Summary

Population ageing in Europe is likely to lead to changes in the provision of pensions and health services. Retirement ages, work practices and housing needs will be affected but changes are likely to be mediated via new technology and hence cannot be exactly predicted. While the ageing population is usually projected in terms of dependency or support ratios, in this paper projections are for older people as a proportion of eligible voters. American experience of the growing power of the elder's lobby is related to the European context, with emphasis on the growth of a framework for lobbying activity in a European context. While a mass movement of older people is even less likely in Europe than in the USA, public choice theory would suggest that as the numbers of older people rises towards 50% of eligible voters, politicians and policy makers will change their policies even without a united elderly bloc vote. There is also empirical evidence to suggest that policy makers perceive elderly people as a homogeneous, and hence a more powerful, bloc than their real divisions in terms of age, class, ethnicity and gender might indicate.

The European situation differs from the American in that the proportion of older voters is very much higher over all and will be even higher in retirement areas and in areas of out migration. The development of a Europe of the regions may allow older peoples' pressure groups to have greater influence in Brussels, by-passing their national governments. They may therefore be more effective than at present appears likely when the situation is looked at from a national perspective. Older women who, in some countries will make up 30% of the potential electorate, may come to have a growing influence on social policy as they unite with younger women to improve access to equal European citizenship for caregivers and those who receive care.

The challenge of an ageing electorate: changes in the formation of social policy in Europe?

The ageing of European populations is now a widely understood phenomenon. There are minor variations in the rate of ageing and the composition of the aged population across Europe, but the trend is common to all countries. The implications of the change have attracted little positive comment. However, 1993 is the European Year of the Elderly and the time is ripe for a reconsideration of the place of elders in public policy formation. This article is intended to provoke discussion on different aspects of policy in ageing societies. The content is necessarily speculative. Not only is the future unknown but necessary information is often lacking (for example from longitudinal

studies of ageing) because the elderly have not been a major concern of governments or social scientists.

Discussion of the social policy of ageing tends to be either negative or patronising - sometimes both. The structured dependency theorists (Estes, 1979; Townsend, 1981; 1986; Phillipson, 1982; Walker, 1980; 1983), have, often with the best intentions, seen old age as a time of marginalisation, of uselessness to a capitalist economy and as worse than useless - a burden. Old people are described as being forced out of the labour force into dependency, first on pensions and then on social and residential care. This structured dependency model has been challenged (Dant,1988; Johnson, 1988) by evidence that many, if not most, old people retire willingly and the great majority lead independent lives for many years afterwards. However, the poverty of older people, particularly the oldest old and women, lends support to some aspects of structured dependency theory.

In discussions of present policy, social security and health have attracted the most attention. Social security policies in response to an ageing population are well set out in ILO (1987). The message in this publication is determinedly up beat but the facts, as presented, belie the message: a smaller working population could find it increasingly hard to finance pensions for the growing number of retired elders.

In health care the well documented fact that older people are heavy users of health services is used to justify another doom and gloom scenario (see for example Haut Conseil de la population et la famille, 1992). In UK at present a person over 75 is four times more likely to be hospitalised in any one year than an adult aged less than 44. Costs are high. In health and social security the old are often seen as a burden which is about to become intolerable.

Policy Formation

The process of policy formation involves groups of younger adults acting on behalf of old people, rather than old people themselves. These groups are part of what Estes (1979) has called the 'aging enterprise'. They help to keep alive the idea of the elderly as a special client group in social policy. Pressure groups, gerontologists and service providers attempt to counteract the negative image of old people by a variety of campaigns, eg the European Year of the Elderly and Intergenerational Solidarity (1993). However by maintaining the image of old people as a disadvantaged group who are unable to speak for themselves and have to rely on powerful, often upper class, campaigners they undo much of what they accomplish.

The question posed here is whether European elders will shift from being the recipients or objects of social policy to having a real influence on policies which enhance their own interests. The

following sections consider how far American experience might apply to Europe and how far specifically European conditions will influence possible outcomes.

Demographic change and its implications

The demographic projections of the numbers of older Europeans (see Table 1) are unlikely to be very far wrong. Short of a catastrophic decline in life expectancy, the numbers of older people are predictable. At present the AIDS epidemic does not appear to be sufficiently virulent in Europe to bring about a major downturn in survival rates. Changes in the birthrate could, and very likely will, occur but they will take time, (upwards of 18 years), to work their way through to the voting age population.

We are heading for a series of European societies such as have never been known on earth before: societies where children, who used to be in the majority, will be a relatively small minority, and the majority of adults will be over 50. It is agreed that these societies will be different, (see for example Gillion, 1991) but first, we do not know how they will differ from today and second, the prospect of radically different societies is not yet part of our everyday thinking.

Cohort effects

The effect of life experiences on different generations of elders cannot be predicted, (see below on voting behaviour). However it is widely believed that elders of the future will be less passive, have higher expectations and be more demanding than current pensioners. Cohort studies identify differences across age groups (see for example DaneAge (1990) which found cohort differences in a wide range of areas from a propensity to take exercise to political participation). It is certain that the elders of the future will be on average more educated and more healthy. They will most probably be better housed and in most countries will be better off financially. The social support they can call on from their families is likely to change as more women remain in paid work but this does not mean that older people will feel neglected.

Health

It is not clear whether life expectancy will go on increasing as it has in past years in most countries (Eastern Europe excepted), but better health (see for example Henning, (1992) on the improved health of elders in Denmark) will enable older people to take an active part in their communities for longer and hence to hold more power and be more active as voters.

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While increases in the numbers and proportions of the very old (over 85) will almost certainly mean an increase in expenditure on social and medical care, we cannot assume that the increase will be pro rata. All European countries except Greece are at present

trying to contain health care costs (Abel-Smith, 1992). Technological changes are in sight which will allow a great many more procedures to be done on an outpatient basis or in local health centres or clinics. Costs will fall. These trends combined with the 'living will' movement (which allows a person to specify that they will not be subjected to needless medical procedures when they are dying), and cost cutting attempts to end heroic surgery on terminally ill patients, may greatly reduce the cost of elder treatment. Such developments would cut the costs of health care for the elderly relative to the costs for other age groups. The demand for elderly health care would thus be seen as less excessive and so have greater legitimacy. It can be argued that 'minimalist medicine' for older people will be both cost effective and better for patients (James Malone Lee, personal communication).

Work

The future of older workers is problematic. The relation between pension levels, capital accumulation and expectations will interact with opportunities for employment. Much will depend on national and local economic development. In areas where work is available, or if existing work is shared differently across age groups and sexes, it is very likely that older people will continue in paid work for longer than they do today, even in countries such as Greece where activity rates are still high. In depressed areas paid working life may get still shorter. Women are likely to show different participation patterns from men. For example older women's participation rates have risen in UK and Sweden in the last few years (Esping-Anderson and Sonnberger, 1989). It is possible that retirement ages will be raised but such a change will need to be accompanied by European directives against age discrimination in employment if it is to be of much assistance to older workers (see EurolinkAge, 1991 for information on campaigns against age discrimination). Where labour force participation is maintained, incomes and participation in community and political life (including trade unions) are likely to be higher than at present.

Housing

In much of Europe, particularly the Mediterranean states, housing for older people still involves a degree of co-residence with other age groups. There is no reason to think that this will persist, given the preference of older people for 'intimacy at a distance'- living near, but not with, their kin, which has developed in most norther European countries.

So far the concept of housing for the life course, or 'mobility' housing which incorporates facilities for disabled people into basic housing specifications, has made only a limited impact outside Scandinavia. As, or if, the policy is accepted and mobility standards are incorporated into building regulations,

much disability in older people which now demands institutionalisation or some form of community care may become a matter of self care. Once again autonomy and the potential for political participation may increase.

Mobility and technological advance

It is not possible to predict how long it will take for computer and other technologies to revolutionise the use of transport (in terms of shopping needs), of work (in terms of dispersion of workplaces to the home, and of communications (in terms of monitoring frail elders and getting assistance to them as needed), (Commission of the European Communities, 1984). Certainly the success of Minitel in France suggests that much could be achieved in ten years and that a revolution may be possible in 20.

Many current disabilities of frail elders could be reduced by simple changes such as buses with tail end lifts, already used in some districts in Sweden. The development of cheap, safe, effort free personal transport would revolutionise mobility for many in later life. Computerised shopping and bill payment will be another breakthrough. Such changes could radically alter the ability of frail or disabled old people to take part in community life. It may be argued that they will not be able to take advantage of new technology, but this too is likely to prove to be an ageist prejudice, and older people will use technology when it improves the quality of their lives.

Special TV programmes directed at elderly audiences via satellite or cable links may increase the knowledge needed to campaign for better conditions. They may also encourage elders to see themselves in a more positive light and so to be more willing to identify themselves as part of a mass movement.

Volunteering and self care

Even if healthy elders are excluded from the labour market, it seems very probable that more will find the energy needed to do free or expenses-paid voluntary work. Grandmothers will most probably continue to look after young children in countries where they do so at present. They may also find themselves in semi-paid occupations in the caring professions where labour is short.

As the retired population becomes more educated and in most European countries slightly more affluent, the opportunities to contribute to the economy, even in unpaid capacities are almost certain to increase and hence the ability to maintain self respect, cohesion and political influence.

Electoral change

All the above changes are likely to have a greater or lesser impact on the status of the elderly and on the formation and

implementation of social policy. However the biggest and most inescapable change will be in the numbers of older people as compared to younger. Such changes are usually expressed as dependency ratios (or less negatively as the converse, support ratios). From the point of view of social policy as dominated by social security considerations, this is the right measure of population ageing.

However if the aim is to consider elders as a factor in policy formation or as a pressure group, a more useful measure is the proportion of eligible voters over a certain age. The age of retirement is sometimes chosen but in European terms this is unsatisfactory. Official retirement ages vary and are changing as a result of European Court directives on equal opportunities. In recent years there has been a widening of the gap between official retirement ages and de facto retirement ages, which have dropped (Laczko and Phillipson, 1991). There is no reason to think that current retirement ages will be maintained over the next thirty years.

Also if the aim is to delineate a constituency or potential political grouping it is important to consider cohorts below retirement age on the grounds that at a certain age they begin to look ahead and to identify with retired people. The age of 55 has therefore been chosen in Table 1. It gives the present and projected proportions for a range of European countries and Turkey. The latter gives an idea of the way that Western Europe differs from many less developed non-European countries. Eastern European countries have been omitted. They show similar but less marked tendencies, despite recent evidence of falling life expectancies in some countries.

Table 1

Table 1 shows that there is a projected increase of almost 10% in the proportion of potential voters over 55 between 1990 and 2020. Countries where almost one third of potential voters are now over 55 will be in the position of having nearly half of all voters in this age group by 2020. As might be expected the trend is least marked in the Mediterranean countries and most in the Northern European. Italy with its sudden collapse in the birth rate is the exception on ageing, and Norway with a rise in the birth rate is projected to maintain a younger population for longer.

It has been argued, for example by Torres-Gil (1992), that it is not just the ability to think ahead to old age (so noticeably absent in early adulthood) that unites those over 50 with retired people. In middle age many people will begin to worry about the growing frailty of their parents. They may then make common cause with the elderly lobby to provide better care and perhaps even higher incomes to cope with growing frailty. A measure of the proportion of voters over 50 produces even more dramatic numbers for a potential elders lobby. Table 2 lists those countries where

half of all potential voters are projected as being over 50 in 2020. They include most of the northern welfare states, though the position of a united Germany is unclear. Switzerland stands out among non-EC states with over 55% of the potential electorate in the older age groups by 2020.

Table 2

From demography to grey power?

Numbers of potential voters are one thing. The conversion from numbers to a functioning interest group is quite another. The simplistic view, that growing numbers of old people mean more power for older age groups and more expenditure on their welfare, along with a corresponding shift away from younger people, has been argued by Pampel and Williamson (1989). Their argument relies on the US for evidence of lobby power and on numbers for all other states. This failure to extend the political argument beyond the United States is no accident. So far there is little evidence that older people form any sort of political group except in America. The following paragraphs will consider the interaction of European institutions with demographic trends.

Older voters

Political scientists have been concerned with the 'elderly voter' as one of several constituencies which must be identified in order to predict or analyze the outcome of elections. For example Dunleavy and Husbands (1985) identify voters over the age of 55 separately from the rest of the electorate. They show that retired voters were just as likely to vote Labour as the rest of the population unless they were among the minority of pensioners with above average incomes. These better off pensioners were very much more likely than the average to vote conservative. The implication is that normal class and interest group cleavages, which set tax payers against recipients of state transfers, will continue into old age. No solidarity is to be expected among older people (Oriol, 1981; Midwinter and Tester, 1987).

Others have related age to voting behaviour in different ways. Butler and Stokes (1974) do not believe that age in itself has any great influence on voting but that generation or cohort does. As they say 'We must not ask how old the elector is, but when he (sic) was young.' (Butler and Stokes, 1974: 54). In their view, well illustrated by Andrews (1991), people who are loyal to a party or set of political principles stay loyal, while those who change in youth may change in age. They conclude that: 'conservation of established political tendencies increases with age, not conservatism' (Butler and Stokes, 1974: 62).

It follows from the Butler and Stokes's approach that people may well vote for different parties as they age and that the change

may not always be in favour of more conservative political programmes. However between the ages of 50 and 95 there will have been many different experiences of youth. If older voters change their voting habits there is no guarantee that they will all change them in the same direction. It is possible that older voters will become politically more divided, not less.

A different theory of elderly voting patterns has been put forward by Rose and McAllister (1990). In their view voting behaviour is a function of age, though not only of age. Noting that people over 65 are more likely to vote Conservative, they suggest that age and conservatism (with a small c) go together and that if a party is seen as the party of change fewer old people will vote for it. However they also see evidence that voters can learn or change even at older ages. They note that the Labour vote among older electors in the UK has fallen. According to this theory, therefore, if an elder lobby develops, older voters may well shift allegiance to support it.

Other European countries have voting patterns which are less class dominated than in Britain. Different social cleavages may be more powerful. Religion, region and language may all predict voting behaviour more accurately than class. The trend towards a Europe of the regions as opposed to a Europe of nation states (Batley and Stoker, 1991; Gripaios and Gripaios, 1992; Rhodes, 1992) could increase the tendency of all voters, including older people, to identify with interest groups rather than political parties.

Diversity v.Interest group formation

As the previous sections illustrated, older people are not a natural political grouping in most countries. Even in America commentators have persistently stressed their variety (Ragan and Davis, 1975; Rose and Peterson, 1963; Williamson et al.1982; Torres-Gil, 1992). However elders have been successful in becoming a recognised political group and in altering social policy in their favour.

While emphases differ, American authors generally see four key aspects in the growth of political influence of older people. The **first** is social marginalisation and the development of a sub-culture (Rose, 1963). Older people recognise their difference from younger age groups and form associations. Some writers have seen individuals as a key influence, either in favour of elders (Lammers and Klingman, 1984) or against them (Putnam (1970). **Second**, once formed the associations need to build coalitions with other groups (Pratt, 1976). Authors differ in the emphasis they give to different coalitions. Williamson et al (1982) see labour union support as a key while Estes (1979) cites a wider coalition which she terms the 'aging enterprise', (and regards as ultimately harmful to the interests of elders). **Third**, a framework established at national level enables existing movements in favour of older people to exercise greater power. Congressional hearings

and the related legislation raise the profile of elderly people. A raised profile results in greater legitimation, first for elderly people to join elder organisations and second greater public support for elder claims.

The **fourth** stage is to some extent a reversal. Public recognition of the legitimacy of elder claims has limitations. Williamson et al (1982) and Torres-Gil (1992) both follow Mauss (1971) in seeing the elder lobby in the US as an example of a movement in danger of being destroyed by its success. Progress, from a marginalised group to strength via a combination of lobby power and broad social concern with the plight of older Americans, first results in gains for older people, particularly in the field of social security and health care. However the success is widely perceived as having resulted in shift of social resources from younger workers towards elder retired people. When such a shift is so big that it is seen as unfair or going too far, the legitimacy of demands made by the elders lobby is challenged. For example Americans for Generational Equality (AGE), now wound up and merged with the Association of Baby Boomers was formed to combat 'excessive' shifts in resources from young to old. Torres-Gil (1992) sees the repeal, in 1989, of the Medicare Catastrophic Coverage Act 1988 as the turning point for American elders. As he says, 'No other major legislation had ever been enacted and repealed within a year due to political pressure. On the other hand, older people were perceived, as a result, as a selfish interest group wanting expanded benefits without the burden on paying for them'.(Torres-Gil 1992: 81).

US commentators therefore see a future in which older people will have more political resources in terms of votes, education and possibly money, but not necessarily more political power unless the legitimacy of their demands can be maintained or they move to voting as a bloc.

Applicability of US experience to Europe

Marginalisation

Following Rose (1965) there is no difficulty in seeing older people in Europe as a marginalised group even though the degree of marginalisation may vary in modern times. The elderly have long been held in low esteem across the continent. Stearns (1977) gives a particularly negative historical picture of the status of old people in France (Sterns,1977), though this is somewhat modified by Troyanski (1982). A select group of rich old people were able to maintain respect (Guillemard, 1980) because of their control over material resources, but even they were often recorded as objects of envy and ridicule rather than veneration or respect among the younger generation who wished to come into their inheritance. There appears to be little historical evidence in any European country of a golden age when property-less old men were well treated, let alone old women.

In modern times welfare states have improved the lot of the old to varying degrees. The process has advanced furthest in Scandinavia. In Denmark for example elderly users are represented on local user councils for the services they consume (Kristiansen, 1992). As DaneAge put it 'elderly people... were characterised chiefly by poverty, ill health and loneliness...we do not feel as powerless or alienated as many people did in the past.. a change in the pattern of sex roles has especially made women more self confident and active' (DaneAge, 1990: 40). Poverty however remains for some, even in Denmark. In France a conscious attempt was made to enable elders to share in the benefits of post war reconstruction via the 1962 Raport Laroque (Guillemard, 1980), but it is still difficult to argue that elderly people are not marginalised both financially and culturally. It therefore seems safe to predict that older people will be identifiable as a marginalised group in all European countries over the next decades.

Development of a Mass Movement

The ability of European elders to form mass movements on the lines of the American Association of Retired Person with 30m members (Torres-Gil, 1992) is likely to be limited. The strong European tradition of marginalising or downgrading old people makes it less likely that they will wish to identify themselves as 'old' by joining a mass movement of seniors. For the same reasons the development of high profile militant movements such as the Grey Panthers will also have limited impact. At present there is no catalyst such as the need for cheap health insurance, identified by Williamson et al (1982) as one of the major factors behind the success of AARP.

Lobby power

The ability to lobby is not dependent on a mass movement and the growth of existing pensioner's groups in Europe should not be underestimated. There are pensioners groups in all EC countries (EurolinkAge,1991; Gifford, 1990) and some of these may yet move into the high profile activist role taken by the Grey Panthers in America. While most are not very effective as lobbyists at **national** level their influence at **Community** level is bound to increase.

A framework for lobbying

European national political systems do not lend themselves to lobbying on the American scale but evidence from Brussels suggests that there is much greater potential for lobbying at the EC level. The potential in Brussels for older people and the European ageing enterprise to build up a lobby on the American pattern already exists and is developing fast (Fallick, 1990; Gardner, 1991).

The development of lobbying is possible because the last few years have seen a very change in competencies at EC level. Whereas the Treaty of Rome made no mention of older people, the Social Charter (1989) included them very marginally by noting that every worker should 'be able to enjoy resources affording him or her a decent standard of living' on retirement and that those who need it should be entitled to 'sufficient resources and to medical and social assistance specifically suited to his needs' (Social Europe, 1990: 49-50). The first EC Programme for Older People began in 1991 with a small budget of 2.2m ECU. Budget increases were exponential in the following two years but slower growth is expected after 1993.

A European Observatory on Ageing and Older People (see Walker et al., 1992, for the first annual report) was set up in 1991. This will henceforth provide one focus for the campaigns of pensioner groups and other national pressure groups. The first meeting of the EC Non-Governmental Organisations Liaison Group, involving cross-national pensioners groups, EurolinkAge, Eurag, Fiapa and the European TUC Retired Section also took place in 1991. In 1992 the first European Pensioners Parliament met in Luxembourg. All these activities help to legitimate the claims of older people. They may have relatively little impact on individual governments but they are part of an expanding area of activity in the EC. The designation of 1993 as the European Year of the Elderly and Intergenerational Solidarity is another such symbolic gesture. National governments allocate a greater or lesser amount of money to support the Year.

The framework for legislation and legitimation and even for the implementation of a restricted range of initiatives is therefore rapidly being strengthened. Court decisions, such and the European Court of Justice ruling in the Barber case (1990) that pensions are pay and hence equal pensions should be offered for equal work are building a legal, as opposed to a political and administrative, framework. It will further enable older people's groups and the coalitions which support them to extend their influence and generate legitimacy. Equally legislation and decisions by the ECJ may be expected to increase awareness of elder rights and to highlight any cases of social dumping of pensioners.

The expansion of administrative competence may be more difficult to achieve as nationalist forces grow in power and countries rely on the principle of subsidiarity to restrict the growth of EC competence (see Spicker, 1991). The important area of state pensions are subject to the principal of subsidiarity and will not be harmonised in the foreseeable future. However moves to harmonise private pensions and retirement ages may be more likely since they come under the heading of distortions in the labour market, and hence can be seen as an area of competence under the original aims of the Treaty of Rome to establish a free market in labour. Other areas such as rail concessions may be harmonised

across Europe, helping to place a framework of entitlements in position which will enhance the sense of common purpose among Europe's elders. Equally however such developments may be blocked by other governments as they have been by the British.

The addition of the new concept of 'European citizenship' in the Social Protocol of the Maastricht Treaty opens up much greater possibilities for elder rights and claims. As Spicker (1991) argues, such citizenship is no longer seen as restricted to those who are in paid work. Older people are unlikely to find themselves with full citizenship overnight but the concept has potential. Equally the addition of health as an area of competence under Maastricht (Title XVII Public Health) will extend EC competence into an area of vital interest to elders. It is possible in these developments to discern parallels with the growth of competence in social affairs of the US government (Spicker, 1991).

Lobby coalitions

So far, as outlined above, support for the elders lobby has mainly come from NGOs. In America trade unions were an important constituent of the ageing lobby coalition. The role of European trade unions in campaigning for a better deal in old age is variable but nowhere very salient. In Germany unions have been concerned with pensions in terms of deferred pay but have confined themselves to the narrow constituency of indigenous workers. Old age poverty for women and gastarbeiter have barely figured on the union agenda. In future there will be scope for union pressure but cross-national co-ordination will be needed (Vogel-Polsky and Vogel, 1991). However such pressure may also come from health and care workers unions as much as from general labour. In the late sixties and early seventies, service unions were seen as one of the main pressure groups for better service and higher expenditure and they may yet figure as a key actors in the European ageing enterprise. In southern Europe all the developments outlined are likely to proceed more slowly.

New developments

Numbers as political power

There are three new ingredients in the European situation which have not been identified by American analysts. These are demographic change, change in the position of women and the development of a Europe of the regions. The first is the demographic strength of older people. A public choice model does not necessarily need a fully developed mass movement in order to instigate changes in policy. Sheer numbers and a higher profile may be enough to cause politicians and other policy makers to alter their perceptions of the parameters within which they operate (Wilson, 1991) in favour of older people. Developments in Brussels will reinforce any such trend.

In this connection, Kasschau (1978) found, in his studies of American policy making, that although political analysts (and no doubt older people themselves), saw elders as too heterogeneous to form united interest groups, decision takers saw them as homogenous. This is an important point and one well known to gerontologists. Policy makers do tend to see older people as a mass and they can be expected to react accordingly if they find they are dealing with large numbers of old people or vocal pressure groups. The chances are high therefore, that older people will affect policies in areas where they are most numerous even though this effect will be indirect rather than direct via political representation.

Women

Second there is the possibility that women will become a significantly greater influence than they are at present. The issue of population ageing is of great importance for women. They are the primary providers (paid and unpaid) of care at all ages. As the numbers of very old increase the chances are that women, at or near retirement age, will have to spend more time caring for frail elders and that this caregiving role may last until well into their own old age. Women as survivors are more likely to live to be frail. They are therefore the main recipients of care as well as the main providers. So far this conjunction has helped to keep informal caregiving off the policy agenda in most countries. Informal care has been seen as something women do 'naturally'. However there is no reason to think that this invisibility will continue as the number of frail elders rises and as the opportunities for paid employment, better incomes and more varied activities increase. Also, in advanced old age, many men (husbands) do take on caring responsibilities (Arber ad Gilbert, 1989) and their contribution should not be forgotten. These caregiving husbands may join politically with the great majority of older women who are caregivers and receivers to force some changes in formal caregiving.

Table 3

Table 3 indicates that the proportion of older women among voters is already high at around a fifth. It will rise in most countries towards a third if current projections are accurate. It will be very much higher in retirement areas and areas of out migration. In the circumstance it is possible that older women's concerns will remain as invisible as they are at present but it seems unlikely that this will be the case.

It might be argued that older women are apolitical rather than political (see Job, 1984 for empirical evidence), and that they are less likely than men to vote on any issue, let alone to combine politically. In future however, the drive to increase care in the community and so the burdens on carers, which is common to

all European countries (Abel-Smith 1992), may make some form of caregiver support a necessity. Campaigns, legislation and the legitimisation that a benefit can bring may be expected to increase the political consciousness of older women both as caregivers and care recipients.

Solidarity at regional and local levels

Third, while European political and social conditions may appear to be against the growth of national pensioner movements, increased pensioner power at regional and local level is much more likely. Regional ability to by-pass the national capital and lobby directly in Brussels and Strasbourg is likely to increase (Leonardi and Nicoletti, 1990). Regions may vary in their level of concern with older citizens' issues. The figures presented in Tables 1 and 2 are national totals but conceal wide differences at sub-national level. In retirement areas, particularly, it is possible to envisage a large population of relatively well educated and marginally more affluent pensioners having a strong influence on local politics and the allocation of resources at a local level.

Two scenarios leading to better deals for retired people can be postulated. In one retirement migrants make common cause with a local political party and use their support as a lever for better services. In the second, a public choice model, local parties compete for the votes of pensioners by adopting policies aimed at their needs. In both cases active retired people may take over leadership in local politics. They have the time and increasingly they will be educated and possibly affluent.

Such local developments may be strengthened by small scale social changes which could be expected to increase the ability of older people to identify as part of a group: the decrease in family contact through migration; changes in voting patterns as older people become more educated and more willing to vote on age group lines; the growth of segregated housing; and cable or satellite television programmes targeted on older age groups. In those countries (most) where the relief of poverty is a local government issue there will be clear benefits which local politicians can offer to impoverished older voters, most of whom will be women.

The increased development of regional funds, which will often be aimed at declining areas where the number of older people is high, may well strengthen the hand of local politicians who want to provide for the majority of their voters (older people). All these developments can be seen as helping to raise consciousness in areas where old people form the great majority of the electorate.

Conclusion

If the American analysts are right the peak of grey power in American has already been passed. The analysis provided by

Williams et al and Torres-Gil both indicate 'a shift from automatic legitimacy to political justification for senior citizen benefits' (Torres-Gil 1992: 81). Europe seems very far from that stage.

In Europe older people are handicapped by below average incomes and by a strong tendency for younger age groups to perceive them as a burden. Pensions are rarely seen as deferred earnings and raising pensions is not so far seen as a measure to enable an old age which is healthier, more trouble free, and hence a cheaper in terms of services. The economic benefits arising from unpaid voluntary work, informal care and self care (a very high consumer of personal resources among frail elders), are unlikely to be added to national accounting frameworks in the foreseeable future. It follows that the contribution of older people to national economies will continue to be undervalued and they will continue to be seen as a burden by many in the younger policy making cohorts.

However there are European developments which could bring about changes in the present allocation of resources between generations. The results would be to improve the quality of life of older people and to bring them nearer full citizenship in old age. The framework for legal and social service developments in favour of aged citizens is already being developed in Brussels. More sophisticated lobbying, building on what is already in place, is likely to raise consciousness and extend the existing framework. Older voters will have a growing political legitimacy even if they do not form an identifiable mass movement.

A Europe of the regions will give greater opportunities for local politicians to bypass national policies and meet local needs for better conditions for older citizens. The sheer numbers of older voters in some retirement areas will affect political perceptions even if there are no political movements specifically organised by older people. The strong tendency of policy makers to perceive elders as an undifferentiated mass will indirectly increase their influence on policy.

The impact of these changes will be mediated by the strength of women's movements in the future. The majority of older voters will be women and the majority of very old care recipients will also be women. It is possible that in countries where the women's movement has little support, the issue of full citizenship for women will continue to be ignored, and with it the needs of older people. On the other hand in countries, or regions, where the women's movement is strong and where younger and older women make common cause it is possible to envisage a real shift towards full citizenship. The result might be greater diversity across Europe in the way old people are treated. Alternatively, if policy makers converge on an ideal of citizenship for all, there will be greater uniformity, even though the forces for change are unequal between countries.

While some might deplore such developments, it is entirely possible to argue that policies which are good for elders are good for all citizens over a wide range of government activities. For example Day (1992) lists good public transport, safety in and out of doors, accessible parks and other informal meeting places, low cost rented housing close to all amenities, and walk-in health and counselling services. These are all improvements which would benefit communities as a whole. Better policies for elders could be seen as a local communal opportunity, even if national governments are slow to act.

Finally the implication for social policy of enhanced senior power are very great. Social policy is traditionally a matter of campaigns, research or administration on behalf of disadvantaged groups. Public policy on the other hand has tended to deal with mainstream issues such as defence. If planning and servicing old age should become a mainstream matter involving the majority of voting citizens the social policy paradigm would, it is to be hoped, undergo a welcome shift. Future European research needs to address the question of whether American experience can or should be repeated and what conditions favour or prevent the development of grey power in individual countries.

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Table 1 Percentage of voters over 55 in selected European countries (actuals and projections)

	1990	2000	2010	2020
	%	%	%	%
Belgium	33	34	37	43
Denmark	32	34	39	44
France	32	32	36	40
Germany	32	37	39	45
Greece	35	36	38	40
Eire	27	26	27	31
Italy	33	35	39	44
Luxembourg	32	35	40	45
Netherlands	29	31	37	42
Portugal	32	31	34	38
Spain	32	32	34	39
UK	34	34	36	41
EC12	33	34	37	42
Austria	32	34	37	43
Finland	30	32	40	44
Norway	33	32	36	40
Sweden	35	36	39	42
Switzerland	32	36	41	46
Turkey	18	18	19	23

Source: Calculated from Bulatao., R. et al. World Population Projections 1989-90 Edition, World Bank, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press

Table 2 Countries in which more than half the voters are over 50 by 2020 (actuals and projections)

	1990	2000	2010	2020
	%	%	%	%
Belgium	41	42	47	52
Denmark	39	43	48	53
Italy	41	44	47	54
Luxembourg	40	44	50	54
Netherlands	36	40	47	52
UK	41	43	45	50
EC 12	40	42	46	52

Austria	40	43	46	53
Finland	38	43	49	53
Sweden	42	46	48	51
Switzerland	40	45	50	55

Source: Calculated from Bulatao., R. et al. World Population Projections 1989-90 Edition, World Bank, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press

Table 3 Women over the Age of 50 as a Percentage of Total Voters

	1990	2000	2010	2020
Belgium	23	23	25	28
Denmark	21	23	26	28
France	22	22	24	26
Germany	24	24	26	29
Greece	24	24	25	27
Ireland	18	17	19	21
Italy	23	24	26	29
Luxembourg	22	24	27	29
Netherlands	19	22	25	29
Portugal	22	22	25	26
Spain	21	22	23	26
UK	22	23	24	27
E 12	22	23	25	28
Austria	23	24	25	29
Finland	21	23	26	28
Norway	21	22	24	26
Sweden	23	25	26	28
Switzerland	22	25	27	30
Turkey	12	12	13	16

Source: Calculated from Bulatao., R. et al. World Population Projections 1989-90 Edition, World Bank Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press