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Consultation "**Confronting demographic change, a new solidarity between the generations**" COM (2005) 94

I am replying on behalf of the British Society for Population Studies (BSPS) to the Commission Green Paper "**Confronting demographic change, a new solidarity between the generations**" COM (2005) 94

We strongly welcome the interest in these issues and encourage the Commission to continue both its analytic and policy interest in this area, but these comments will be confined principally to the core demographic issues.

We believe that discussion of demographic trends and managing their impact should take place at European level, but also at the global, national and sub-nation levels as well. This should be informed by high-quality research and statistical evidence. Although we strongly welcome the fact that statistical data are now freely available through the NewCronos database, major gaps remain: for example, there were no EU-wide population projections produced between 1999 and 2005, although these are crucial for a well-informed debate.

Much of this debate is concerned with the implications of demographic change, rather than with attempts to change these patterns themselves, which is sensible, and we return later to the issue of 'population policies', based around increasing fertility and/or increasing in-migration.

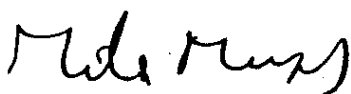
The assumption that population growth is desirable is implicit throughout the paper (e.g. "**Immigration** has recently mitigated the impact of falling birth rates in many countries." p3, or "Never in history has there been economic growth without population growth", p5). However, it is possible to have increasing per caput economic growth without positive population growth. The Report also assumes that the "gap" between actual (1.5 children) and the "number that children they want" (2.3 children) (p5) is real and amenable to policy intervention. The reasons for this gap are identified as "late access to employment, job instability, expensive housing and lack of incentives", but to address these would require substantial additional resources, which in practice would need to be redeployed from other groups

(possibly such as from those in higher education or from older people), so any such initiatives would have to be carefully analyzed to identify their effects across the whole population and on the wider economic environment.

The second demographic mechanism for increasing population growth is by increasing immigration, and we are asked to comment on whether immigration "can mitigate certain negative effects of demographic ageing". The Green Paper is skeptical about this, and we endorse that conclusion. The number of elderly people (e.g. those aged 75 and over) is likely to increase by 70% in the next three decades or so. Given that the working age population is projected to shrink over that period, the required number of new migrants would have to be comparable to the indigenous working age population to maintain the same ratio between these two age groups, and the same issue would arise as these migrants themselves became old. Europe can have either a population with a relatively high fraction of older people with overall low or negative population growth, or a lower fraction but with a rapidly growing population: it cannot have low population growth and a young population age structure simultaneously.

Therefore, we do not regard an explicit population policy (e.g. based on a target overall desired population size or fertility rate) as appropriate, but as the Green Paper emphasises, these trends will have a profound impact across the Community in years to come. The policy responses will need to include all the main areas such as education, employment, housing, social security and health. The Green Paper identifies issues such as job insecurity as harmful to family building, but under the label of "flexibility" it is being promoted as a mechanism to increase economic competitiveness. It would be helpful if policy-makers were aware of the impacts in other areas, and we would re-iterate the need for wider publicity and discussion of demographic issues so that they remain at the forefront of debates across all policy areas.

Yours Sincerely



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Green Paper on Demographic Change  
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