

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

COMMITTEE ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The Committee on Women's Rights met in Brussels on 5 and 6 May 1993 under the chairmanship of Christine Crawley (Soc., United Kingdom). Agnès Hubert, Head of the Equal Opportunities Unit at the Commission of the European Communities, outlined the Commission's proposals for the draft budget for 1994. These include a 55% increase on the 1993 appropriation for promoting equal opportunities, bringing the total proposed for 1994 to ECU 6.2 million. She also reported that the Commission was planning to allocate ECU 250 000 to co-financing initiatives to encourage women to participate, as voters and candidates, in next year's European elections. The Unit will be publishing a campaign guide for women politicians and a meeting to launch the electoral campaign will be held in Louvain on 23 and 24 September.

Christa Randzio-Plath (Soc., Germany) outlined the position of the Committee on Women's Rights on reform of the Structural Funds, which modifies their objectives, effectiveness and coordination. She was pleased that the phrase "equal opportunities" had finally been included in the text of the framework Regulation and stressed the need for the text as a whole to pay particular attention to women. She hoped that the percentage of Social Fund resources earmarked for women would, at the very least, be in proportion to the unemployment rate for women. Christine Crawley proposed an amendment to the proposal for reform of the Structural Funds, whereby masculine forms would be replaced by expressions that are not gender-specific.

Other matters discussed included the need to maintain the IRIS network and press ahead with other training initiatives for women; the importance of companies appointing counsellors to support victims of sexual harassment and help them to defend their rights; and the problems of pornography and poverty, which affect women throughout Europe. Finally, the Committee on Women's Rights decided to organize a public hearing on the NOW programme on 28 and 29 June.

Information: European Parliament, – rue Belliard 96-113, B-1040 Brussels, OR – Plateau de Kirchberg, L-1919 Luxembourg.



WOMEN OF EUROPE NEWSLETTER

Dear Readers,

A conference on "Women of the Mediterranean" was held in Montpellier from 13 to 15 May 1993. The event, organised by the CNIDFF, the Catalan Women's Institute, the Association of Mediterranean Women and the Languedoc-Roussillon Union of Women's Information Centres, was attended by 250 women drawn from all over the region. The main themes of the conference, hotly debated by delegates, were identity, political and economic power, and the "creative Mediterranean".

Delegates demonstrated, with energy and conviction, that "unity and diversity are two facets of the same message" which must be incorporated into a global vision in which awareness of the whole highlights the value of its component parts. At a time when Europe is in search of an identity, the experience of these women supports the thesis that social, historic and cultural differences, often perceived as obstacles to "European citizenship", are in fact assets which should be cultivated. Simone Susskind, who chaired the session on "Women of the Mediterranean and political power", warned of the threat posed by the rise of the extreme right and the upsurge of racism in the north and the spread of Islamic fundamentalism in the south. She called for vigilance to prevent the erection of new barriers of xenophobia, exclusion and ostracism. On the central issue of access to political power, delegates stressed that women, north and south, were at one in their rejection of violence and that they all had conflict management skills. They also discussed the possibility of a specifically feminine approach to practical politics.

In the countries of the Mediterranean, where a large majority of men experience "a real fear of women, just as Ulysses feared the sirens", women are still under-represented in positions of power. Yet their active participation in liberation movements proves that they are capable of acting effectively in the political arena, using different methods to achieve their ends. Sadly, in this part of the world, embarking on a political career often means abandoning one's private life. Politics is synonymous with service. It is "the art of making other people's business one's own, the source of globalization". But this function has been eroded over time. Marie-Claude Vayssade, a member of the European Parliament, expressed the hope that women would succeed in "reconciling the world with the noble art of politics". Let us hope that, north and south, more and more women will gain access to high-level decision-making and take us closer to genuine democracy.

Anne-Blanche Haritos

Anne Blanche Haritos

COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

The Equal Opportunities Committee held its 13th extraordinary meeting in Brussels on 28 and 29 April 1993. The meeting was chaired by Rena Lampsa (Greece). The meeting, attended by committee members, representatives of the IRIS, LEI and childcare networks, and NOW national coordinators, was convened midway through the third action programme to review steps taken to promote equal opportunities and to consider reform of the Structural Funds.

Addressing the Equal Opportunities Committee, Segismundo Crespo Valera, Director-General for Social Affairs at the European Commission, expressed concern about equal opportunities in a period of recession. There was much to be done. If change was to be brought about, men and women should be equally represented – particularly since the way women organized their lives to make time for work, family and social responsibilities could "point us all in the right direction". He reaffirmed the Commission's commitment to equal rights and announced that priority was being given to the proposal for a directive on leave for parental and family reasons and to two further proposals, one on reversal of the burden of proof, the other on the individualization of social security rights. He also called for input from women for the Green Paper on social policy to be published in October.

Women and reform of the Structural Funds

The new coordination and framework regulations for the Structural Funds were presented to the Committee. Sue Binns, Chef de cabinet to Mr Millan, briefed the committee on the new ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) regulation and Fernand Dusaunoy dealt with the proposal for a regulation on the EAGGF (European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund). Philippe Hatt, Head of the Coordination, Evaluation, Inspection, Specific Measures and Community Initiatives Unit, reported on the ESF (European Social Fund) regulation (which covers the NOW initiative). This propo-

...

ses several important changes to Social Fund objectives. While the first priority remains the fight against unemployment, Objective 3 stresses the need for measures to combat long-term unemployment and facilitate the occupational integration of young people. A major innovation is extension of the Fund to measures to facilitate the integration of marginalized groups into the labour market. Objective 4 aims to prevent new unemployment by adapting workers' skills to industrial change. The Fund's main contribution will be in the form of training and retraining. The principle of equal opportunities is maintained by the reform.

In this connection, Segismundo Crespo Valera stressed that although "we are entering a new phase in which the promotion of equal opportunities will be one of the top priorities of the new Fund", this did not mean that "specific Community initiatives to assist women have had their day". The Commission, he said, was working on a new Social Fund initiative to develop "exemplary measures" under three priority headings: equal opportunities, social exclusion and industrial change.

Rena Lampsa stressed that the Committee wanted to see the reform taking more account of women's needs and expressed the hope that the framework regulation for the Social Fund would be amended to give it express responsibility for women. A letter is to be sent to the European Parliament and the Council to support the demands made by the European Women's Lobby in connection with reform of the Structural Funds.

Agnès Hubert, Head of the Equal Opportunities Unit, gave a progress report on the third action programme and outlined the contribution made by the NOW initiative. Celia Alexopoulou, the initiative's coordinator, reviewed its activities and achievements and noted that, under the new proposals, women would benefit from a higher proportion of Social Fund resources. This meant that the NOW initiative would receive more funding and could be placed on a longer-term footing. Representatives of the IRIS, LEI and childcare networks and of CREW also briefed the Committee on their activities. The positive action network, which had been suspended, was operational again. Its future strategy would focus on the telecommunications industry.

The European elections

Rena Lampsa called on the Committee to exert pressure at various levels to raise women's awareness of the European elections. Maria Stratigaki, of the Directorate-General for Social Affairs, said that a co-financing programme would be proposed to NGOs and government agencies

to promote electoral campaigns at national level. A campaign guide and campaigning material (including documentation from the Athens conference on women and decision-making) will be distributed and a seminar will be held in Louvain in September to encourage women to take part in the European elections. The Information for Women Unit is working to the same end through various channels (including the European network of women journalists).

During the meeting, Maria Stratigaki announced that the European Seminar on Employment in Europe would be held in Brussels in October. The central theme will be "Does Europe have the will to tackle employment problems?". Orlagh O'Farrell, also of the Directorate-General for Social Affairs, briefed the Committee on the situation regarding parental leave. It is interesting to note in this context that the United Kingdom has proposed that this issue be reopened and linked to care of the elderly, a particularly pertinent suggestion as 1994 – "The Year of the Family" approaches.

Information: Equal Opportunities Unit, DG V, Commission of the European Communities, rue de la Loi 200, B-1049 Brussels.

"EQUALITY IN THE FUTURE – AN INTEGRATED ASPECT"

Under the Danish Presidency, an important seminar on equality in the future, organized by the Danish Employment Ministry in cooperation with the European Community, was held in Aarhus (Denmark) from 12 to 14 May. The point of departure was one of the fundamental tenets of the Community's third equal opportunities programme, namely that equal opportunities should be integrated into the formulation and implementation of all relevant policies and programmes at Community and national level. Delegates stressed that, unless this was done, there could be no transition from formal to real equality.

Denmark's equal opportunities policy is undoubtedly an example to the other Member States. Women make up almost half the Danish workforce, almost 70% of adult women are in paid employment, and representation of women in political institutions is higher than in any other Community country. Denmark seems to be ahead of the rest of Europe in appreciating that women are "a vital resource for the health of the economy and society as a whole throughout the Community".

The Commission is well aware of the importance of equality in our society, which is why it has proposed major chan-

ges to the European Social Fund and an increase in its resources to promote equal opportunities. Mr Padraig Flynn, the Member of the European Commission responsible for Social Affairs, urged delegates to the seminar to contribute to the preparation of the planned Green Paper on social policy.

The importance of involving women in decision-making was one of the key themes of the seminar and was dwelt on by Mr Henrik Nepper-Christiansen, in his closing address. What was needed, he said, was more women in Parliament and in government, and he called on women to work together to secure more access to positions of power.

In her summary of the three-day seminar, Lesley Abdela, a journalist from the United Kingdom, confirmed the need for more women in positions where decisions of interest to women are taken. Parliaments and the media were the twin citadels in which women should aim to capture more influence. The cooperation of the media was necessary nowadays to get the equal opportunities message across. For this reason, many Community journalists were invited to attend the seminar and take part in the debates. It is to be hoped that they will gradually rid the audiovisual and print media of the old stereotypes of what women are and do. Denmark will hand the Presidency over to Belgium at the end of June. Let us hope that the measures to promote equal opportunities proposed in the second half of the year will be as ambitious as those put forward by Denmark.

Information: Nathalie Davies, Equal Opportunities Unit, DG V, Commission of the European Communities, 200 rue de la Loi, B-1049 Brussels.

EUROPEAN WOMEN'S LOBBY

The European Women's Lobby held its fourth General Assembly in Antwerp on 23 and 24 March 1993. The message from its President, Anna Vale, was clear: "Women need help in this time of crisis". Even in times of crisis, equality and efficiency are an integral part of the economy, but Europe must also advance on the social front and put forward solutions to help women, she said. This request was directed towards the Lobby's guests, notably Mr Padraig Flynn, the Member of the European Commission responsible for employment and social affairs. He was urged to use his influence to bring about the major changes needed to allow women to make a fuller contribution to economic, social and political life.

...

•••

In reply, Mr Flynn said that women needed encouragement and advice to enable them to play a full part in the political system – “not only to change it but to improve it”. He repeated what he had said to the Committee on Women's Rights in March (see *Women of Europe Newsletter No 33*), stressing that the objective of equal treatment for women and men must be fully integrated into the policies and programmes that would lead the European Community into the 21st century. He asked for the Lobby's support to strengthen his arguments in the face of other pressures and invited members of the Lobby to contribute to production of the Green Paper.

He also referred to reform of the Structural Funds, making the point that these Funds were not exclusively concerned with women and that women would have to fight to ensure that they got what they wanted. The Lobby restated its commitment to keeping up the pressure to ensure that the reform of the Structural Funds reinforced equal opportunities in the economic, social and political spheres.

A motion adopted by the Lobby found that the Commission's latest proposals on the Structural Funds fell short of the aim of promoting equal opportunities as defined in the Community's third action programme and that they failed to take account of the specific requirements of women in relation to employment and vocational training or, indeed, of their role in European integration.

If women were to play a part in European integration, they must have access to positions of influence. A report on this subject was presented by Jacqueline de Groote, who had chaired a special working party. The findings were clear: if women are to occupy positions as decision-makers, they must seize them. They must take power, not beg for it. The Lobby is planning to launch national campaigns to secure increased representation of women in the European Parliament following next year's elections.

Restating its concern about the situation of women in what was Yugoslavia, the Lobby adopted a declaration condemning and denouncing the rape of women and urging that rape be treated as a war crime. It also called for the establishment of effective war-crimes tribunals. The declaration was not the only action taken by the Lobby; it also undertook to represent and guide women's organizations in what was Yugoslavia to make their demands heard throughout Europe and to ensure that they receive the funds they need for humanitarian projects.

The concerns and activities of the Lobby are legion. The wide range of topics discussed in Antwerp included a motion condemning all forms of racism in the European Community. A study on black and immigrant women was tabled which examined their living conditions in the

Community and recommended a number of key measures to enhance their social status and guarantee them better working conditions.

Information: European Women's Lobby, rue du Méridien 22, B-1030 Brussels, Tel. (32 2) 217 90 20.

INFORMATION COMMUNICATION

Women's language

The first international symposium on “Women's Language, Men's Language” was held in Antwerp on 14 and 15 May. Jointly organized by IRDECE (Institut de Recherche pour le Développement de l'Espace Culturel Européen) and the City of Antwerp's Emancipation Department, with the support of the Information for Women Unit of the Commission of the European Communities, it was attended by 120 academics, linguists, sociologists and political scientists from the twelve Community countries, Quebec, Switzerland, and French-speaking countries of Africa.

The symposium was chaired by Patricia Niedzwiecki, the linguist whose brainchild it was. The first day was devoted to the linguistic deficit in the feminization of language and the problems of the social perception of women. Although opinions differed, notably on the desirability of wholesale feminization of language, delegates supported the aim of enhancing the visibility of women in society through language.

Patricia Niedzwiecki announced the creation of an international network for the feminization of language. The symposium, which attracted a sizable delegation of Belgian Ministers and Members of Parliament and representatives of the European institutions, produced an abundance of declarations and initiatives and laid the foundations for this network, which should be up and running within the next few months.

Patricia Niedzwiecki's book (*La langue au féminin*) was published by the City of Antwerp to coincide with the symposium. The proceedings will be published in early September.

Information: IRDECE, rue de Roumanie 50, B-1060 Brussels, Tel. (32 2) (537 97 60).

Equal opportunities in Ireland

A new ministerial post, Minister for Equality and Law Reform, has been created in Ireland. The job has been given to

Mervyn Taylor, who has undertaken to update regulations on equal opportunities in employment, to modernize the law on equal pay and to introduce a bill on equality.

This marks a major step forward, since most agreements in this area are based on custom rather than the law. It is expected that reinforcement of the legislative base will lend more weight to active application of reforms throughout the working environment.

European network of Women Journalists

In April, Italy and Spain set up their own national networks of women journalists to encourage women to take part in the European elections and to increase their awareness of the single market.

Information: Information for Women Unit, DG X, Commission of the European Communities, rue de la Loi 200, B-1049 Brussels, Tel. (32 2) 299 94 16.

Women and politics

At the recent Congress of Belgium's French-speaking Social Christian Party, women secured a “protocol” guaranteeing them one third (33.333%) of places on the electoral lists for future local elections. The next step will be to secure similar guarantees for other elections and other political parties.

Unemployment: the 10% barrier is broken in the Community

The jobless total in the Community is now 17 million. According to figures published by Eurostat, the Central Statistical Office of the European Community, the unemployment rate in the European Community has broken through the psychological barrier of 10% (10.2% in March). The position of women on the labour market continues to be more precarious than that of men; in February the unemployment rate for women was 12.6% as against 8.6% for men. Young people are still at the bottom of the league table with an unemployment rate of 19.2%. Sadly, the outlook is far from

•••

...

encouraging: the forecast is for an unemployment rate of 11.5%, representing a jobless total of 20 million, by mid-1994.

EUROPEAN COURT OF JUSTICE

United Kingdom condemned for discrimination against women

The European Court of Justice in Luxembourg has delivered a judgment condemning discrimination against women in the United Kingdom. The case was brought by the Equal Opportunities Commission, the agency responsible for most sex discrimination cases in the United Kingdom. The case involved the social services' refusal to pay certain allowances to women who had reached pensionable age, which is 60 for women in the United Kingdom. The women concerned had been forced to give up work because of invalidity after the age of 60. They were refused the severe disablement allowance (SDA) or the invalid care allowance (ICA) because the 1975 Social Security Act states that workers who have reached retirement age do not qualify. In its defence the British Government argued that the vast majority of women receive an old-age pension from the age of 60. The Court of Justice pointed out that its February 1986 judgment in the Marshall case had confirmed a woman's right to go on working after the age at which she can claim a pension. It also found that the grant of benefits such as the SDA or the ICA constituted an individual right which could not be denied to the women concerned on the grounds that, statistically, their situation was exceptional. The Court of Justice accordingly found against the British Government guilty of sex discrimination, since the retirement age for men in the United Kingdom is 65.

Equal pay – Belgium must amend its legislation

In its judgment of 17 February 1993, the European Court of Justice found Belgium guilty of discrimination against older female workers. Redundant workers over the age of 60 are entitled to a redundancy allowance in addition to unemployment benefit. Under another law, how-

ever, unemployment benefit can only be paid to women up to the age of 60, as against 65 for men. This means that women over the age of 60 do not qualify for the additional allowance whereas men retain entitlement for five years. Belgium will therefore have to amend its legislation to ensure equal treatment between women and men.

Luxembourg in the wrong on maternity benefits

In a judgment delivered on 10 March 1993 the European Court of Justice ruled that Luxembourg must amend its rules on birth and maternity benefits. At present ante-natal benefit can be paid to a mother-to-be only if she has been legally domiciled in Luxembourg for one year before the birth of her child. To qualify for maternity benefit the mother must be legally domiciled at the time of the birth. The Court found that these maternity benefits constituted social benefits within the meaning of Community law and must therefore be paid to all female workers, whether or not they are Luxembourg nationals.

CONFERENCES

A conference on women and information, with particular reference to the ethical and professional aspects and the role of women, was held in Bari (Italy) from 15 to 17 June. It was organized by the National Council of the Order of Journalists in cooperation with the Inter-regional Council of Apulia and the Basilicata and the Regional Press Association. The meeting was attended by journalists from the Twelve, Romania, Albania and what was Yugoslavia, and gave them an opportunity to exchange experiences as women journalists and discuss equal opportunities in the world of the media. *Information: Isotta Gaeta, Ordine dei Giornalisti, Lungotevere de' Cenci 8, I-00186 Rome.*

"Frauen machen Messe + Kongress": the second "Top 93" Fair will be held in Düsseldorf from 1 to 4 July 1993 under the patronage of Rita Süßmuth, President of the Bundestag. The 200 exhibitors will include multinational companies, local employment initiatives, NGOs, and political groups, all with displays demonstrating what they are doing for women. A number of discussions on employment and careers for women are to be organized by the Helga-Stodter Foundation, the

moving force behind the event. The Information for Women Unit of the Commission of the European Communities will be there too.

Information: Hilde Albertini, Information for Women Unit, DG X, Commission of the European Communities, rue de la Loi 200, B-1049 Brussels, Tel.: (32 2) 299 92 32

PUBLICATIONS

Bulletin on Women and Employment in the EC. Six-monthly publication from the European Network of Experts on the Situation of Women in the Labour Market. It examines key developments in this field within the Community and looks at topical items of news and research from the Member States. The bulletin is available in English and French.

Image and media. Publication by Grace, a European women's studies data bank which provides information on research not only in the field of the modern mass media, but also in more traditional areas, such as art, the history of art and the novel.

Panorama. Statistical data concerning the participation of women in political and public decision-making. Produced by the European "Women in decision-making" network, it provides a comprehensive overview of the representation of women in political bodies in the Member States.

Equal opportunities: project funding: who, what, why, where, when? A DG V document (V/5598/93) explaining in clear, practical terms how to go about applying for funding in the field of equal opportunities.

All these documents are available from the Equal Opportunities Unit, DG V, Commission of the European Communities, rue de la Loi 200, B-1049 Brussels.

Editor in Chief and coordination:
Anne Blanche HARITOS
WOMEN'S INFORMATION UNIT
Commission of the European
Communities
Directorate-General for Audiovisual
Information, Communication and Culture
Rue de la Loi 200, B-1049 Brussels
Tel. (32.2)299.94.11