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Plenary Session III

The European Society in the 21st Century: Demography and Inclusion

All announced participants were present with the exception of Sebastian Lazaroiu.
Sulfina Barbu gave a speech in her new capacity as Romanian Minister of Labour, Family and Social Protection.

It was an inspiring session with to the point contributions and questions, also from the audience.

Your rapporteur will sketch a general overview without going into the detailed remarks presented by the individual guest speakers and panellists.

The following main topics were discussed:

Population ageing
Population decline
Immigration
Integration and Inclusion

Ageing and decline of the population in the EU member states are serious if not alarming problems.

Population ageing is influenced by low fertility and increasing longevity.. Life expectancy in the EU, now 75 years for men and 82 for women on average, may increase during this century by an extra 15 to 20 years. The support ratio (workers/non-workers) may change from 4 on 1 to 4 on 2 or even 4 on 3. This will create huge financing problem for our health care systems and our pensions. Anyway, we shall have to raise the retirement age to at least 67 or 68. And where do we get the personnel necessary for the caring for the elder?

As for population decline – which is of course also influenced by low fertility -- there are reports stating that by 2050 the EU population will shrink from 493 million inhabitants to 472 million. The work force could go down with 68 million. Worrying, even alarming figures.

How to manage ageing and decline?

Our first task is to assure that there will be enough economic growth in the future. The EU counts 5.000.000 unemployed young people under 25 years of age. And 23.000.000 unemployed adult people. We need massive investments to create jobs for the unemployed. Continuation of the present trends implies less production and less consumption and therefore less prosperity.

Are their solutions at hand for our specific demographic problems?

The average number of children per woman is 1,5, way below the replacement level of 2,1. But all over Europe, and especially in France, the level seems to be improving. This is an important development but not enough. Family-friendly and child-friendly policies should be encouraged and further developed. This contribution to countering our problems is welcome but only of relative importance.

We should try to improve our labour productivity. That could be an increase in productivity per worker, for example by making more hours per day. Better of course would be an increase in productivity per hour worked. Anyway, we can not expect big results in this field.

Later retirement helps, be it only for cutting pension costs.

More help could come from more labour participation. More elderly people at work and more young women with children. Again, family-friendly and child-friendly policies are of vital importance here.

Life long learning also helps to enhance the work force.

And then there is immigration.

Let it be clear. There will be immigration towards the EU in any circumstance: legally as well as irregularly.. International immigration (from outside the EU) will help in handling the population decline. Although it will not be the panacea.. To counter the decline in the workforce we need 100 million immigrants – some scientists speak of 160 million. Forget about such a figure.

The present attitude in the EU towards immigration is too tense, too negative and too defensive. We need immigrants. In the Arabic world exists a great reservoir of trained youth under the age of 25. Europe should tap in this reservoir, do away with islamofobia and facilitate its visa procedures.

The other side of the immigration coin is integration and inclusion.

Let us be honest. Integration and inclusion takes time. You cannot force it. Do not use coercion to speed up cultural assimilation. This is counterproductive. Many types of forced inclusion measures f.e. obligatory language courses, lessons in citizenship etc. will fail. But we should underline the necessity of respect for the rule of law. Sharia laws and practices are unacceptable.

We could learn something from the United States. Integration happens in America. And it can be stimulated. Examples are civil rights legislation, residential integration through the armed forces and encouraging university admissions. No one contests that one needs patience.

What about circular migration? Immigrants returning to their home country after a number of years. That seems a great concept. Does it work? There are positive signs as concerns intra-European migration. People move from Central and Eastern Europe towards Western Europe but are inclined to return as the economic situation in their home country gets better.

In that case there is no great problem in the field of granting citizenship. The demand simply stays low. For international immigration this can be different, in the EU as well as in the United States. We have to develop EU thinking and regulations concerning double citizenship.