



**COUNCIL OF  
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

**Brussels, 23 May 2007**

**9317/1/07  
REV 1**

**SOC 185**

**NOTE**

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from : Permanent Representatives Committee (Part I)  
to : Council (EPSCO)

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Subject : **Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on the importance of family friendly policies in Europe and the establishment of an Alliance for Families - *Adoption and exchange of views***

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Following the Conclusions of the Spring 2007 European Council and on the basis of a Presidency proposal, the Social Question Working Party met twice to discuss Conclusions on the importance of family friendly policies in Europe and the establishment of an Alliance for Families.

The delegations will find attached the text as agreed by the Permanent Representatives Committee at its meeting on 16 May 2007, which is now submitted to the Council for adoption.

Presidency questions drawn up with a view to the Council's exchange of views are to be found in doc. 8913/07.

**Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on the importance of family-friendly policies in Europe and the establishment of an Alliance for Families**

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE MEMBER STATES, MEETING WITHIN THE COUNCIL

RECALLING

- (1) that at its Spring 2007<sup>1</sup> meeting the European Council agreed that the establishment of an "Alliance for Families" will serve as a platform for the exchange of views and knowledge on family-friendly policies as well as of good practices between Member States, in order better to meet the challenges and seize the opportunities of demographic change;
- (2) the importance accorded by the Commission in its communication entitled "The demographic future of Europe – from challenge to opportunity"<sup>2</sup> to the assertion that Member States can and must find successful political responses to demographic changes and to low birth rates, in particular, and increase labour participation through family-friendly policies;
- (3) the Council Resolution of 22 February 2007<sup>3</sup>, which stresses that demographic change requires further efforts to allow those men and women who wish to work and to raise families to have children without having to sacrifice their careers, by promoting gender equality and by facilitating the reconciliation of work, family and private life, taking into consideration the equal participation of fathers in family tasks;

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<sup>1</sup> Doc. 7224/07

<sup>2</sup> Doc. 14114/06 [COM (2006) 571 final]

<sup>3</sup> Doc. 6216/1/07

- (4) the demography report submitted by the Commission services on 14 May 2007 which shows that countries which have achieved high female labour force participation and the most progress in gender equality are today also experiencing relatively high fertility rates;
- (5) the Decision of the Commission<sup>4</sup> to set up a High-Level Group on Demography with the mandate to advise the Commission in the process of monitoring demographic change and policy responses to it;
- (6) that it is the responsibility of the Member States to formulate policies for the support for families consistent with national public policy;
- (7) the Commission's Roadmap for equality between women and men<sup>5</sup> and the Pact on Gender Equality adopted by the European Council in March 2006 where policies to reconcile work and private and family life are set as priorities for achieving equality between women and men, and also the Report on equality between women and men 2007<sup>6</sup> where it is highlighted that policy responses to demographic change should take into account the principle of gender equality;
- (8) the European Pact for Youth adopted by the European Council in March 2005, which emphasises the need for better reconciling work, family and private life to enable young people, who so wish, to start a family and to participate fully in training and education or to enter into working life at the same time;

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<sup>4</sup> Expected on 25 May 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Doc. 7034/06

<sup>6</sup> COM(2007)49

- (9) the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee of 14 March 2007<sup>7</sup>, which states that families are a source of economic prosperity, especially when both parents can be gainfully employed, that the EU should therefore encourage the Member States to incorporate the family dimension in its economic and social policies and that the EU should use best practice to promote a sustainable family policy;
- (10) the tools and targets already agreed in the European Union in recent years under the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs and the open method of coordination for social protection and social inclusion, that are of high relevance for a better reconciliation of family, private and working life and the development of policy responses to demographic change;
- the target agreed by the Lisbon European Council in 2000 of increasing the proportion of women in employment to more than 60 % by 2010;
  - the call by the Stockholm European Council in 2001 for the development of indicators on the provision of care facilities for children and other dependants and on family benefit systems;
  - the commitment made by the Barcelona European Council in 2002 to provide childcare by 2010 to at least 90 % of children between 3 and 6 years old and at least 33 % of children under 3 years old;
  - the call upon Member States by the Spring European Council in 2006<sup>8</sup>, reaffirmed in March 2007<sup>9</sup>, to take necessary measures to rapidly and significantly reduce child poverty, giving all children equal opportunities, regardless of their social background.

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<sup>7</sup> Doc. SOC/245 - CESE 423/2007

<sup>8</sup> doc. 7775/1/06 REV 1 (paragraph 72)

<sup>9</sup> doc. 7224/07 (paragraph 19)

- (11) the announcement by the Commission that it will present in 2008 a communication on child care assessing the Member States' progress in achieving the childcare development goals;

EMPHASISE THAT

1. the basic changes in the composition of the population as a result of demographic change will have consequences for the structure of social life and for the economy, posing challenges that must be met with coherent, long-term strategies;
2. low birth rates in many European countries very often do not reflect the personal wishes of women and men, but are in many cases the expression of their social situation and of the social imbalance characterised by the fact that equality of opportunity, gender equality and suitable conditions to reconcile work, family and private life are not sufficiently put into practice, that families, and in particular women, are overburdened by the constraints and costs that raising children or caring for dependents may involve and by the lack of affordable child and other care services of high quality, and thus do not have sufficiently reliable bases on which to plan ahead and organise their lives;
3. with full awareness of the diversity of families and of family policies in the European Union, better support for families and enhancing the well-being of children are [...] crucial to a better quality of life and to Europe's economic development. Such measures should encourage equality of opportunity for children and young people of all backgrounds in terms of education, training and entry into a highly productive working life. They should also allow the reconciliation of work, family and private life for women and men with caring responsibilities, thus enhancing the chances of European businesses of finding qualified workers;
4. sustainable family policies have a part to play in improving social cohesion and in sound economic development, and to that end national measures in particular in the following areas have to be borne in mind:

- improvement of the social infrastructure for families, allowing people with care responsibilities to enter and stay in employment, providing affordable and accessible high quality care services for children and other dependents in particular, including the availability of counselling, parental education and training for carers as well as day care and leisure-time facilities for young people;
  - more precise targeting of support for families, with the aim of better compensating the costs of raising children, including during the periods immediately following their birth, and taking due account of the specific needs of single parent families and of families with a large number of children, as well as helping them to fulfil care responsibilities for other dependents;
  - better conditions governing the organisation of work and time, and a better balance between employment security and flexibility ("flexicurity") over the life cycle to the benefit of family life, including in particular appropriate arrangements for parental and care leave for both women and men, better access to lifelong learning opportunities and ensuring gender equality in employment, notably by tackling gender stereotypes;
5. the European Union must take into account the fact that Member States are responsible for formulating appropriate sustainable family policies, yet it also ought to take advantage of the decisive contribution that European exchanges in this field can make to achieving the goals of the renewed Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs and the European Union's social cohesion objectives;
6. the Alliance for Families constitutes a platform for the exchange of views and knowledge and represents a sustainable commitment of the European Union and its Member States to address, within the context of demographic change, issues related to family-friendly policies, to support each other in the search for forward-looking political responses and to make knowledge and experience available for all actors, so as to reinforce shared efforts. At the European level, no new structures shall be created but existing instruments, resources and bodies should be used to that end in a coherent, effective and targeted way.

## CALL ON THE MEMBER STATES AND THE COMMISSION

1. to take into consideration the needs of families, in particular those with care responsibilities, in the work of the relevant European policy-formulating committees and expert groups.

The work of the Social Protection Committee and the Employment Committee will help to understand which support policies are most effective in securing adequate living standards for families, in reconciling work and family life and in preventing poverty. Within their respective remits, this could include the promotion of the labour-market participation of parents, family friendly working arrangements, the provision of enabling services, including care for dependents, services adapted to the needs of people with caring responsibilities who want to participate in the labour market, day-care and pre-school education, cash benefits and tax benefits.

The High Level Group on Demography, as an advisory body to the Commission, will contribute to the overall assessment of how to address demographic challenges and should, in particular, stimulate the exchange of good practice on family-friendly policies. In so doing, it will also support the Social Protection Committee and the Employment Committee in the above-mentioned areas of work. The Commission will ensure the complementarity of the work of the High Level Group with the activities of the two other Committees as well as with the High Level Group on gender mainstreaming;

2. to bring together the measures taken and progress made in the context of the Alliance for Families in a public internet portal which also includes relevant information provided by the Member States, the social partners and non-governmental organisations;

## CALL ON THE COMMISSION

1. to establish a framework in which interested Member States, social partners, civil society organisations and other stakeholders can learn from each others' experience and use it to improve conditions for families. The following measures should in particular be envisaged:

- invite the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, to set up under its aegis and for the purpose of facilitating the exchange of experience, good practice and innovative approaches on family friendly policies, an observatory which will, in cooperation with the Member States and the social partners, gather information, process it and make it available; of particular importance is information on local, regional and company initiatives to increase family-friendliness, especially concerning a better reconciliation of work, family and private life;
  - promote research on the situation of families and on family-friendly policies in order to enhance knowledge of the effectiveness of such policies and how they interact with related policy areas and the effects of social, economic and cultural conditions; such research should be promoted under the 7th Framework Research Programme, taking particular account of European diversity, and should also involve the European Institute for Gender Equality and the OECD in particular;
  - support the role of the High-Level Group on Demography in facilitating the exchange of views with social partners and civil society, in order to involve them in the establishment of the Alliance for Families;
  - take appropriate account of family issues in future demography reports and in the future fora on demography starting in 2008;
  - ensure that local and regional players in Europe who are willing to organise fora and the establishment of city and regional partnerships can benefit from international exchanges of on-the-ground experience to be identified through the above-mentioned research activities, the work of the demography forum, the High-Level Group on Demography and the observatory;
2. to use the information provided by the Member States to describe their state of preparation for demographic change, every two years using its annual progress report;

3. to evaluate progress achieved by the Alliance for Families and present its findings on the occasion of the 2010 European Demography Forum.

#### CALL ON THE MEMBER STATES

1. to make intensive use of the opportunities for exchanges of opinion and experience offered by the Alliance for Families and, in particular, make the necessary contributions to the work of the High-Level Group on Demography;
2. when preparing and organising local, regional and national fora on demographic and family-related issues, to establish close cooperation with the social partners, and involve undertakings and non-governmental organisations; the fora could be used to create lasting and action-oriented alliances for more family-friendliness, taking into account all the major determinants of the quality of family life;
3. to make use of the possibilities offered by the European Structural Funds and of other relevant European funding instruments for securing appropriate financial support for local, regional and national family-friendly initiatives such as the organisation of national, regional or local fora and partnerships seeking to promote employment through better reconciliation of work, family and private life by facilitating access to child care and care for dependent persons and by adapting the organisation of work to the needs of families;
4. to take the appropriate measures to promote an equal sharing of care responsibilities between women and men;
5. against the background that the diversity of national family policies and traditions provides a good resource for mutual learning between Member States, to use the information and experience made available through an intensified European exchange to identify possible improvements of their own frameworks for supporting families.