

**EUROPEAN POPULATION FORUM 2004**  
**Population Challenges and Policy Responses**

**Geneva, 12-14 January 2004**

**Opening statement by Mr John Murray**  
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The Council of Europe has a long tradition of close cooperation with United Nations bodies, and especially with UNECE, on population questions. Over the years we have worked together with UNECE in many different ways, for example on publications, data collection, organisation of conferences and census monitoring, and we look forward to cooperating further during the coming months and years in order to take forward the results of this Forum. Bearing all this in mind, I am therefore most appreciative of this opportunity to convey, on behalf of our Secretary General, Dr Walter Schwimmer, the good wishes of the Council of Europe for a successful Population Forum.

Having looked at the list of participants, and going by the experience of previous demographic conferences organised by UNECE, I have indeed no doubt that our discussions during the next three days are going to be of real value to governments and to the research community.

In the Council of Europe we have recently observed a notable resurgence of interest in demographic questions among policy-makers and politicians. Especially striking has been the renewed enthusiasm with which our Parliamentary Assembly has been engaging with demographic questions and drawing attention to their policy implications. The presence here today of a particularly strong delegation of members of the Parliamentary Assembly is eloquent testimony to this development.

An important objective of this Forum is to examine the implementation in UNECE countries of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in 1994. In this connection, it is important to note that the Parliamentary Assembly, in its Recommendation 1564 (2002) on *the state of the world population*, stressed that much work still needs to be done and called on European States to redouble their efforts to fulfill the Cairo programme, particularly by reinforcing their commitment to sexual and reproductive health. I am pleased to be able to inform you that, in the reply of the Committee of Ministers to this Recommendation, which was adopted on 24 September 2003, the governments of the 45 member States of the Council of Europe “reiterate [their] commitment to the 15 underlying principles of the Programme of Action” and “join the Parliamentary Assembly in encouraging member States to reaffirm their support for achieving the goals and objectives of that programme”.

On the intergovernmental side of the Organisation, the European Population Committee – several of whose members are also present here – is responsible for the Council of Europe’s programme of demographic activities. The European Population

Committee monitors population trends, prepares comparative studies, and brings them to the attention of governments and the public. The committee does not itself engage in fundamental demographic research but instead produces policy-oriented studies as a contribution to the Council of Europe's *strategy for social cohesion*.

The Committee is working on many subjects of current interest which will be under discussion in this Forum, for example population ageing and its consequences for society, current and future migration trends at national and international level and the socio-demographic characteristics of populations at risk of exclusion. There is no doubt that the proceedings of the Forum will provide valuable input for our ongoing work.

Alongside its Population Studies series, the major publication of the Committee is its annual report *Recent Demographic Developments in Europe*. This volume, which monitors developments in Europe in all the main demographic variables, is based on data which is collected jointly each year by the Council of Europe, Eurostat and UNECE.

Allow me to mention some of the current work of the European Population Committee which is particularly relevant to the issues under review in the Forum. The Committee has, for example, been very active recently in the area of the reproductive health behaviour of young Europeans. In 2003 the work focussed on the role of *education and information in reproductive health*, while previously the Committee published studies on *the sexual and reproductive behaviour of adolescents* and on *contraceptive practices and abortion among adolescents*. The Committee believes that education and awareness-raising are needed in order to achieve changes in behaviour and sustainable improvements in sexual and reproductive health.

Low fertility is another topic which will be under discussion in the Forum. Here I should like to announce that we published just a few days ago a study on the *demographic and social implications of low fertility for family structures in Europe*. This study investigates the relationship between low fertility and new family patterns and examines the implications of childlessness. It notes that while low fertility tends to reduce individual poverty (by reducing family expenses and increasing labour force participation family incomes are increased), it has worrying long-term consequences for national budgets and in particular for pension systems. The report also reviews some of the measures taken to help women combine childbearing with paid employment.

Finally, I should like to announce that the Council of Europe is planning for spring 2005 a *Conference on demographic challenges for social cohesion*. This conference, a joint event of the European Population Committee and the Parliamentary Assembly, will be an excellent opportunity to bring together demographers and policy-makers from all our member states to examine the implications of population trends for social policies. The organising committee is currently developing modules on topics such as *population ageing, the implications of changing family formation, and the impact of migration on society*. I am quite sure that the debates in this week's Forum will provide valuable input for this forthcoming event.