

**Speech** by Dirk J. van de Kaa, President of the European Association for Population Studies (EAPS) at the Opening Session of the European Population Conference 1987: Issues and Prospects, Jyväskylä, Finland, June 11-16, 1987.

Governor, Rector, Ladies and Gentlemen

As a demographer I have long had feelings of warm sympathy for the Queen in a book by the author of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, when she remarked: "It is a poor sort of memory that only works backwards". For it would have saved me, and I imagine many a colleague, a good deal of embarrassment if my memory had also worked forward. But today I feel different. European demographers live in an exciting time and this largely because we are unsure about what the future will bring.

Nearly all countries in the region have experienced unusually rapid changes in marriage patterns, household formation and fertility, independent whether inside or outside marriage. Moreover, many countries are attracting sizeable streams of immigrants. It is as if a Second Demographic Transition has Europe in its grip. A transition which - contrary to what has long been expected - may lead to a period of population decline.

This first, large scale European population conference, organized by demographers and population scientists themselves, addresses a large number of issues related to these recent changes, but also to periods further back. The topics range from the future of the family to the insights the work of early empirical demographers may provide. They were not chosen because of their relevance for policy and neither with the intent of making them the basis for recommendations to governments. They were simply selected because it was felt their analysis might at least bring us a step closer to establishing the scientific truth about them. I cannot guarantee, Governor, Distinguished Guests, that all papers will reflect the excitement just referred to. I should, perhaps, recall the statement of a famous Dutch author, who died exactly hundred years ago, in this regard. He called himself *Multatuli*, which - it may comfort our paper writers - I have learned to translate as "I have suffered greatly", and said "I try to write normal Dutch, but unfortunately I

have been to school". And, as most demographers have gone to several schools and have attended university as well, to non-experts their language tends to be a little less than lively.

As I remarked a few moments ago, this conference was organized by Europe's demographers themselves. In fact, no less than five different professional bodies joined forces to prepare this gathering. All my experience and organisational instincts warned against such an arrangement. I felt it was bound to lead to considerable strife, difficult communications and numerous misunderstandings. That this did not occur possibly partly vindicates those of my friends who consider demographers the most well-behaved and least unruly lot of all social scientists. But it, no doubt, primarily reflects the good personal relations amongst those involved in the organisational work and their common desire to work constructively together for a good cause. On behalf of the European Association for Population Studies, I should like to pay tribute to the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population, the Finnish Demographic Society, The Finnish Population and Welfare Federation Väestöliitto and its Population Research Institute, and the Central Statistical Office of Finland, and to thank them most warmly for their efforts and co-operation. Under the able chairmanship of Allti Majava, and supported by a good secretariat, we worked very well together. I should also like to express our sincere thanks to those governments and organisations which supported us financially. It has been of great value to us.

When Finland was first mentioned as a venue for this conference, Governor, the members of the Council of EAPS immediately told me it would be an excellent choice. They stressed the various abilities of its demographers, its wonderful nature and the country's unique geographical position. Since by then I had already learned to recognize and respect their collective wisdom and liked Finland myself, I was easily persuaded. I must admit though that the point about the good geographical position largely escaped me. I felt that Helsinki and Jyväskylä were perhaps a little further to the North than convenient to all. I pondered the point a little further and found part of the answer, I thought, in Alice in Wonderland when a lobster observes "The further off from England the nearer is to France ...". I had long since learned that in

population matters there often is merit in not being closer to the one than to the other! Almost unconsciously a further sentence floated around in my mind, but its content referred to a situation so remote from our continent that I failed to make the connection. It is attributed to Porfirio Diaz, who seems to have said "Poor Mexico, so far from God and so close to the United States".

As regards the personal affinity that I as a Dutch demographer had felt for Finland, the answer occurred to me, when recently, on the car radio, I listened to Louis Armstrong. He clearly sang to encourage people to fall in love, giving as examples that "... the Dutch in Old Amsterdam do it, not to mention the Finns!" So we seem to share a human faculty without which life would be exceedingly dull and demographers would soon be out of work.

Ladies and Gentlemen, The Council of the European Association for Population Studies trusts that this European Population Conference will be a success and that it will, at regular intervals, be followed by similar meetings of a regional nature.

Thank you.