



Deutscher
Caritasverband

EU - Vertretung - DCV Freiburg

rue De Pascale 4-6
B-1040 Brüssel

Tel : +32 2 230.40.81
Fax : + 32 2 230.57.04
e-mail: euvertretung@caritas.de

Opinion on the EU Commission's Green Paper:

“Confronting Demographic Change – a New Solidarity between the Generations”

Introduction:

Europe's society faces an unprecedented demographic change which will entail massive consequences for the economic and social situation of the entire European Union. The facts presented by the European Commission in its Green Paper highlight challenges that concern all EU Member States: all Member States witness an increase in the share of elderly people, whereas the number of children suffers a visible decline. In the light of current knowledge, the EU's population will start to decrease by 2025. In one third of the regions of the EU there has already been a fall in population since the 1990s. With regard to this Europe-wide threatening demographic trend, the EU Commission calls for resolute measures in the area of population policy. The Green Paper starts a debate on the question of how to tackle this trend which is an obstacle to growth, and what role the Union is to play regarding the necessary measures.

Evaluation Summary:

The DCV (German Caritas Association) welcomes the Commission's Green Paper and its start of a discussion process within the European Union on the question of how to best react to the demographic trend in all Member States, which constitutes an obstacle to growth. This document deals primarily with issues relating to social and family policy where the EU merely assumes a supporting role. However, the Commission acknowledges that even an EU policy that follows the new Lisbon Strategy by focussing on growth and employment can be defined only within the context of social policy orientations for the future.

The DCV is of the opinion that the European Union should identify the phenomenon of demographic change as a joint challenge and discuss it in the context of the “Open Method of Co-ordination” (OMC). This process does not interfere with the powers of the Member States. According to the OMC, any necessary processes of change should first be initiated and supported at local, regional and national levels, before the European level becomes involved, on the basis of subsidiarity, by issuing political guidelines as recommendations for the Member States to act upon. Herewith one has to consider the German particularity of possessing a complex and effective network made up of both public and non-statutory welfare services.

Given the variety of topics mentioned and the numerous possibilities to achieve demographic impulses in individual areas by improving framework conditions for families, the DCV is convinced that it is possible to slow down the process of demographic ageing this way, but not to „solve“ it as described in the Green Paper.

This is about tackling the challenge and about shaping the future by balancing the legitimate interests of the generations.

In the end, the EU citizens need to basically trust their social security if one is to face the challenges of demographic change. Therefore, one of the central challenges for the EU, besides issues relating to economic and employment policies, is to start a discussion process on the „European Social Model“ with all relevant stakeholders including civil society, and leading to a clear vision for a social Europe.

In the context of demographic change special attention must be given to measures designed to support life with children and relatives who require nursing care, and to make the founding of a family an attractive lifestyle model. Nevertheless, changes must not be motivated by mere population policy interests, nor must family policy be reduced to balancing family life and work. Of equal importance to families is to find adequate financial framework conditions and to be able to fall back onto effective support mechanisms for dealing with daily life.

The DCV appeals in favour of not stigmatising the ageing of societies as a problem as such. Tackling the lower rate of innovation and production growth and the foreseeable social protection problems demands a policy which makes use of the experience of the older generation, and which promotes their vitality by offering challenging tasks and processes of lifelong learning.

With regard to the topics and policy areas mentioned, the DCV finds:

- Support must be given to measures designed to help balance family and professional tasks as well as civic interests. Part of this approach is an increase in quality and quantity of day care facilities for children. Of equal importance are structures designed to help families when giving nursing care to relatives. But the DCV is also an advocate of free choice for parents to what degree they desire to be responsible for the care and education of their children, in particular during their first years, and thus are not available for employment, fully or partially. Free choice requires a variety of options available. This demands that adequate transfer payments be earmarked for enhancing day care for children in order to also secure models for taking care of one's children oneself.
- The DCV considers immigration to the Member States of the European Union a humanitarian necessity in the face of world-wide political instability, and welcomes clear immigration rules and reliable integration measures in this context. The DCV warns against viewing immigration solely against a background of population policy requirements and economic utility. Such does not reflect the requirements of a migration and integration policy guided by Europe's humanistic principles. In particular the issue of immigration must not be reduced to satisfying the need for workers in the EU countries, while at the same time more and more obstacles make it difficult for refugees to be admitted or families to be reunited. Immigration will only be able to slow down the processes of demographic ageing. It would be more effective, to develop proper integration measures designed to promote and use the potential available among those migrants who already have been residing in the EU for some time. Unfortunately, this aspect is not mentioned in the Green Paper.
- The DCV is concerned that more and more responsibility is put on the shoulders of less and less children and young people without any appropriate investments being made into this "resource in ever shorter supply". An empowerment initiative should be launched designed to offer chances in life to young people from all social backgrounds and to enable a maximum level of equal opportunities. This requires an active policy in the fields of youth, education and labour market, which challenges particularly the industry as well as the political leaders at national, regional and local levels to assume joint responsibility for the education and training of young people.
- The DCV appeals to companies to offer more flexible working time models, designed to fit in with the various stages of life, and open up adequate employment opportunities in particular for parents and older workers. In the interest of business management and the national economy there is a need for new HR strategies to be able to effectively counter the already apparent negative impact due to a lack of orientation geared towards age and family. In these efforts the companies must receive

support from the State by defining framework conditions, and from the know-how coming out of research and science.

- The Green Paper addresses the issue of antidiscrimination only in the context of migration. The DCV states that current policy regarding the elderly has also a trend to exclude them, and supports all initiatives designed to promote old people's vitality and reintegrate them more actively into social life. Older people with a health-related handicap and their family members must be able to fall back onto support measures geared to their needs.

With regard to the individual issues and the ensuing questions, the DCV issues the following opinion:

1. The Challenges of European Demography

1.1. The Challenge of a Low Birth Rate

Report:

The Commission describes the low birth rate in combination with the process of ageing in the Member States as a challenge for economic policy. It states that never before has there been economic growth without concomitant population growth. Based on the fact that the number of children desired falls behind the number of children actually born, it demands structures which allow potential parents to see their desire for children fulfilled. The EU Commission criticizes the fact that families, who play an important role for the solidarity among the generations, do not find framework conditions encouraging them to raise children. Examples of such obstacles are in particular the late and precarious access to employment, expensive housing and the lack of incentives to establish a family (family benefits, parental leave, child care, equal pay).

Evaluation:

It is not possible to "solve" the process of demographic ageing because, though its scope can be managed, in the end it will probably turn out to be irreversible. The task is then to tackle this challenge and to shape the future by balancing the legitimate interests of the generations. If there has never been economic growth without population growth in the past, this does not imply that such will never happen in the future.

A more politically minded EU needs to develop a "social model" that takes into consideration all social needs, including the desire to live life with children. Infrastructure measures are helpful particularly for those who desire to have children or already have children and want to and can continue in employment. This restriction shows that enhancing infrastructure alone has only a very limited effect on boosting demographic growth, because in all European countries there are numerous parents who can no longer participate in the labour market because they have to look after their children, willingly or unwillingly so.

The DCV shares the Commission's view that measures are needed to facilitate a greater balance between work and family life. Women still have to invest more time and energy if they want to achieve in their vocational careers what men have achieved. There is still a lack of quantity and quality with regard to the infrastructure of child care facilities, so that parents in all regions of Germany still do not have the help and support needed when raising children. For many women the care for old and frail relatives is a double burden besides their employment, to which they do not desire to add by having children of their own.

Reducing the urgency of these problems alone does not yet guarantee a turnaround in the demographic trend. We cannot exclude that the concept of a European Internal Market geared towards growth and employment contributes towards people's behaviour falling along those same lines, and they thus regard children as a burden. Still, by taking into account the needs of the Welfare State, young people may receive more incentives to start a family. For this reason we see a need for action in the following areas.

Opinion on the Questions:

A Better Work/Life Balance

The option of a better work/life balance can render family life more attractive again for many people. Part of this is a quantitative and qualitative improvement of day care facilities for children. However, both the organisation responsible for the facility as well as the parents must be able to pay for such a qualified child care. Instead of subsidising care services via reduced VAT rates, the DCV favours transfer payments that enable the parents to actually use and pay for the needed infrastructure. In Germany, no value-added tax is levied on services of day care facilities and this should not be changed.

The DCV welcomes an approach that considers assistance and care for the elderly and their active involvement when discussing infrastructure issues. The envisaged loss of vitality in an ageing society can be effectively countered by programmes for self-activation and more opportunities for lifelong learning. Enhanced vitality among the elderly means also a relief for relatives who provide nursing care – usually the women.

Parents must be in a position to claim the support services offered by social and youth welfare bodies. This is the only way to encourage young people to raise a family.

Equality between Men and Women:

Many young people will find family life a more attractive option if there is a more equality in employment coupled with a more balanced distribution of family-related tasks. But this requires countering the persisting stigmatisation of housework as a minor job. Equal opportunities for women in employment also means that women no longer need to invest a disproportional share of their time and energy in the implementation of their career planning, and thus will have more time and space available for planning a family.

Both fathers and mothers alike should be entitled to claim parental leave with full job guarantee. In this regard the DCV is in favour of incentive systems designed to promote a sharing of parental leave between both parents, and a financial compensation for the opportunity costs inherent in child-raising. The material equipment of poor families is a priority.

1.2. The Possible Contribution of Immigration

Report:

The EU Commission regards immigration as a possible way to counter the loss in population numbers. Such immigration would require accompanying measures like an effective and transparent administration and integration and equal opportunities policies, in the interest of the immigrant and the host society alike. The question if such immigration is actually desired, must be discussed at the national and European levels.

Evaluation:

The DCV considers immigration to the Member States of the European Union a humanitarian necessity in the face of world-wide political instability, and welcomes clear admission rules and reliable integration measures in this context. The Green Paper quotes the European Council meeting in Thessaloniki (June 2003), which justly highlights the importance of integration policy, and links this with its importance for meeting the demographic and economic challenges. However, the DCV warns against viewing immigration solely against a background of population policy necessities and economic utility.

Opinion on the Questions:

Immigration as a Compensation for Demographic Ageing

Immigration can only mitigate part of the negative impact of an ageing population. Experience shows that immigrants are quick to adapt their procreative behaviour to that of the host society. There would hence be a need for ongoing massive immigration of young people in order to effectively counter demographic ageing. Recruiting qualified groups of people carries also the danger that the home countries suffer a lack of these same specialists. It is also doubtful if a necessary number of people would be willing to leave their countries.

Immigration by people with little or no skills, which might be envisageable on a larger scale, bears the risk that this group of people fills certain gaps, e.g. in the area of nursing care at home, thus becoming second class workers with low wages, precarious residence status and low social standing. For the host countries this might lead to a short-term alleviation of their problems. But in the long run this leads to a further devaluation of those activities. And this type of labour immigration is no real solution for the migrants themselves. We already see signs that even they would be replaced by new (even cheaper) labour after a short period of time. Only immigration would make sense that guarantees good working conditions, just remuneration and social integration to migrants as well.

Integration Measures for Immigrants

So far only insufficient attention has been given to the integration of immigrants. This is reflected in a lack of social, societal and political participation – e.g. evidenced by educational failure, disproportionate unemployment, bad health care and a high percentage of migrants depending on social benefits. Integration measures must start here and aim for a higher degree of legal, social and societal equality. Migrants must not be seen simply as people who need support. They rather must be accepted as a group enriching society. Their potential must be realised and put to use more than has been the case.

Among the necessary measures are: early facilitation, language training alongside school, promoting the mother tongue as first language and/or multi-lingualism, reducing structures fostering exclusion in school and vocational training, further improvements regarding the cross-border recognition of diplomas, abolishing the secondary access to the labour market, developing the skills of the employed by further training, job-related language training.

In addition, there is a need for legal integration by secure residence status and protection against expulsion.

The family is an important factor for promoting integration. Hence, family reunification should be available without restrictions for children until the age of at least 18 years und their core family. With regards to the family reunifications with other family members generous provisions should be striven for. Migrants need the same level of social protection as EU citizens. Therefore all migrants who legally and permanently reside in an EU country must have equal access to social benefits. They must enjoy equal working conditions. Additionally, once an employment contract or a professional career come to an end, the same social rights must be maintained, independently whether the migrant remains in the country, moves to another country or returns to his home country.

Societal and political participation should be promoted by granting voting rights to nationals of third countries at the local level, and by issuing open transparent rules for naturalisation.

Anti-Discrimination Rules, the Structural Funds, and the Employment Strategy

Community instruments like the anti-discrimination rules, the Structural Funds and the Employment Strategy can contribute towards creating a context for migrants and citizens alike where both enjoy equal rights of participating in society, economic progress and the labour market, independently of their origin, age, disability, religion or gender. As a side-effect, such might also help overcome the “challenge of a low birth rate”.

2. A New Solidarity Between the Generations

2.1. Better Integration of Young People

Report:

The demographic change will alter the quantitative and qualitative relationship between the generations. Given the fact that more and more responsibility is put on the shoulders of less and less children and young people, this “scarce resource” ought to be handled more responsibly. The EU Commission criticises the integration problems young people face: It is not acceptable that integration into society is even made more

difficult for young people by a lack of education, unemployment, the risk of poverty and discrimination. Here it is in particular the education systems that have an important role to play.

Evaluation:

Faced with the fact that in Germany 15% of young people in a year do not successfully finish their vocational training, the DCV requests a qualification initiative designed to give best possible chances in life to young people from all social backgrounds, and a maximum degree of equal opportunities.

Opinion on the Questions:

Impact of Community Measures

Reducing the risk of exclusion and poverty for young people has become an important topic for the EU, as part of the Lisbon Strategy entitled "Youth Pact". The EU Member States pursue the objective to promote the vocational and social integration of young people as well as their mobility. The focus is in particular also on disadvantaged young people.

In a national action plan the German government committed itself to implementing the employment guidelines of the EU, namely to cut in half the number of people without vocational training by 2010.

Improving the Educational Infrastructure

A proper education and initial training for young people form the basis of their social and political participation. This requires active youth, education and labour market policies, challenging in particular the political leaders at national, regional and local levels to share in the responsibility for education and training of young people.

The sooner support and help is given and persons with parental responsibility are put in a position to educate and support their children (more) capably, the easier it is for young people to develop into an independent and socially competent person - a general objective described in the Children and Youth Welfare Act.

The bridges from elementary to primary and secondary schooling and from vocational training to employment must be defined in a holistic system of care, education and training in such a way that children and youth no longer fall outside the system and become permanently excluded. In this context priority must be given to the increasing phenomenon of school drop-out.

The Transfer from School to Employment

In order to successfully integrate (disadvantaged) youth we need a high degree of permeability between school and vocational training, and concepts within the school system that avoid an excessively early selection and stigmatisation of young people. This requires an improved institutional and equal co-operation between youth support agencies and schools, with the aim to give better and/or more adequate support to young people who are educationally challenged and disadvantaged, and thus to give them improved chances of access to vocational training and the labour market.

In the case of youth with educational and social handicaps we need low-threshold and modular tiers of qualification and training designed to guarantee that even youth who rather have practical and crafts-oriented talents can develop a professional perspective. Education and training for all young people remains a task for the entire society, in the individual countries as well as for the whole of Europe.

Here the EU's Structural Funds with their measures can make a contribution towards creating reliable framework conditions that allow young people to receive support that is geared to their individual needs and interests.

2.2. A Global Approach to the Working Life Cycle

Report:

The EU Commission assumes that companies in the future will once again rely more heavily on the experiences and skills of their older employees given the falling numbers of younger workers. In order to guarantee a reintegration of older employees in the work process the Commission suggests to create more flexible bridges between work and retirement. Even younger employees will need flexible working times so that for example they have more time to be with their children during certain phases.

Evaluation:

The DCV welcomes the demand for flexibilisation of employment in accordance with the various job opportunities during different stages of life, as well as measures designed to offer more job opportunities once again to older employees. Many companies are still quite unprepared for the huge shift in the age composition of their workforce. They do not pursue an age-specific HR strategy. We already witness the first consequences of this lack of age orientation in the HR departments. An increase in maladjusted requirements, i.e. excessive physical demands and intellectual underchallenge, lead to limitations of performance capacity, an increase in illnesses due to overwork, and the invisible social exclusion of elderly capable people by putting them out into early retirement. Companies have to face these challenges immediately for reasons of business and general economics.

Opinion on the Questions:

Opportunities for Modernising the Organisation of Work

Practical experience shows that opting for an age-adapted HR strategy entails numerous advantages for the company, the individual employee and in addition for the entire national economy. From a business standpoint it strengthens the company's competitiveness. From the viewpoint of the employees it enhances the quality of life in social terms because integration in the labour market equals social integration. Society or the national economy as a whole, via a higher employment rate, benefit from increased stability for the social security systems and improved competitiveness which in turn will increase employment.

An age-adapted HR strategy consists of mainly five elements given the increasingly scarcer and ageing workforce pool:

- **Longer stay within the company:**
Job tasks are designed in such a way that employees can fulfil them until they are 65 years old. All employees – including older ones – receive an opportunity to gain qualification and increase their skills. The abilities of older employees must be recognised to a higher degree.
- **Support for getting a job even at an older age:**
Companies make a conscious choice to employ older, capable people and reach out to them via specific HR measures.
- **Sustainable Integration of Young Employees:**
Given the decreasing share of younger employees it will be of vital importance for companies and society to integrate younger people as much as possible into the labour market. In order to facilitate young parents' integration in working life, it is necessary to take into consideration particularly the concerns of young couple with children, by allowing more flexible bridges between working life and phases of care for the family. This would also contribute to bring about the needed rise in women's employment rate.
- **Systematic Transfer of Know-How between the Generations:**
The exchange of knowledge between older, more experienced employees and the younger generation must be consciously promoted. Thus the know-how in a company becomes a joint asset so that existing knowledge is being used more effectively, and shifts in the age structure of the workforce can be assimilated much more easily.
- **Ergonomic Restructuring of Companies:**

Work organisation and –requirements need to be adapted to older employees (45+ years). It requires a health policy at company level in order to guarantee continuous good health and consequently a long-lasting working life. The employees shall be actively involved in defining their working conditions.

The State must accompany a company's HR policy by setting national framework conditions. Part of this are, among others, support for older and younger people to become (re-)integrated in employment, increasing facilities for child care, the right to claim childrearing leave and/or childrearing allowance as well as the legal regulations on part-time work, in particular the specific part-time scheme for older workers.

A better integration of the elderly requires the scientific community and professionals to develop new HR policy concepts. The State should promote those activities. In addition this must be accompanied by a change in mentality in society. We need solidarity across generations, so as not to allow any discrimination of people on the grounds of their age or their family situation (child-rearing, nursing care). The focus must be on the entire working life cycle of a person:

- The individual phases of employment (vocational training, start of working life, phase of raising a family, phase as “older” employee, end of working life) entail different requirements for the employee and his workplace.
- Throughout his professional career a worker has different preferences.

In a joint effort the organisations of the industry (representative bodies of employers and employees), science and the national government must promote the change in awareness within society. The DCV welcomes the support from the European Union in the form of campaigns and funds for projects.

2.3. A New Place for “Elderly People”

Report:

The Commission highlights the fact that until 2030 there will be a significant increase in the number of people between 65 and 79 years of age and who are more mobile and can lead a mostly independent life due to their financial and health situation. In particular the US example has shown that this group possesses a potential they can and want to actively bring into the social and economic life of society.

Evaluation:

In the light of its work with the elderly, the DCV supports the perspective to involve older people actively in society's life. But it duly points out that this group does also include people who are economically weak or need support due to their health limitations.

Opinion on the Questions:

Starting Retirement

There still should be a statutory minimum retirement age so that insurance bodies can continue to calculate the duration of pension payments. However, such a threshold should not lead to an automatism, but should enable each insured to decide starting retirement at a later date. But in the context of more flexible employment models it might be envisaged to link the start of retirement to a minimum number of years with contributions paid into pension insurance schemes.

Participation of “Senior Citizens”

Involving “senior citizens” in economic and social life requires multiple pathways due to the differing needs and expectations of this heterogeneous group. This requires educational offers so that they can develop their knowledge and skills, incentives for companies to continue employing “senior citizens” or to recruit them,

and specific PR on areas where “senior citizens” can get involved. A helpful element might be models that combine wages and pensions as well as flexible forms of employment (part-time, temporary).

Employment in the Voluntary Sector and the Social Economy

Even voluntary non-profit associations and the social economy must work on enlarging their opportunities for older people to find employment. In addition there are numerous possibilities for “senior citizens” to find work as a volunteer. This also requires targeted PR and advertising so that offer and demand be stimulated, and it needs accompanying qualification and forms of recognition. Institutions like Senior Citizens’ Bureaus, day centres for the elderly, volunteer centres etc. play an important role in increasing offer and demand. They even are a framework for self-organised activities to receive help and support from other institutions.

Investing in Health Promotion and Prevention

Prevention is of importance for any age group, in particular where disadvantages and exclusion pose a threat or are already a reality. We need special measures for “the elderly” in order to take into account their different resources. Via respective European initiatives in the fields of social protection and health care, e.g. by using the OMC, the mobility of pensioners between the Member States can be increased.

2.4. Solidarity with the Very Elderly

Report:

The Commission underlines the fact that the rise in life expectancy will lead to a sharp increase of the share of people of 80+ years. The percentage of singles in this group and of those needing help or nursing care is higher than among younger people. Families must be supported to a greater extent because they will not on their own be able to solve the matter of caring for these people, and will even be less in a position to provide such help due to increased employment rates and geographical distance.

Evaluation:

The DCV welcomes that the EU Commission gives separate consideration to the situation of those elderly whose handicaps prevent them from being involved in the same manner. Action must be taken to ensure in good time that these senior citizens and their relatives will continue to find the necessary infrastructure and staff required.

Opinion on the Questions:

Pensions and Transfer Payments

A person who needs services in order to live a (largely) independent life cannot usually finance such with his pension income or means alone. For this reason there is a need for additional funding resources, like e.g. a long-term nursing care insurance.

Guaranteeing Necessary Staff Levels

The decrease in the number of employable people and the concomitant rise in the number of people requiring nursing care will lead to staffing bottlenecks and will put the nursing profession into sharp competition with other professions. For this reason efforts must be deployed to ensure that the profession is rendered attractive by good salaries and favourable working conditions. The quality of vocational training needs further improvement, and a transfer between the different nursing professions must be possible.

But it will not be sufficient to opt for professional care alone. Professional care must be accompanied by other therapeutic job categories, by the involvement of relatives, and a large number of volunteers (honorary work).

Guaranteeing Care

It is necessary to start with those relatives who are care-givers, and offer them advise, training and relief in order to prevent overburdening, and to motivate them to seek the timely help of social services and institutions.

The so-called “social net” has gaps particularly in the case of very old people and may even not exist at all. Developing new networks for neighbourhood care does usually require some kind of organisation taking the initiative, recruiting and motivating people to get involved, and co-ordinating the action. Non-profit organisations in all Member States like the associations of non-statutory welfare in Germany support in multiple ways the creation of social networks.

3. Conclusion: What Should the Union’s Role be?

Report:

This section presents the three main priorities the European Union ought to follow in the face of demographic change.

1. Promoting demographic growth together with addressing the question what value our society attaches to children and families. Solutions mentioned are for example the modernisation of social protection systems, increasing the rate of female employment, incentives for raising the birth rate and a judicious use of immigration.
2. A balanced “burden sharing” between the generations with regard to working time throughout life, the funding needs stemming from pensions and health-related expenditure, and a just distribution of the “benefits of growth”.
3. Finding new bridges between the stages of life, designed to take into account the need to participate in social and economic life as well as the need for education and having time to care for one’s children.

Opinion on the Questions:

Regular Analysis and Exchange:

In principle we have to welcome the EU’s intention to tackle this challenge that affects all Member States – as the Green Paper cogently demonstrates. The DCV would be happy if the EU could decide to establish a regular exchange and annual analyses on demographic change and its impact on societies and all the policies concerned. The Union should assume a role of co-ordination and information for its Member States, so as to enable an informed discussion and relevant solutions. A way to achieve this might be full-scale and adequately processed information on the basis of existing study and research results (web portal). In addition analyses and statistics could be published on a regular basis, e.g. a biennial EU report on demographic developments. The EU’s ministerial conference lacked such a problem analysis on a scientific basis.

The Union could promote processes of peer review (in the context of the OMC), as already successfully done in other policy areas, and which fosters mutual learning from successful actions and a corresponding implementation of measures.

Equally, the Union could evaluate the plethora of projects it funds and where related measures are being implemented (e.g. integration of older people in the labour market in the context of EQUAL) so as to draw conclusions for the political level and the implementation of measures. It is important that the discussions and solutions avoid a unilateral focus on people as mere elements of the labour force.

Nevertheless, the current attitude shown by the EU and presented to the Member States at the ministerial conference held in Brussels on 11 July 2005 under the title “Confronting Demographic Change – A New Solidarity Between the Generations“ has been quite one-dimensional and only focussed on financial and material aspects. Several speakers rightly underlined that this is not sufficient. Will the decision whether to have children or not be taken solely on the basis of the existence of adequate funding, childcare and other benefits? Does the gap the Green Paper mentions as existing between the desire to have children and the number of children actually born not also reflect a lack of confidence in the future? The referenda on the

European Constitution Treaty held in France and the Netherlands have shown, among other things, that the EU citizens feel insecure and wonder if there is a social Europe and what shape it will take in the future. It is therefore a central challenge for the EU, also with regard to these topics, to initiate a process of discussion on the “European Social Model” with all relevant stakeholders, including civil society, at which end there shall be a clear vision of a social Europe.

There is no vision of what Member States are expected to do and to deliver, so that the impression is easily created that only the EU can offer any solutions. There is equally a lack of consideration given to the potential tasks of civil society in the Community and the Member States. The contours of a “European Social Model”, which needs to be developed, remain unclear. The crisis surrounding the ratification of the Constitution in the Member States offers a chance for re-orienting the EU’s core strategy, in which the social aspect receives its own function. The EU can only reach their economic goals, if the EU formulates social aims and if the social inclusion of all citizens is forwarded.

The EU would make a significant contribution towards social security if it would succeed in re-orienting its overall strategy along the lines of rekindling the citizens’ confidence in the EU and the corresponding national and regional implementation of its employment, economic and social policies. Only on the basis of such social security will it be possible to tackle the challenges of demographic change. Founding a family requires such security, which is not just limited to financial aspects, but also includes the participation of older people in society and the economy as well as a competition-free contract between the generations.

In addition more young people should be involved in the European social discussion, as a confidence-building measure. Today’s youth are those who have to lead the “European Project” in the future. If they lack confidence in and knowledge of Europe, this will not succeed. The “Youth Pact” is a good start in this regard and needs to be strengthened.

Using Financial Instruments – Activating Solidarity in Various Areas of Life

The challenges inherent in demographic change can be anchored in many programmes, in particular those that start in 2007. The PROGRESS Programme can be used to promote the employability of older people, for the development of other models to balance work and family life, as well as for fostering solidarity between the generations.

An important factor should be the revitalisation of areas in life which open up potential for neighbourhood solidarity, which enable the balancing of work and family life, the activation of the elderly and a dialogue across generations.

“Civil Dialogue” as a Bridge to Society

Especially civil society, representing highly diverse social groups, has a two-fold function: to serve as a bridge between policy-makers and the various social groups, and also as a motor for the community where solidarity is being organised or has to be organised once more. Therefore “civil dialogue” is of central importance.

As a German voluntary organisation, the DCV can make a contribution towards this in the national political context by developing suggestions for a solution to the “demographic change” in Germany and channelling those into the European debate.

Freiburg, 5th August 2005