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Demographic challenges for social cohesion

Recommendation 1749 (2006)

Reply from the Committee of Ministers
adopted at the 988th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (21 February 2007)

1. The Committee of Ministers has taken note with interest of Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1749 (2006) on demographic challenges for social cohesion, and has taken note of Resolution 1502 (2006) on the same subject. It transmitted the text to the Steering Committee on Social Cohesion (CDCS) and to the European Committee on Migration (CDMG) for information and possible comments. The opinions received from these committees are appended to the present reply.

2. With respect to the Assembly's request to encourage the CDCS to support a more family-friendly environment, it points out that the CDCS's Committee of Experts on Children and Families (CS-EF) has carried out substantial work on positive parenting, including the preparation of a recommendation on positive and non-violent parenting which was adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 13 December 2006. Regarding the work of the European Committee on Migration (CDMG), the Committee of Ministers refers the Parliamentary Assembly to the appended opinion of this committee, and informs the Parliamentary Assembly that in the framework of its examination of the Programme of Activities for 2007, it has approved a project on migration integration policy and practice.

3. In a broader perspective, the theme of the Conference of European Ministers for Family Affairs (Lisbon, May 2006) was "Changes in Parenting: Children today, Parents tomorrow", with a session devoted to "Family policies in the light of demographic changes in Europe and different patterns of family life". The Committee of Ministers also draws attention to the Council of Europe campaign launched as part of the follow-up to the Third Summit, on "Building a Europe for and with children". Last year's Council of Europe Social Forum, in November 2006, on "Achieving cultural cohesion in a multicultural Europe", held its discussions against the background of the evolving composition of European populations. All these inter-related activities contribute to ensure the "intergenerational equilibrium" called for by the Assembly in paragraph 5.1.1 of its recommendation.

4. The Council of Europe's activities specifically relating to demographic data and population trends were discontinued in 2006 following the decisions taken after the Third Summit of Heads of State and Government to seek increased focus on the Organisation's core objectives and bearing in mind budgetary constraints. Consequently, the studies and surveys of population trends mentioned by the Assembly in its recommendation are no longer published, and therefore the Committee of Ministers cannot respond to the requests made concerning them. However, despite the interruption of the activity, the Committee of Ministers confirms that the proceedings of the European Population Conference 2005 referred to in paragraph 5.4 of the recommendation are readily available, both in the form of a publication and on the Council of Europe Internet site.

5. The Committee of Ministers agrees with the Parliamentary Assembly that national statistical organisations and international research organisations should be encouraged to carry out research and surveys nationally and throughout Europe. It points out in this respect that the United Nations carries out extensive work on population data with national institutions. Furthermore, it trusts that the Council of Europe's

transversal activities in the areas of families, migrants, young people and social cohesion referred to above actively contribute to increased public awareness of the challenges linked to demographic trends and of the need to deal with the problems of population decline and ageing of society in order to ensure social cohesion.

Appendix 1 to the reply

Opinion of the European Committee for Social Cohesion (CDCS) on Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1749 on demographic challenges for social cohesion

The CDCS is aware of the danger to social cohesion which demographic challenges can present through the adverse effects they can have on solidarity between generations and in particular on working conditions and social welfare systems.

Therefore it welcomes the theme of the present recommendation which is of great importance. The current work of the CDCS on positive parenting is in line with the proposal to support family-friendly policies and services which could be of benefit to demographic challenges and social cohesion and minimise the negative impact of ageing. The CDCS understands that financial reasons have led to the termination of the Council of Europe's intergovernmental activities in the demographic field but underlines the fact that, in this situation, it will be difficult to implement this recommendation.

Appendix 2 to the reply

Opinion of the European Committee on Migration (CDMG)¹ on Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1749 on demographic challenges for social cohesion

1. The European Committee on Migration (CDMG) welcomes the attention of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to the current and emerging demographic challenges caused by the birth rate decline and population aging in Europe. CDMG shares the concerns expressed by the Parliamentary Assembly and agrees that it is necessary to develop a comprehensive European strategy to deal with these issues.
2. CDMG fully supports the view expressed by the Parliamentary Assembly that migration is an important demographic factor that should be taken into account in population policies. It also agrees that in order that migration can meet demographic challenges, orderly migration management and effective integration policies should be developed and implemented in the European countries.
3. CDMG refers the Parliamentary Assembly to its Migration Management Strategy (adopted in 2000). CDMG has recently reviewed this strategy in the light of the challenges faced by the countries of emigration.
4. One of the current major projects of CDMG is devoted to the development of integration policy and practice. It is hoped that in 2007 CDMG will approve, for adoption by the Committee of Ministers, two draft recommendations on the integration of migrant children and on access of migrants to employment and self-employment opportunities. Budgeting restrictions on staff, resources and activities hamper the Secretariat from pursuing the project more effectively. Further planned budgetary reductions for 2007 will further contribute to these difficulties.
5. CDMG also agrees with the need to encourage the collection and analysis of relevant statistical data. The 2005 annual report on 'Current Trends in International Migration in Europe' was presented to CDMG in April 2006. CDMG regrets the loss of the migration data published in the Council of Europe demographic yearbook 'Recent demographic developments in Europe'.

¹ Opinion prepared by the Bureau of CDMG and finalised by the Secretariat after its 63rd meeting (Kyiv, 27 September 2006)