



European Communities

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

WORKING DOCUMENTS

English Edition

1985-86

24 March 1986

A SERIES

DOCUMENT A 2-230/85/ANNEX

ANNEX

to the report drawn up by Mrs CINCIARI RODANO
on behalf of the Committee on Women's Rights

o
o o

OPINION of the Committee on Youth, Culture, Education,
Information and Sport

PE 98.639/fin./Ann.



OPINION

(Rule 101 of the Rules of Procedure)

of the Committee on Youth, Culture, Education, Information and Sport

Draftsman : Mr ELLIOTT

At its meeting of 29 January 1985, the Committee on Youth, Culture, Education, Information and Sport appointed Mr Elliott draftsman.

The Committee discussed the draft opinion at its meeting of 18-20 September, 30-31 October 1985, 25-27 November 1985 and 28-30 January 1986. It adopted the conclusions on 28 February 1986 by 14 votes in favour, 7 against and no abstentions.

Those taking part in the vote were : Mrs EWING, Chairman ; Mr McMAHON, acting for the draftsman ; Mr BAYONA AZNAR, Mr BARZANTI (deputizing for Mr PAPAPIETRO), Mrs BOOT (deputizing for Mr HERSANT), Mrs BUCHAN (deputizing for Mr FAJARDIE), Mr CANTARERO DEL CASTILLO, Mr HABSBURG (deputizing for Mr SELVA), Mr HAHN, Mr HAPPART (deputizing for Mr GALLO), Mrs LARIVE-GROENENDAAL, Mr McMILLAN-SCOTT, Mr MARCK (deputizing for Mr GERONTOPOULOS), Mr MÜNCH, Mrs PEUS, Mr PLASKOVITIS (deputizing for Mr ELLIOTT), Mr RAMIREZ HEREDIA, Mr REMACLE (deputizing for Mr PELIKAN), Mrs SEIBEL-EMMERLING, Mrs SQUARCIALUPI (deputizing for Mr FANTI) and Mr WEDEKIND (deputizing for Mr POMILIO)

Introduction

In 1983 the European Parliament adopted a resolution¹ calling for a Community family policy to become an integral part of all Community policies.

Pending adoption of such a policy, Parliament called upon the Commission to draw up an Action Programme for 1983-88. Along with budgetary provision, Parliament proposed that the Action Programme give priority to institutionalizing the dialogue with European family organisations, organising seminars on links between occupational and family commitments, a co-ordinated research programme, and increased assistance from the European Social Fund.

This opinion looks at various aspects of family policy raised recently within Parliament and proposes certain points for inclusion in the report of the Committee on Social Affairs and Employment.

The effect on the family of falling birth-rates

In recent years the birth-rate in a number of European countries has fallen near to replacement level. However, stabilisation of population, given the ever-increasing demands of humanity on the limited environmental resources of the planet, should be a matter for congratulation, not for regret. Moreover, a modest population relative to a country's size and its resources, enables the quality of life of its citizens to be enhanced. A genuinely caring society should surely ensure that every child born is a wanted child.

A lower birth-rate may mean there are fewer young people to provide for an increasing number of elderly, but with modern medical care most elderly people can have the expectation of an active and fulfilling life and given a good standard of community support services even those who are infirm or senile can be properly provided for.

The family and changing social attitudes

All societies since the dawn of civilisation have experienced periods of severe social turmoil, but we have nevertheless in some significant ways made progress. Present-day societies do, by and large, have a more compassionate and tolerant attitude to the less fortunate and to minority groups, than in the past. Thus human slavery is no longer acceptable, concern is shown for the physically and mentally handicapped, proper provision for the sick and elderly is expected, and minorities such as homosexuals are at least tolerated. The equal status of women is, albeit slowly, being accepted.

Sexual patterns of behaviour change with time and from one culture to another. Today in most developed societies, divorce, sexual relations before marriage and the cohabitation of unmarried people are broadly acceptable. It is in fact doubtful if strict sexual standards were ever widely practised even in past societies with apparently rigid codes of behaviour. To a large extent present-day society is simply more honest, open and less hypocritical. As long as we provide properly for the consequences of these changes in the pattern of family life on children and others at risk, they need not threaten the fabric of our society.

¹ OJ No. C 184 of 11.7.83, p. 114.

The family and abortion

Legal abortion, with proper safeguards, is now available in many member countries and should be retained. Abolition would be unlikely to eliminate or drastically reduce abortions. It would simply recreate the position of some years ago when women who could afford to pay would have illegal abortions or travel for treatment to countries where it was allowed, and many who could not would resort to 'back-street' abortions, with all the appalling risks to life and health which this would inevitably mean.

Moreover, abolition or tighter control would result in a great many more unwanted children being born with a consequently greater risk of their abandonment, neglect, etc.

Abortion will always be an inferior form of birth control, but no woman undergoes it frivolously, and its abolition would create far more misery than exists in the current situation. A full and comprehensive programme of family planning education should be freely available to all. Together with free birth control provision, the present level of abortions could be much reduced.

Surrogate motherhood

If the new medical techniques which have made surrogate motherhood a reality were to be applied to a significant extent, there could be new factors introduced into many family relationships. On the positive side there could be real benefits in terms of assisting childless couples, although clearly this would need to be the subject of careful control, both medically and socially. The commercial exploitation of surrogate motherhood should, however, be prohibited.

This new and most important development justifies a very full study to ensure that possible benefits are not outweighed by the dangers.

Positive help for the family

A major problem for many families at the present time is the ever-increasing level of unemployment and housing shortages in many Member States. A Community-wide action programme to tackle these twin evils would make an important contribution to ensuring a stable future for family life.

Our individual countries should be encouraged to learn from the initiatives and practices of others to improve the quality of provision for the needs of the family, especially those families suffering stress or deprivation. The aim should be to establish a good standard of provision throughout the Community. Thus, single-parent families, the numbers of which have increased greatly in recent years as a result of social changes, should be enabled to enjoy absolute equality of economic and educational opportunity and of legal status with traditional families. Governments should be encouraged to adopt the principle of making maintenance payments directly from public funds with subsequent recovery from the liable partner, through tax adjustments or other means. This would take away a lot of the strain from family situations and might possibly assist in reducing child abuse.

Families with mentally- or physically-handicapped children face particular difficulties and should receive special help both financial and practical. Special facilities should be provided so that handicapped children are not denied educational and recreational opportunities available to others

Proper support for the elderly and handicapped should be provided to allow them to live in dignity within the community for as long as possible. This should include an improvement of the home help service and other forms of community support. Such provision would also help relieve the burden of care from hard-pressed relatives, thus reducing strain and tension within families with consequent benefits in maintaining family stability.

These goals can only be achieved if EEC Member States are prepared to make the necessary resources available. Expansion of positive aid to poorer families and to those with special problems must be accorded a higher priority than cutting taxes for the better off.

Conclusion

The Committee on Youth, Culture, Education, Information and Sport suggest that the following recitals, indents and operative paragraphs be included in the report of the Committee on Social Affairs and Employment and of the Committee on Women's Rights:

- having regard² to Parliament's resolution on the ill-treatment of children,
 - having regard³ to Parliament's resolution on a Community policy for the aged,
 - whereas the family is the basic unit in society, and whereas the rights of the family must therefore be protected,
 - whereas the members of a family also have rights and duties vis-à-vis each other which must be consolidated by means of legislation.
- A. whereas Principle 6 of the 1959 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child justly emphasises that every child has a right to love and moral and material security;
1. Calls on the Commission to draw up proposals that will enable the family to fulfil its role in society ;

(a) Social Policy

Equal treatment of families with children, and respect for parenthood, whatever the legal position of the family or the child may be,

- through a housing policy which is geared to the needs of children and which recognises their right to proper play-space and recreational facilities and which provides for the special requirements of larger families; housing policy should be based on the principle that everyone is entitled to decent accommodation, since apart from the physical protection it provides, it fulfils the need of every individual and every family for a home and privacy,

² Doc. A2-171/85, adopted on 17/01/86

³ Doc. A2-219/85, adopted on 10/03/86

- through a wide range of child-care facilities that meet family requirements, such as day nurseries, day-care centres, holiday homes proper playgrounds and recreational facilities,
- through maintenance payments made directly from public funds with subsequent recovery from the liable partner and financial recognition for parents staying at home to bring up their children,
- through support for the family's function of caring for its members,
- through a state child benefit available to all sufficient to ensure financial security to all families together with special allowances to those supporting sick or elderly relatives;
- through a free national health service available to all, thus freeing families of the financial burden and anxieties of illness.

(b) Educational Policy

- ensuring equality of educational provision and opportunity for all children whatever the financial circumstances or social background of their families.

(c) Economic Policy

Progressive restoration of full employment which alone can ensure genuine security for all families on a permanent basis, together with adequate support for those unable to work;

- recognising the right to work of women with children, with special reference to one-parent families, and assisting this by provision of adequate child-care facilities,
- the harmonious combination of family and work commitments.

(d) Taxation

- making expenditure on day-care facilities for children tax-deductable;
- ensuring equal taxation treatment for men and women whatever their marital status.

2. Calls on the Member States to use all possible means to create a climate in which every child is wanted and accepted ;
3. Also calls on the Commission to include research and exchange of information at Community level on the question of surrogate motherhood in the Action Programme for 1983-88 already proposed by Parliament.

1944