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**CONCLUSIONS**  
**OF THE EUROPEAN POPULATION CONFERENCE 1982**

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In accordance with procedure agreed upon, the draft conclusions prepared by the Organising Committee to the European Population Conference were circulated to conference participants, who then submitted proposals for amendment which were debated at the closing session. The final text contained in the present document was adopted by the Organising Committee taking into account the proposed amendments in the light of the debate.

1. At the European Population Conference 1982, held between 21 and 24 September 1982, the consequences of demographic development in member states of the Council of Europe as well as the policy responses needed were discussed. The conference was organised by the Steering Committee on Population (CDDE) under the auspices of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. The participants included national delegations from member states participants nominated by the Consultative Assembly and by certain intergovernmental committees of the Council of Europe, observers nominated by certain invited non-member states and international governmental and non-governmental organisations, together with independent experts admitted as observers. The 17 working papers dealt with the following topics:

- a general survey of the demographic situation in Europe;
- the study of specific demographic problems;
- an assessment of likely future developments;
- the views of governments on the demographic situation;
- the policy responses to that situation; and,
- the possibilities for European co-operation on population matters.

In addition, national reports prepared by governments of member states and two other background papers were made available to participants.

Similar topics were discussed during the European Population Conference organised by the Council of Europe in 1966 and 1971. In the meantime, however, the demographic situation has changed so fundamentally that a new conference which would be concerned predominantly with the policy aspects of present and future population trends had become indispensable. The discussions at the 1982 conference have confirmed this view.

Not all aspects of demographic trends could be discussed within the time limits of the conference in particular the demographic situation outside Europe, and its implications for Europe could not be considered.

#### The demographic situation

2. Differences in social, economic and occupational structures and of culture continue to exist between the countries of Europe and also between the member states of the Council of Europe. Nevertheless there are many common features the most important of which are summarised in paragraphs 3 to 9.

3. Except in a few countries where the birth rate remains high, the outstanding feature of the present demographic situation in Europe is the sharp decline in numbers of births since about 1965. Although the decline has since come to a halt in most countries, the present level of fertility is no longer sufficient in many countries to ensure the replacement of the population in the long run. In view of the far-reaching changes in economic and social conditions which have taken place in recent years, and the related changes in values and life-styles, there is no certainty that present trends will be reversed spontaneously, although that possibility cannot altogether be excluded. Consequently, the authorities in many countries may either now or in the future, have to take account of a situation in which the number of births falls short of the number of deaths. Countries in such a situation will in the long run be faced with a decreasing population unless the natural decrease is offset by a positive net balance of migration. Such a positive balance is unlikely to be achieved, at least in the short run, since the rate of immigration to such countries has recently been falling.

4. The decline in the birth rate has coincided with a considerable decrease in rates of first marriage and remarriage. On the other hand, in most countries, the number of consensual unions has increased, especially among younger people. Such unions may be permanent, in which case nuptiality will decrease; but, even if the partners were to marry later, which is particularly likely if they decide to have children, nuptiality will not return to its former level. The decline in nuptiality has coincided with an increase in the number of divorces which has led to a situation where, in some countries, well over one quarter of the marriages of more recent cohorts are likely to end in divorce. The effect of these changes on fertility is uncertain, but an increase in the proportion of births outside marriage is likely to occur.

5. The decline in birth and marriage rates and the increase in the number of divorces and consensual unions must be placed in the context of changes in contemporary society's system of values and roles, including changes in the status of women. Better education and vocational training, increased opportunities for employment outside the home, the possibility to plan family size effectively and responsibly and the elimination of the fear of unwanted pregnancy have made many women more independent. Nevertheless, the burden of domestic work and rearing of children still appears to be borne mainly by women, and men are too often reluctant to share such duties with their wives, even when the wife is employed outside the home.

6. The decrease in birth rates and the possible decrease in death rates at older ages will lead to a further increase in the proportion of old people in all European countries. With improving standards of health, the capacity of the elderly to contribute to the welfare of the community is likely to be enhanced, and it is important that they continue to participate actively in society. In any case, in countries with well-developed social security systems and medical services, either the proportion of the national product devoted to the care and maintenance of the elderly and those no longer engaged in

gainful employment will have to rise, or benefits will have to be reduced - or else a higher proportion of the gains from economic growth will have to be devoted to this purpose. These additional costs will only be partly offset by reduced expenditures on children and adolescents. In countries in which economic growth is low or non-existent, there may well be serious difficulties in financing benefits for the elderly. The problems will become more critical in countries where the economically active population will diminish after the turn of the century.

7. Because of the high level of birth rates before 1970, large numbers of young persons are still entering and will continue to enter the labour market during the next few years, and work will have to be found for them at a time when unemployment is already high. Many experts think that the economic situation may not improve very much in the years to come. This is one reason why governments of countries with a large foreign labour force are becoming less and less willing to admit more foreign workers, though still allowing the reunion of families. However, some governments take the view that the limits of absorptive capacity have been reached in their country.

8. Practical politics is often dominated by topical issues. As a rule, however, many of the most far-reaching consequences of changes in demographic trends become apparent in the long term. Thus, the reduction in the birth rate after 1965 will affect demographic development for many decades to come even if fertility were to increase again in the near future. Similarly, in countries where the birth rate has been or remains high, population growth may be expected to continue for some time, even if the number of births were to drop sharply. The conference therefore wishes to emphasise the long-term effects of demographic processes, as reflected especially in changes in age distribution. The problems which will result from these changes need to be considered without delay. The committees which have been appointed in some countries to study the demographic situation and its consequences are well suited to undertake this work.

9. It is clear that an indefinite increase in population cannot be supported. At the same time, rapid falls in the birth rate leading to prolonged population decline also result in problems. In many respects, a situation in which births and deaths are nearly in equilibrium would seem desirable in the long run. However, in some countries with a high density of population a situation where population would become stationary at a slightly lower size than at present would not be unwelcome.

It seems clear however that, in societies where, under present circumstances, most people do not wish to have more than two children, a stationary population can only be reached if the aspirations of the individual and the needs of society can successfully be brought into harmony. In this respect, the suggestions in paragraphs 10 and 11 are of special importance.

### Fields of action

10. Although almost all delegations indicated in their statements that their governments had not formulated explicit population policies, the situation outlined in the previous paragraphs may lead some governments to take action to influence fertility trends. It is, of course, a matter for individual governments to decide whether or not the demographic and budgetary situation in their countries makes such action desirable, or possible. However, there is disagreement about the efficacy of such policies.

In a democratic society, the right of individual men and women to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children should be regarded as fundamental and deserves priority above all other considerations. Amongst other things, this implies that free access to family planning services should be assured so as to implement the resolutions on family planning adopted by the Council of Europe in 1975 and 1978.

It is recognised that parents who bring up children will inevitably be at an economic disadvantage in comparison with those who do not have children. It is widely accepted that it is right for a community to take measures which will at least partly offset the reduction in living standards occasioned by parental obligations. Among such measures, a number deserve specific mention:

- a. Tax benefits and cash transfers to families which improve their economic conditions and partially compensate for the loss of income suffered by parents, both in the period around the birth of a child, and whilst the child is heavily dependent on parental care;
- b. Granting leave to the parent to enable him or her to care for the child, without suffering career disadvantage;
- c. Adequate provision of child welfare services, including a safe physical and social environment;
- d. To assist families with children in their housing needs.

Children whose parents have chosen not to enter into a legal marriage should not suffer any discrimination because of their parents' status.

11.a. It is generally agreed that it is desirable that the number of unwanted pregnancies should be minimised. The provision of counselling and sex education should help in this regard, particularly amongst those sections of the population who are most exposed to that risk.

11.b. The increasing employment of women outside the home is regarded as an irreversible phenomenon to which other social institutions must adapt. The relationship between fertility and participation of women in the labour force is well-established, but it is complex and works in both directions. Nowadays there is usually a conflict between the desire for children, and participation in the labour force by men and women which provides them with financial and other rewards.

It remains true in most European countries that the main burden of domestic duties and child care continues to fall on women. To reduce this conflict, men must change their attitudes and behaviour and take their share of such duties.

It is widely agreed that it should be made easier for parents of either sex to combine the rearing of children with gainful employment. In this connection, the growing numbers of one-parent families deserve special consideration. The necessary change would involve action at many levels and many aspects of policy, such as conditions of employment (eg flexible working hours), the provision of specific services (eg creches, kindergartens), physical planning (to reduce the need for and burden of commuting). Progress has already been achieved in some of these fields, but it has been fragmentary and thus less than adequate.

The co-operation of employers and trade unions would be indispensable to achieve these aims, and new legislation may be necessary.

Notwithstanding the above, some parents may wish to devote a substantial part of their activities to caring for their families, particularly when the children are young, and their wishes should be respected. The problem of mitigating the economic disadvantages that this entails (both for the parents themselves and their children) will need consideration.

12. In recent years a preoccupation with problems of fertility has tended to obscure the continuation of considerable differences in the death rates of European countries. However, an increase in the expectation of life in good health is a universal human aspiration. Further reductions in death rates in European countries are likely to be achieved by improving environmental and working conditions and persuading people to change their life styles, by avoiding the consumption of substances which have been shown to damage their health, and by an increased awareness of health, including the health of unborn children, in those sections of the population which have not fully benefited from the progress of medicine and from health services.

13. The large fluctuations in sizes of birth cohorts during the last decades are of great importance for the educational system and require a high degree of adaptability. The problems involved can only be overcome by early and flexible planning.

14. The governments of host countries should recognise the contributions made by immigrants to the development of their economies and should therefore facilitate the economic and social integration of foreigners who are legally resident, clarify their rights as to residence and take measures to prevent discrimination against them. In this connection, measures to help integrate children of immigrants into the host society and especially into the world of work at all levels are of vital importance. The countries of origin and host countries should co-operate closely in drawing up policies in the field of migration. Energetic action should be taken against all activities which encourage xenophobia.

15. To enable policy makers to take fuller account of the demographic dimension of economic and social problems:

- further studies of both natural and migratory movements of population, including the provision of more basic statistics, should be encouraged;
- the resources available to demographic research institutes should be made adequate for this purpose;
- demographers should play a full part in national and regional planning;
- steps should be taken to promote population, education and information on population matters.

16. The problems arising from the demographic development in the member states of the Council of Europe are interdependent and, consequently, there is a need to co-operate in this field. However, it cannot be expected that member states could arrive at a common population policy, since demographic conditions, social and political structures and political goals are too diverse. Nevertheless, support should be given to all efforts to improve information and multiply exchanges of views on demographic topics at the international level. That can be done between scientists and politicians, bilaterally and multilaterally; the two are not mutually exclusive. The Council of Europe's initiative in becoming active in this field through the Steering Committee on Population (CDDE) is particularly welcome. In this committee, policy and scientific considerations are both taken into account. The conference therefore requested the Committee of Ministers to maintain its support for the CDDE especially in decisions affecting its programme of work. The conference expressed its satisfaction with the co-operation with other intergovernmental committees and with committees of the Parliamentary Assembly that deal with related themes, and would like to see these contacts strengthened further.

17. The CDDE's work should continue to be concentrated on its committees of experts, whose findings are discussed each year at the plenary session and made available to the public. At the same time, the practice of holding seminars on specific topics from time to time for a wider range of participants should be continued, because of their potentially greater impact. The next European Population Conference should be held after the 1984 UN World Population Conference and examine the implications of its findings for the policies of member states of the Council of Europe.

18. The European Population Conference 1982 highlighted the demographic trends and their policy implications in the member states of the Council of Europe. These trends are, however, not only of interest for this part of Europe but also for the rest of the world. It therefore seems desirable that the CDDE should play its part in helping member governments to prepare for the next World Population Conference.