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EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Proposal for a

DECISION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL

on the European Year for Active Ageing (2012)

(text with EEA relevance)

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

1. CONTEXT OF THE PROPOSAL

The European Union is in a process of significant population ageing, as was stressed by the Commission in 2008 in its 2nd Demography Report on *"Meeting social needs in an ageing society"*. According to Eurostat's latest projections released in 2008, there would be only two people of working age (15-64) for every person aged over 65 in the European Union by 2060 compared to a ratio of four to one today. The strongest push in this direction is expected to occur during the period 2015-35 when the baby boom cohorts will be in retirement. This shift is due to a combination of low birth rates and rising life expectancy. Indeed Europeans today are living longer and healthier lives than ever before. Since 1960, life expectancy has risen by eight years, and demographic projections forecast a further five-year increase over the next forty years. This is a historic achievement that deserves to be celebrated.

The EU population pyramid clearly shows an increase in cohort size just after the end of World War II, marking the start of the baby boom. From 2012 the European working-age population will start to shrink, while the population aged over 60 years will continue to increase by about two million people a year, according to a scenario that takes into account likely increases in immigration and birth rates¹.

These demographic changes present both challenges and opportunities. Population ageing may increase pressure on public budgets and pension systems, as well as on the staffing of social and care services for older people. Old age is still often associated with illness and dependency, and older people can feel excluded from employment as well as from family and community life. There is a fear that the older generations might become too heavy a burden on younger, working-age people and that this could result in tensions between generations.

This view neglects, however, the significant actual and potential contribution that older people — and the baby-boom cohorts in particular — can make to society. A key opportunity for tackling the challenge of demographic ageing and preserving intergenerational solidarity consists therefore in ensuring that the baby-boom cohorts stay longer in the labour market and remain healthy, active and autonomous as long as possible.

In the framework of the Employment Strategy, Member States have started to reverse the trend to early retirement so that the EU-27 employment rate for people aged 55-64 has increased from 36.9% in 2000 to 46% in 2009. Encouraging older workers to stay in employment requires notably the improvement of working conditions and their adaptation to the health status and needs of older workers, updating their skills by providing better access to life long learning and the review of tax and benefit systems to ensure that there are effective incentives for working longer.

Active ageing is also an effective tool for tackling poverty in old age. In 2008, 19% of people aged 65+ in the European Union were at risk of poverty. A considerable number of older people experience old age as a time of marginalisation. While better employment opportunities for older people could help tackle some of the causes of poverty among this age group, active participation in voluntary activities could reduce the isolation of older people.

¹ 2nd European Demography Report: Meeting Social Needs in an Ageing Society. SEC (2008) 2911
<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=502&newsId=419&furtherNews=yes>.

The huge potential that older persons represent for society as volunteers or carers could be better mobilised by eliminating existing obstacles to unpaid work and by providing the right framework.

The Commission Communication on "*Europe 2020 – A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*" sets out ways to exit the crisis and prepare the EU economy for the next decade. In the context of inclusive growth, the Commission highlights the importance of promoting a healthy and active ageing population to help, among other things, achieve high-employment, invest in skills and reduce poverty.

The proposed European Year for Active Ageing would encourage and support the efforts of Member States, their regional and local authorities, social partners and civil society to promote active ageing and do more to mobilise the potential of the baby boom cohorts.

It should be seen as the highlight of a major effort spanning the period 2011-2014, during which the EU would focus many of its programmes and policies on the issue of active ageing and put in place a framework in which new initiatives and partnerships supporting active ageing at all levels (Member State, regional, local, social partners, civil society) can be encouraged and publicised.

In 2011, public authorities, social partners and civil society organisations at all levels would be encouraged to commit themselves to specific goals related to active ageing; the focus would be on achievements during the European Year. The goals would be documented on a European website which would then become the website for the European Year and would also serve as a tool for monitoring and evaluation.

In 2012, the focus of the European Year would be on starting to implement the commitments made during 2011, on raising awareness among the general public, publicising these initiatives through media activities and the involvement of other multipliers. Results of active ageing projects funded under existing budget lines and programmes would be presented.

2. RESULTS OF CONSULTATIONS WITH THE INTERESTED PARTIES AND EXPECTED IMPACT

2.1. Consultations

Having committed itself to an inclusive approach in developing and implementing EU policies, the Commission asked for the views of stakeholders on the theme of active ageing and intergenerational solidarity, and on the form a possible European Year might take, with a view to obtaining input for its formal proposal, enhancing transparency and promoting early coordination.

Early consultation was in the form of an online questionnaire which gave Member States, social partners, NGOs and other interested parties and experts the opportunity to express their views. It was available on the web page 'Your Voice in Europe', the European Commission's single access point to a wide variety of consultations, for over two months. The questionnaire focused on the following themes: threats and opportunities of ageing in relation to intergenerational solidarity, recommended policy measures, the specific role of the EU in promoting the right policy responses, topics and activities for a European Year, and the involvement of stakeholders.

Contributors were generally in favour of a European Year on the theme of active ageing. They welcomed the awareness-raising aspect, placing key themes more firmly on political and public policy agendas. They also thought it would give recognition and support to people already working on these topics, support the sharing of good practice, and generate innovative approaches and new synergies between existing players. Respondents also wanted a European Year to leave a long-term legacy, in part by generating long-lasting initiatives. Respondents of all types (civil society organisations, public authorities, social partners, etc) showed a great willingness to be involved in a European Year, indicating activities they were planning to hold which could feed into such a year, and proposing additional projects.

2.2. Expected Impact

Policy responses on active ageing generally fall within the responsibility of the Member States, which are stepping up their efforts to mobilise the potential of older people. However, responses received from Member States' national authorities were overwhelmingly supportive of the idea of action at Union level and, in particular, of a European Year. They felt that the European Union could support their endeavours by creating a more supportive environment, with increased awareness among policy makers and the general public, helping to mobilise policy makers and stakeholders at all levels, supporting mutual learning across Europe, monitoring progress, and helping to define common objectives and targets.

Current activities at EU level do not seem properly geared to dealing with what needs to be done: (1) raise awareness among the general public, policy makers and other stakeholders of the importance of active ageing and of the need to do more to mobilise the potential of the baby boom cohorts; (2) foster an exchange of information and experience between Member States and stakeholders; (3) give Member States and stakeholders an opportunity to develop policies by way of specific activities and by committing to specific objectives.

Broad-based support will be required at all levels of society and from a wide range of stakeholders. The key challenge is to mobilise stakeholders in a way that will generate significant action at national, regional, local and company levels across the EU. With greater political momentum and visibility for active ageing policies, policy makers can be encouraged to take more ambitious initiatives.

In a European Year with activities coordinated at EU level, the Commission would be able to ensure that specific European Year activities are consistent with other EU initiatives and programmes.

3. LEGAL ELEMENTS OF THE PROPOSAL

Article 151 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union says that the Union and the Member States shall have as their objectives 'the promotion of employment, improved living and working conditions, so as to make possible their harmonisation while the improvement is being maintained, proper social protection, dialogue between management and labour, the development of human resources with a view to lasting high employment and the combating of exclusion.' In order to achieve these objectives, the Union shall support and complement the activities of the Member States regarding working conditions, the integration of persons excluded from the labour market and the combating of social exclusion (Article 153(1) of the TFEU).

The objectives enumerated in Article 151 underpin the proposal for a Decision on the European Year for Active Ageing (2012), which aims at encouraging and supporting the

efforts of the Member States, their regional and local authorities, social partners and civil society to promote active ageing.

The main purpose of the proposal falls within the ambit of Article 153(1), as the proposal aims at raising general awareness, stimulating a debate and mutual learning between Member States and stakeholders in order to promote better opportunities and working conditions for the participation of older workers in the labour market and to combat social exclusion.

The primary intention is to promote active ageing in employment by creating better opportunities for the participation of older workers, and to promote active ageing in society, by combating social exclusion through voluntary work, healthy ageing and autonomous living.

The proposal for a Decision consequently finds its legal basis in Article 153(2) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

The proposal for a Decision is in conformity with the principle of subsidiarity as provided for in Article 5 of the Treaty on European Union, as the objectives of the proposed European Year cannot be fully achieved at Member State level due to the need for trans-national exchange of information and the EU-wide dissemination of good practice, and can therefore, by reason of the scale of the proposed action, be better achieved at EU level.

4. BUDGETARY IMPLICATIONS

No additional funding is sought for the European Year. The flexibility for annual or multiannual priority-setting based on the budget lines and programmes of the Directorate General for Employment and other relevant programmes provides sufficient financial margin for running the Year on a scale similar to previous European Years. The administrative resources can also come from existing administrative budgets.

Proposal for a

DECISION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL

on the European Year for Active Ageing (2012)

(text with EEA relevance)

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular Article 153(2) thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the European Commission,

After transmission of the draft legislative act to the national Parliaments,

Having regard to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee²,

Having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions³,

Acting in accordance with ordinary legislative procedure,

Whereas:

- (1) Pursuant to Article 147 of the Treaty, the Union shall contribute to a high level of employment by encouraging cooperation between Member States and by supporting and, if necessary, complementing their action.
- (2) Pursuant to Article 153(1) of the Treaty, the Union shall support and complement the activities of the Member States on working conditions, the integration of persons excluded from the labour market, and the combating of social exclusion.
- (3) Pursuant to Article 25 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, the Union recognises and respects the rights of the elderly to lead a life of dignity and independence and to participate in social and cultural life.
- (4) Successive European Councils have recognised the need to tackle the effect of ageing populations on European social models. A key response to this rapid change in the age structure consists in promoting active ageing and thus ensuring that the baby boom cohorts, who are, on the whole, healthier and better educated than any such cohort before them, have good opportunities for employment and active participation in society.

² OJ C [...], [...], p. [...].

³ OJ C [...], [...], p. [...].

- (5) The growing proportion of older people in Europe makes it more important than ever to promote healthy ageing. Healthy ageing can help raise labour market participation of older people, enable them to be active in society for longer, improve their individual quality of life and curb the strains on health and social care systems.
- (6) The Commission presented its views on the demographic challenges the EU faces and on opportunities for tackling them in its communications on ‘The demographic future of Europe — from challenge to opportunity’ of 12 October 2006 and on ‘Dealing with the impact of an ageing population in the European Union’ of 21 April 2009.
- (7) The Council adopted on 22 February 2007 a resolution on ‘Opportunities and challenges of demographic change in Europe: the contribution of older people to economic and social development’, which emphasised the need to increase the possibilities of active participation by older people, the new economic opportunities ("silver economy") created by the growing demand of older people for certain goods and services as well as the importance of a positive public image of older people.
- (8) The Council adopted on 8 June 2009 Conclusions on ‘Equal opportunities for women and men: active and dignified ageing’, which recognises that, throughout the EU, older women and men face serious challenges as they seek to live active lives and to age with dignity, and proposes a number of measures to Member States and the Commission.
- (9) The Council adopted on 20 November 2009 Conclusions on ‘Healthy and dignified ageing’, inviting the Commission, inter alia, ‘to develop awareness-raising activities to promote active ageing, including a possible European Year on Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity in 2012’.
- (10) The Commission emphasised in its Communication on ‘Europe 2020 — A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth’ the importance to the European Union of promoting a healthy and active ageing population in the interests of social cohesion and higher productivity. It proposed a flagship initiative ‘An agenda for new skills and jobs’, under which Member States should notably promote active ageing policies, and a flagship initiative on a ‘European Platform against Poverty’. Achieving these policy goals requires action from all levels of government and various non-governmental stakeholders; they can in turn be supported, at the Union level, by European Year activities aimed at raising awareness and fostering the exchange of good practice. National coordinators should see to it that national action is coordinated and is consistent with the overall objectives of the European Year. The participation of other institutions and stakeholders is also planned.
- (11) The Council adopted on 7 June 2010 Conclusions on ‘Active Ageing’, inviting the Commission ‘to pursue the preparation of a European Year for Active Ageing in 2012 during which the benefits of active ageing and its contribution to solidarity between generations can be highlighted and promising initiatives in support of active ageing at all levels can be publicised’.
- (12) The Commission proposed in its proposal for a Council Decision on "Guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States" of 27 April 2010, which calls under the guidelines 7 and 8 on Member States to increase labour force participation through policies to promote active ageing, to raise employment rates of older workers through innovation in work organisation and to increase the employability of older workers through up-skilling and participation in lifelong learning schemes. Guideline 10 emphasises the need to enhance social

protection systems, lifelong learning and active inclusion policies with the aim to create opportunities at different stages of people's lives and shield them from the risk of social exclusion.

- (13) In its Communication on "A Digital Agenda for Europe", the first EU2020 flagship initiative adopted on 19 May 2010, the Commission stressed the importance of ICT for ageing well, proposing in particular the reinforcement of the Ambient Assisted Living (AAL) Joint Programme. The Digital Agenda for Europe also recommended taking concerted action to increase the digital competences of all Europeans, including older persons, a group that is over-represented within the 150 million citizens, or about 30% of the total, who have never used the internet.
- (14) The Commission is implementing the European Disability Action plan that contains relevant actions for older persons given the correlation between disability and ageing. In particular actions on accessibility following Design for all approaches would be relevant. Furthermore the EU and all Member States have signed the UN Convention on the Rights of persons with disabilities that contains relevant provisions for older persons.
- (15) Active ageing is targeted by several Union programmes, such as the European Social Fund, the European Regional and Development Fund, the PROGRESS programme, the Life Long Learning Programme, the Public Health Programme, the specific programmes on information and communication technologies and on socio-economic sciences and humanities in the Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Development, the Action Plan on 'Ageing well in the information society', the Ambient Assisted Living (AAL) Joint Programme for research and innovation, the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme with pilot deployment projects on ICT for Ageing Well and the Action Plan on urban mobility. Union co-financing of European Year activities will be in accordance with the priorities and rules applying, on an annual or multi-annual basis, to existing programmes and autonomous budget lines in the field of employment, social affairs and equal opportunities. Where appropriate, programmes and policies in other fields, such as education and culture, health, research, the information society, regional policy and transport policy, may support the European Year.
- (16) The objectives of the proposed European Year for Active Ageing cannot be fully achieved at Member State level due to the need for transnational exchange of information and the Union-wide dissemination of good practice, and can therefore, by reason of the scale of the proposed action, be better achieved at Union level. In accordance with the principle of proportionality, as set out in Article 5 of the Treaty on the European Union, this Decision does not go beyond what is necessary to achieve those objectives.

HAVE ADOPTED THIS DECISION:

Article 1
Subject

The year 2012 shall be designated as the European Year for Active Ageing (hereafter referred to as 'the European Year').

Article 2

Objectives

The overall purpose of the European Year shall be to encourage and support the efforts of Member States, their regional and local authorities, social partners and civil society to promote active ageing and to do more to mobilise the potential of the rapidly growing population in their late 50s and above, thereby preserving solidarity between generations. Active ageing means creating better opportunities and working conditions to enable older workers to play their part in the labour market, combating social exclusion by fostering active participation in society, and encouraging healthy ageing. On this basis, the objectives shall be:

- (1) to raise general awareness of the value of active ageing in order to highlight the useful contribution older persons make to society and the economy, to promote active ageing and to do more to mobilise the potential of older persons;
- (2) to stimulate debate and develop mutual learning between Member States and stakeholders at all levels in order to promote active ageing policies, to identify and disseminate good practice and to encourage cooperation and synergies;
- (3) to offer a framework for commitment and concrete action to enable Member States and stakeholders at all levels to develop policies through specific activities and to commit to specific objectives related to active ageing.

Article 3

Content of measures

1. The measures to be taken to achieve the objectives set out in Article 2 shall include the following activities at Union, national, regional or local level:
 - conferences, events and initiatives to promote debate, raise awareness and foster the making of specific commitments;
 - information, promotion and educational campaigns;
 - exchange of information, experience and good practices;
 - research and surveys on a Union or national scale, and dissemination of the results.
2. The Commission or the Member States may identify other activities as contributing to objectives of the European Year and allow the name of the European Year to be used in promoting those activities insofar as they contribute to achieving the objectives set out in Article 2.
3. The Commission and the Member States shall take account of gender mainstreaming in the running of the European Year.

Article 4
Coordination with the Member States

Each Member State shall appoint a national coordinator responsible for organising its involvement in the European Year. The national coordinators should also see to it that national activities are properly coordinated.

Article 5
Coordination at Union level

The Commission shall convene meetings of the national coordinators for the purpose of coordination at Union level and to exchange information, including on commitments made and their implementation in the Member States.

Coordination at Union level shall also be a matter for the existing policy committees and advisory groups.

The Commission shall also convene meetings of representatives of European organisations or bodies working in the field of active ageing to help it run the European Year.

The European Parliament, the Member States, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions will be associated in the activities.

Article 6
Consistency and complementarity

The Commission — together with the Member States — shall ensure that the measures provided for in this Decision are consistent with any other Union, national and regional schemes and initiatives that help attain the objectives of the European Year.

Article 7
Evaluation

By 30 June 2014, the Commission shall submit a report to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the European Committee of the Regions on the implementation, results and overall assessment of the initiatives provided for in this Decision.

Article 8
Entry into force

This Decision shall enter into force on the day following that of its publication in the *Official Journal of the European Union*.

Article 9

This Decision is addressed to the Member States.

Done at ...,

For the European Parliament
The President

For the Council
The President