



European Economic and Social Committee

SOC/277
Promoting solidarity
between the generations

Brussels, 13 December 2007

OPINION

of the

European Economic and Social Committee

on the

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Promoting solidarity between the generations

COM(2007) 244 final

On 20 June 2007 the European Commission decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 262 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Promoting solidarity between the generations
COM(2007) 244 final.

The Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 14 November 2007. The rapporteur was **Mr Jahier**.

At its 440th plenary session, held on 13 December 2007, the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 106 votes to 21 with 28 abstentions.

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1. **Background**

- 1.1 The principle of solidarity between the generations is one of the structural keys to the European social model. Owing to demographic imbalances, it must be reinforced through new commitments and solutions, striking a new financial equilibrium. Therefore, to maintain this principle of solidarity between the generations, an active approach must be taken by the public authorities, at various levels, and all the social players must be involved in guaranteeing high-quality social services of general interest for families, young people and all those unable to support themselves, together with lasting pension and social security systems.
- 1.2 In connection with these issues, particularly the reconciliation of working and family life, the promotion of equal opportunities and of employment (especially for women), the EESC recently stated its position in a series of opinions¹, the recommendations of which are fully reiterated in the analyses and proposals made herein.
- 1.3 Although the Commission communication is entitled Promoting solidarity between the generations, it concentrates on the family, including in relation to the new Alliance for Families, recently established by the European Council. The amount of activity currently

¹ See, above all: EESC opinion of 16 December 2004 on Relations between the generations (rapporteur: Mr Bloch-Lainé), OJ C 157 of 28.6.2005; EESC opinion of 14 March 2007 on The family and demographic change (rapporteur: Mr Buffetaut), OJ C 161 of 13.7.2007; EESC opinion of 14 March 2007 on The economic and budgetary impact of ageing populations (rapporteur: Ms Florio), OJ C 161 of 13.7.2007; EESC opinion of July 2007 on The role of the social partners in reconciling working, family and private life (rapporteur: Mr Clever).

being witnessed at Community level amounts to an important renewal of interest and action in the area of the family after a long break. It is also – as the Commission's Communication itself states – "the first stage in a European response to the challenges laid down by demographic change". For this reason, the opinion concentrates on these issues.

- 1.4 In 1983, the European Parliament passed a resolution on European family policy which gave the policy visibility at European level for the first time and, above all, paved the way for the creation of a budget heading the following year for promoting pro-family activities.
- 1.5 1989 saw the first meeting of the Council of family affairs ministers, which adopted some important measures on proposals from the European Commission. Thus the Commission itself was asked to set up a European Observatory on the Social Situation, Demography and Family, now the European Observatory on Demography and the Social Situation (SSO), and a high-level group of government experts on the family. Finally, the Commission created an Interservices Group on the family dimension of various Community policies. On this occasion the Council also opted for institutionalising contacts with family organisations and with the European Parliament's Intergroup on Family and Protection of Childhood.
- 1.6 In 1994, 1999 and 2004, the Parliament passed new resolutions, while the cross-party group itself was set up in 1988.
- 1.7 However, one of the consequences of a crisis in 1998 regarding budget headings and their legal basis was to put an end to the heading allocated for supporting families.
- 1.8 The present Communication is the outcome of the Commission's thinking on demographics which began with the 2005 Green Paper on demographic challenges² and continued with the Communication entitled *The demographic future of Europe – from challenge to opportunity*³. It is also part of a wider institutional dynamic launched by the German Presidency with the conclusions of the Spring European Council and ending with those of the Council of Ministers on the Alliance for Families on 30 May 2007 and reprised in the Conclusions of the European Council of 21-22 June 2007.
- 1.9 The Communication points out that Europe has essentially three types of intervention to support the family: compensation of direct and indirect costs relating to the family; support services for parents in the form of care and education of children and those in need of care, and adapting employment and working times as well as conditions and access to social services of general interest at local level. These aspects have evolved in very different ways in the various Member States depending on political choices and the goals these entail. While

² COM(2005) 94 final.

³ COM(2006) 571 final, examined by the Committee in an exploratory opinion of 14 March 2007 on The family and demographic change, requested by the German Presidency (rapporteur: Mr Buffetaut), OJ C 161 of 13.7.2007.

the Commission has difficulty identifying the most effective policies, it nevertheless highlights the way that some countries (the Scandinavian countries) have been successful in finding a mixture of policies promoting reconciliation of work and family life and gender equality, so as to encourage both higher birth rates and a sustained level of female employment.

- 1.10 Although family policies are, strictly speaking, a matter entirely for the Member States, the Commission points out that the European Union has always sought in its policymaking to take account of the family and the quality of life of its members. Moreover, the balance between family and working life is one of the key planks of Community employment policies as part of the Lisbon Strategy.
- 1.11 The Commission's Communication goes on to set out the nature of the European Alliance for Families and the Community action geared to supporting it. Particularly important elements of this are a high-level group of government experts on demographic issues, the establishment of European as well as national, regional and local forums and networks, the creation under the auspices of the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions of an observatory on best practices, and a series of research tools focused particularly on the 7th Framework Programme. Finally, the Commission intends to mobilise the resources of the European Structural Funds to support equal opportunities and the balance between family and working life.

2. **Remarks and challenges**

- 2.1.1 There is no doubt that the question of inter-generational solidarity is a very broad and involved one and is in turn part of a more complex set of challenges posed by various social, economic and international changes underway, among them population ageing, which will have a substantial impact on the lives of Europe's citizens in the future, especially on working and social conditions. In its Communication, the Commission notes that the Lisbon strategy provides the basis on which family policy can be modernised by promoting equal opportunities and above all by improving the reconciliation of work and family and private life, which increases women's participation in the labour market. This reconciliation is also highlighted in the integrated guidelines for growth and jobs, according to which employment policy should be tailored to the circumstances of family life and changes in those circumstances during different periods of life. The open coordination method, which affects social protection and social integration, focuses on improving the situation of poor children and their families, supporting long-term care of dependants and modernising pension systems.
- 2.1.2 The meeting of generations that is played out and develops within the family is an enormous challenge from which Europe is not exempt. The family is the natural forum for solidarity between the genders and through the life cycle. Social change has resulted in the emergence of a wide range of different family structures. When designing measures, account must be

taken of all the different family situations, with due respect for subsidiarity and national legislations⁴.

- 2.1.3 The most recent reports on the socio-demographic situation tell us that in several countries the number of family units is growing, while their size is dropping. At the same time, the structure of families is changing far more rapidly than was once the case due to the fall in the number of marriages (down from 8 per thousand inhabitants in the 1960s to 5.1 per thousand in 1999), the higher age at which they are contracted, the increase in separations and divorces, the increase in the number of those who live alone and the increase in children born outside of wedlock. On this last point, the number of children in the EU living with only one parent has risen by 50% since 1983 and today stands at 13% (with a peak of 25% in the United Kingdom)⁵. An increasing number of children live in blended families, which have several grandparents and siblings from former families. Adoption of children from outside Europe is increasing, and new family cultures have appeared as a result of immigration.
- 2.1.4 The fertility rate in Europe is now around 1.45 children per woman and hence well below that required to replenish the population. It is lowest in the Mediterranean countries. The decline in birth rates is an almost universal phenomenon within the European Union and amounts to more than 45% since the 1960s.
- 2.1.5 As a result, our societies have ever fewer young people and children and ever more pensioners and older people generally. In 1950, 40% of the population of the EU-25 were under 25. In 2000, the figure was down to 30% and in 2025 it will fall to 25%. By contrast, in 1950 only one person in ten was older than 65, while in 2000 it was already one in six and in 2025 it will be close to one in four. These figures are indicative of profound changes in the structure of consumption, in housing and care needs, in social behaviour and in the actual priorities of public policies.
- 2.1.6 Of course, Europe's various forms of social security, working conditions and medical advances mean that most older people can count on a substantially longer life and a relatively comfortable income. Nevertheless, serious problems of poverty affect at least a sixth of women over 65 and in general around a quarter of the elderly living alone⁶. Poverty and exclusion among elderly women is usually the result of their having a weak or non-existent

4 See the EESC opinion of 31.1.2006 on the "Green paper on applicable law and jurisdiction in divorce matters", rapporteur: Mr Retureau (OJ C 24, 31.1.2006), where it is stated that "the Green Paper (wisely) does not propose to harmonise substantive law."

5 Eurostat, Population in Europe, 2005. Although the presence of one parent families varies widely among EU Member States (below average in Italy, above in Sweden), composition by sex is almost identical in all countries (with a clear prevalence of women), with the sole exception of Sweden, where 26% of lone parents are men.

6 Poverty is calculated here in relation to the income levels of each Member States, so that it appears lower in some of the new Member States (for example, only 6% in Poland), while markedly higher in others, such as Ireland (44%), Greece (33%), Portugal (30%), Belgium (26%) and the UK (24%). Europe's Social Reality, BEPA consultation document, March 2007.

employment history. Obviously, this situation becomes graver for those over seventy and eighty, creating an increasingly unsustainable burden on families, in so far as the social security and care system is unable to provide adequate services.

- 2.2 According to Eurobarometer⁷, 97% of Europeans view the family to be one of the most important things in their lives, coming immediately after health. This favourable view becomes even more positive when Europeans are asked about the future⁸. The importance of the family is evident when help is needed: 70% say they turn to their partner, while 25% turn to another family member, notably in cases of illness (88%) and need of advice (78%) or money (68%).
- 2.3 Europe's families are increasingly living on the outskirts of large cities. However, the pattern varies greatly depending on age: the very elderly and the young are more attached to living in big cities, while families with children and people of retirement age tend to relocate to small centres. The difference of location depending on age tends to create new problems in terms of managing services and of social cohesion in large urban areas, a phenomenon also aggravated by migratory movements, which tend to be greater in cities where there is a demand for a larger work force.
- 2.4 The percentage of the European population over the age of sixty-five rose to 17.2% in 2005 (EU-15). Due to greater life expectancy, women make up the larger part of the growing contingent of the elderly and account in all European countries for more than 50% of those over sixty-five.
- 2.5 As far as poverty is concerned, around 72 million people in the EU-25 (i.e., 15%) are directly affected and 26 million are teetering on the poverty threshold⁹. Of these, around 12 million are older persons; 9% of the EU population have lived in a low-income family for two out of the last three years of their lives; families with several children are at particular risk of poverty. Around 20% of Europe's 94 million young people under 18 are exposed to the risk of poverty and in the last three decades the child poverty rate has risen in all EU countries and now surpasses that for the population as a whole, with particularly serious peaks for single-parent families, families that experience long-term unemployment or underemployment, and large families. The children of poor families suffer hardship, are gravely disadvantaged, have

⁷ Eurobarometer 273, "European social reality", February 2007.

⁸ See on this issue the book *Valori a confronto*, ed. R. Gubert and G. Pollini, Milan 2006, which draws on research data of the European Values Study, which involved 40 000 people in 33 European countries (EU and certain countries of the Council of Europe) and was carried out by a number of the continent's universities. "The demographic future of Europe", a research project carried out by the Robert Bosch Foundation and the German Federal Institute for Population Research, which interviewed 34 000 people in 14 European countries, confirms the strong attachment Europeans have to the family.

⁹ Calculated on the basis of a poverty threshold of 60% of average income. "The social situation in the European Union 2004" and Eurostat 2003. See also the latest, 2005-2006, edition of "The social situation in the European Union", published by the Commission in spring 2007, which dealt with the balance between generations in an ageing Europe.

more health problems and do less well at school, with obvious social, economic and political costs for the future. Such lack of concern for children's rights can cultivate juvenile delinquency and the exploitation and trafficking of children.

3. General comments

- 3.1 Despite the above, the European institutions have so far found it very difficult to see the family as a social structure that plays an essential role in present-day society and for this reason merits greater interest from the Community.
- 3.2 Although there is no shortage of official declarations from the most disparate public bodies at international and European level ascribing to the family a crucial role in society, in practical terms, Europe appears as yet not to have included the family in its priorities, which rest essentially on two pillars: the forces of the free market and competition, on the one hand, and equality of opportunity for all citizens, on the other. The reference to these two pillars is evident, for example, within the Lisbon Strategy and the Social Agenda 2005-2010.
- 3.3 Generally speaking, the European Commission continues to address the issue of the family from the vantage of social policy, employment and equal opportunities¹⁰. As a rule, however, in many documents dealing with matters such as young people, children's rights, education issues and so on, the actual notion of the family almost never appears and the approach focuses essentially on individual rights or on the individual as an economic actor. Rarely is he viewed in terms of his relationships, and first and foremost as part of a family and of a system of social relationships that centres upon the family. However, the family continues to play an important role in sustaining a person's growth, overseeing his integration in society and work and, very often, taking upon itself the burden of illness and of any brief or sustained period of disability and reliance on others. The social services provided by the state or the private or social market remain essential, especially in promoting reconciliation of work and family life, preventing family poverty and unemployment, and supporting and helping families afflicted by illness, substance abuse, child-rearing problems and domestic violence. These services are not enough in themselves to adequately meet the emotional and psychological needs of the individual, be it the person cared for or the carer¹¹.
- 3.4 However, the increasing calls from Europe's citizens for attention to be paid to the family do appear to have received a very positive response from the German EU presidency, which proposed a grand alliance between the institutions in order to promote coordinated policies to

¹⁰ Family issues are allocated to DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. Individual documents can be found on the website of the European Alliance for Families: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/families/index_en.html. It is regrettable, however, that it is not possible to access all the extensive work carried out for more than a decade before 2000 by the European Observatory on the Social Situation, Demography and Family (established in 1989).

¹¹ Susy Giullari and Jane Lewis, "The Adult Worker Model Family, Gender Equality and Care"; Social Policy and Development Programme Paper Number 19, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, April 2005.

counterbalance the fall in births and the increase in the number of older people. In the last two years, in fact, there has been a fresh start in all the Union's institutions which is more systematic, strategic and forward-looking and thus offers greater potential.

- 3.5 First and foremost, there are the important provisions of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union regarding the family¹², though it is regrettable that the revision of the EU Treaties did not include an explicit reference to "supporting family life" in Article 3 on the aims of the European Union.
- 3.6 The EESC expresses its profound appreciation of the Commission's Communication, which sets out a practical agenda for lending substance to the proposed Alliance for Families. This is a constructive platform which takes on board a number of the suggestions already formulated by the EESC and more generally in the debate in recent years to respond to demographic challenges, support cooperation and partnership between various players, promote a better response to the needs of families looking after children and other dependents, improve reconciliation of work with both family and private life – including with a substantial investment in quality services for children and for families – and so help to establish a new and more robust solidarity between the generations.
- 3.7 The deplorable fact remains, however, that the lack of support from some Member States has made it impossible to apply the open coordination method to this area, which would have given the Alliance greater strategic and structural weight. The EESC recognises, nevertheless, that the Communication provides possible foundations on which to develop an organic platform which does not prejudice the possibility of further developments based on more explicit coordination.
- 3.8 Vigilance will be required, then, to ensure that after the crucial impetus given by the German Presidency, this new work does not get sidelined. As part of the new and increasingly intense interest of various European bodies in social questions and the wellbeing of citizens, the family is emerging as a new focus of attention, thought and action. These initial and diffident openings must be progressively enhanced and extended with a detailed work plan to culminate in the Third European Demographic Forum, scheduled for 2010.
- 3.9 More generally, the important thing is to give tangible recognition to the practical and substantial contribution that families continue to make to our societies and to the care of people at every stage of their life. In this light account should also be taken of the social and economic utility and of the possible and untenable increase in costs, especially for welfare services, if the family is not sufficiently supported and encouraged in performing its role.
- 3.10 In this connection, a significant role is already being played by social partners at various levels. As part of their first 2003-2006 work programme, the social partners presented a raft

¹² The articles concerned are: 7, 9, 14, 24-3, 33 and 34.

of equal opportunities measures geared particularly to reconciling family and work and all that this entails. Their second programme, for the period 2006-2008, is based on a wide-ranging analysis of the principal challenges for the labour market¹³. The EESC encourages the social partners to continue in this direction.

- 3.11 But more and more consideration should also be given to the structural dimension of the role of creating and renewing the social and relationship capital which is increasingly recognised as indispensable to the wellbeing of the individual and of society as a whole. There is no doubt that time devoted to children and the family is time taken away from the career. However, it is also an investment in the care and education of people that should be recognised and encouraged: by considering adding to existing measures (benefit payments, tax breaks, parental leave, etc.) some form of recognition in terms of pension contributions for time spent taking care of those members of the household who need help¹⁴. This would thus prevent solidarity between the generations storing up a burden for the future (in terms of insufficient pensions and consequent greater risk of poverty) which will fall predominantly on women.
- 3.12 For similar reasons, another factor to be taken into account is the giving of unremunerated time, which is hard to quantify and is therefore often unnoticeable, even though it profoundly impinges on the quality of community life, which is increasingly sought after and valued by most people.
- 3.13 This basic structural dimension of people, which creates and generates the social fabric, must be given more explicit social recognition, in tandem with better development and alignment of all those other conditions of environment and services that can help people to realise the aspiration to start a family, to have the desired number of children and to be able to care for one's loved ones with equanimity.

4. **Specific comments**

- 4.1 The Commission's Communication itself sets out some helpful and detailed ways forward in terms of both goals and initial steps (such as the establishment of a high-level group of government experts on demographic questions). The EESC supports these approaches, encourages their elaboration in full and hopes they will be constantly given the appropriate publicity and their progress will be widely reported in order to secure the greatest possible participation in the process.

¹³ In July 2007 Europe's social partners sent a letter to Commissioner Špidla in which they expressed their willingness to clarify the directive on family leave and the situation regarding reconciliation of work and family life in the EU. To this end organisations have set up a joint working group which is to submit a report to the EU social affairs summit to be held in March 2008.

¹⁴ See, for example, the new measures established in Finland, where the social partners negotiated a major reform of the pension system in 2003, which was passed by Parliament in 2004 and brought into effect in 2005. For more information, see www.tyoelake.fi (pages in English).

- 4.2 Active involvement of local and regional actors is particularly important, given the ever more important and central role these institutions play in the provision of social services and delivering innovation. In this context, it seems worthwhile not only to promote the creation of regional and local forums, but also to call upon the Commission to play an active role, in coordination with interested parties, in preparing, and supporting, a detailed plan for forums and initiatives in all Member States to guarantee maximum involvement in the process.
- 4.3 The EESC believes that the creation of an observatory on best family policy practices within the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions should be supported, and recommends that this be achieved through close consultation of civil society players – in particular family associations – at various points during the process, both in identifying these best practices and in appropriate opportunities for comparing and reflecting.
- 4.4 Vigilance will then be required to ensure that the prime focus of this observatory is not limited solely to family issues involving work, but that it is also directed towards the compilation of a detailed survey on the needs of the family and the generations and on measures and funds available for safeguarding and promoting the development of new forms of solidarity between the generations. This would help to map out the current infrastructures of social citizenship in the Member States¹⁵.
- 4.5 On the research front, the EESC also proposes the following specific areas for work:
- the role and impact of fiscal policies (regarding both benefit payments and tax allowances) of the various EU countries in supporting or penalising family life, especially concerning children (from birth to care to education) and adults being cared for by families, reconciliation of work and family life and employment of women, as well as a fairer division of responsibilities between men and women;
 - policies and actions to promote active ageing: given the ever increasing gap between retirement age and dependency due to illness or advanced age, more initiatives and actions are needed to get older people committed to and involved in social and cultural activities to benefit their own community, since this increases the quality of the social capital in its entirety;
 - a life-cycle prognosis to investigate the possibility of replacing the current longitudinal view of average life cycles¹⁶ with an alternative, more flexible, approach in which investment in the family, career-breaks to look after children or others who need care or to follow courses is not seen as the happy exception or as an inevitable detriment to

¹⁵ See EESC opinion on the Social Policy Agenda (rapporteur: Mr Jahier) of 10 December 2003, OJ C 80 of 30.3.2004.

¹⁶ A cycle which today supposes an absolutely rigid sequence of growing up, education and difficult and drawn-out integration into the world of work, with inevitable consequences on family time and possible birth rates, and ending in late adult life with having to face the double burden of supporting children and looking after one's own parents.

career, especially for women, but instead progressively becomes a normal and ordinary condition for most men and women who so desire¹⁷.

- At the same time, research should take account of the abovementioned steep rise in the number of one-parent families that could lead to more people being alone in their old age and finding it very difficult to meet their financial commitments; in such cases, a more flexible approach to the life cycle could seriously affect their standard of living. Research should therefore also look into measures that could be taken to ensure that pension levels are sufficient to guarantee a decent standard of living for all, while also exploring the individualisation of pension rights between the members of the family.
- The social impact and costs of child poverty (including child trafficking and crime against children), support provided to families in coping with unemployment, illness, substance abuse, mental health problems, domestic violence and child-rearing problems, and obstacles to young people becoming independent and starting a family for both sexes.

4.6 There are two further areas that have been little explored and which the EESC believes need greater and more careful attention from the Commission as part of the present strategy:

- in the main, housing policies are still conceived within a life cycle in which the part devoted to work was absolutely predominant and which no longer seems to correspond to the present reality¹⁸. This is especially true of social housing, be it promoting family crèches or the right of those needing care to live at home and have a real possibility of doing so;
- the situation of disabled or highly dependent people, often living in their own or the family home, is a challenge for the introduction of the type of social services and products that help elderly people to live independently in their own home and also a challenge in terms of the isolation of individuals and families which only becomes clear when a tragedy occurs.

4.7 The proposal recently submitted by a broad cartel of European-level family organisations to the various European institutions would seem particularly worthy of attention¹⁹. It is a call for a revision of VAT rates on baby products, beginning with nappies. There has already been a definite political commitment from the Commission (on 19 July 2006) to table a proposal to revise the sixth VAT directive, especially Annex H of Directive 2006/112/EC, which lists the products and services to which Member States are authorised to apply, at their discretion, a

¹⁷ On this issue, the lines of research envisaged by the Dublin foundation are to be strenuously encouraged and broadened.

¹⁸ See also EESC opinion on Housing and regional policy (rapporteur: Mr Grasso, co-rapporteur: Ms Prud'homme), CESE 407/2007 of 15 March 2007.

¹⁹ On 15 May this year, International Day of the Family, the European Large Families Confederation (ELFAC), together with many other organisations, including COFACE, launched an appeal to the heads of institutions entitled "Need for reduced VAT on essential items for child raising". For further information and documents, see www.elfac.org.

reduced rate no lower than 5%²⁰. The cost of these articles has a major impact on family budgets throughout Europe.

The EESC supports this proposal, which could be a tangible step forward and a matter on which the European Union can encourage the Member States to give substantial economic support to families.

4.8 Finally, two specific steps should be mentioned:

- the need to establish a more precise family mainstreaming of the various EU policies to systematically cover both the impact on families of individual measures applied and the family dimension within the various sectors of the Union's social and economic action. In this connection, the EESC thinks the Commission should relaunch the Interservices group created in 1989 but subsequently abandoned, which would make it easier to coordinate its action in this area;
- the need for systematic consultation of Europe's citizens, and especially family associations and social partners, to enable better on-going assessment of measures taken, more efficient dissemination of information and support for this process either financially or via the establishment of appropriate procedures and forums. The EESC itself could prove to be an excellent institution to give structural stability to this task.

5. Conclusions

5.1 While the scale of the demographic challenge is acknowledged, the issue of solidarity between the generations should not be focused on, and therefore limited to, this alone, but must increasingly be treated as a priority problem of the coming years – involving horizontal centres of responsibility (institutions, social partners, civil society organisations, etc.) and longitudinal ones (young people, old people, etc.) – as these are crucial for Europe's economic, social and cultural development and for the renewal of the very social compact on which our democracies stand.

In fact, over the years, the cultures of solidarity which have characterised Europe's development so far, have afforded original and sustainable solutions which have proved crucial for human, social and economic progress: from national welfare systems to the relationship between social rights and obligations, from the development of citizenship rights to the intersection and continuity of responsibility between generations in the family.

5.2 As the French writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry put it, it is important not merely to foresee the future, but to bring it about. What is needed, therefore, is to act to give every citizen a new faith in the future and especially in the family and, above all, the young. In this way, they will

²⁰ Some Member States already apply a reduced VAT rate to nappies, but it is felt that a more far-reaching decision should be taken which includes the whole gamut of products for babies, from food to clothing, which continue to be taxed at the highest rate.

no longer be obliged to deal with a social environment whose resources, services and time are so unfavourable that they require the undue postponement of personal family plans and having the desired number of children. Instead, they will experience the sturdiness of a renewed alliance of solidarity between generations and will be empowered to make their own contribution to it, and thus meet the challenges of our times.

Brussels, 13 December 2007.

The President
of the
European Economic and Social Committee

The Secretary-General
of the
European Economic and Social Committee

Dimitris Dimitriadis

Patrick Venturini

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N.B.: Appendix overleaf.

APPENDIX

to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee

Rejected amendments

The following amendment, which received at least a quarter of the votes cast, was rejected during the discussion (Rule 54(3) of the Rules of Procedure):

Point 4.3

Amend as follows:

"The EESC believes that the creation of an observatory on best family policy practices within the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions should be supported, and recommends that this be achieved through close consultation of civil society players – in particular family associations – at various points during the process, both in identifying these best practices and in appropriate opportunities for comparing and reflecting. The EESC calls on the Commission, the European Parliament and the Council to take the necessary steps for the establishment of the family observatory at the Dublin Foundation and to provide the necessary financial means for this purpose."

Voting:

For: 63

Against: 67

Abstentions: 22