowed to pursue employment or other gainful activity without losing their retirement pension benefits. It is also important to support the employment of persons with disabilities, and the payment of the disability pension, as the benefit substituting earned income should be treated as final measure in the case of there being no employment opportunities for a disabled person.

As mentioned above, in 2003, Poland passed a law regulating voluntary work. The law was particularly focused on first-time labour market entrants. Its provisions, however, apply to all persons, including the elderly.

The right to establish residence in any of the Member States is one of the basic rights of EU citizens. It seems that the Community law in place allows pensioners and other citizens to enjoy this right. Should there arise any difficulties in this regard, they should be eliminated.

Proper structural conditions should be created to facilitate restraining the increase in health care costs, e.g. by designing health care systems based on the competition of health care and insurance providers and on external verification of procedures according to the criterion of patients' real needs. Introducing some low fees for medical advice may be a simple way of preventing the abuse of the system. Preventive health care should be one of the health policy priorities.

- The coordination of national social protection policies is due to be extended to long-term care for the elderly in 2006. How can this help to manage demographic change?
- In particular, should a distinction be drawn between retirement pensions and dependency allowances?
- How do we train the human resources needed and provide them with good quality jobs in a sector which is often characterized by low salaries and low qualifications?

- How do we arrive at a balanced distribution of care for the very old between families, social services and institutions? What can be done to help families? What can be done to support local care networks?
- And what can be done to reduce inequality between men and women when they reach retirement age?
- How can new technologies support older people?

Due to the increasing share of elderly people in the population structure, a reasonable direction is to extend the open method of coordination to include policies focused on elderly people, covering such areas as long-term care policy, and in a broader sense – preventive measures, health care and social policy towards these people. In view of the streamlining process, such a comprehensive approach should be strongly promoted.

There should be a distinction and clear division between old - age pensions and dependency allowances. Old - age pensions are insurance-based and linked to the length of employment and pay levels. Dependency allowances constitute income support when a person concerned requires additional care, i.e. less frequent. It is critical to make care services available and to ensure stable financing thereof.

Churches and other religious organisations (e.g. convents) have been traditional providers of care services, among others, for the elderly. Many NGOs do the same. All these organisations and persons working for them are not profit-oriented, and they usually provide good quality care at affordable prices. They deserve every public support, which should be provided according to fair and transparent procedures. Supporting the involvement of that type is one of the objectives of the European Strategy for Social Inclusion.

Naturally, Churches and other religious organisations as well as NGOs are not and cannot be the sole providers of long-term care for the elderly. With the increasing demand for such services in general and the stress on their quality, pay increases in the sector should follow. Thus, more people may well be attracted to those professions. Therefore, the sector does not have to be forever doomed to be characterised by low salaries. Citizens should rather be helped in arranging for their long-term care themselves, as the situation may require. In respect to some persons, it could be done, for example, through incentives to take out additional private insurance. In respect to others – through adequate allowances based on the income criterion. Another possibility would be to extend basic social insurance package to include long-term care. Unfortunately, this may result in increasing the insurance premium, thus adding to the already excessive tax-wedge in many EU countries.

It should also be pointed out that the increased investment in R&D to which the EU countries committed themselves under the re-launched Lisbon Strategy should, *inter alia*, result in eliminating or alleviating many problems today associated with old age. Other developed countries are quite possibly also working on the development of technologies “adding health to longevity”. Thus, extrapolations of current trends on which predictions of a dramatic increase in the demand for long-term care for the elderly are based may not necessarily materialise in full.

In any case, the fair distribution of a potential additional burden resulting from increased demand for long-term care for the very old should, first of all, respect the preferences of the citizens themselves. And, as the above mentioned studies suggest, they seem to prefer such care be mostly provided in families, while the elderly themselves seem, to a significant extent, agreeable

to bear extra costs of care. It would thus appear that the government policies should be geared towards assisting families in this task, and towards helping the elderly to pay for the services needed, in case they do not have a family to ensure necessary care, or if they require such care which cannot be provided by families.

To reduce inequality between sexes, efforts should be continued in Poland to equalise the retirement age of women and men. So far, attempts by the government to do so have not been successful due to lack of consent to proposed changes on the part of women themselves. Other than that, such inequalities should not be dealt with through retirement schemes but they should be rectified through the labour market policy.

The development of technologies can be expected to add “life to age”, and more specifically – health to longevity. How exactly, this is not for social policy experts to determine. Yet, one may expect that the results of technological progress relevant for social policy will, on one hand, allow people to remain economically active longer than ever before and, on the other hand, limit the period of intensive care often required in the end-of-life stage.

- Should the European Union be promoting exchanges and regular (e.g. annual) analysis of demographic change and its impact on societies and all the policies concerned?
- Should the Union’s financial instruments – particularly the structural funds – take better account of these changes? If so, how?
- How could European coordination of employment and social protection policies better take on board demographic change?
- How can European social dialogue contribute to the better management of demographic change? What role can civil society and civil dialogue with young people play?
- How can demographic change be made an integral part of all the Union’s internal and external policies?

The EU should be promoting the exchange of information and regular analyses of demographic changes and their impact on societies and the social policy. However, the frequency of the above mentioned analyses needs to be discussed, i.e. whether they should be annual or perhaps longer intervals for such analyses are appropriate, as demographic changes and changes in, e.g. retirement policy do not take place on an annual basis.

It seems reasonable to revise the priorities of the European Social Fund so that they better address the demographic changes observed. Possible modifications might, e.g. allow elderly people organisations to apply for project co-financing.

The employment, education and economic development goals the European Union has set out for itself are very ambitious already. If implemented, they should allow the Member States to successfully deal with the aspects of “aging societies” currently perceived as problematic. Recently, some changes in the OMC implementation have been introduced, especially in regard to those objectives that the Member States currently focus on, i.e. growth and employment. Time is needed to see how effective those changes have been before any new amendments are put forward.

The state of the European social dialogue is entirely in the hands of social partners themselves. From the government point of view, any support for the implementation of the policy priorities

set out under the re-launched Lisbon Strategy would be helpful as they would enrich social dialogue at the national level. Many specific actions which, when supported by social partners, would contribute to more expeditious achievement of those priorities have been mentioned above.

As suggested above, demography-related issues are the key challenge for the entire Union for now and well into the future. Therefore, “demography mainstreaming” should be considered in designing and implementing all programmes of the Member States and the EU in the area of social policy, employment and economic policy, as much as it has already been the case in regard to gender mainstreaming. The European policy should make a wider use of best practices, both of the Member States and other countries, in solving demographic problems and emphasise the liability of the Member States for the urgent commencement of courageous and practical actions in this area.