

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

416 votes for, 103 votes against and 59 abstentions: the Members of Parliament from the 15 Member States were all present in Strasbourg on 18 January to give the Santer Commission their approval by a large majority.

This approval, preceded by a new procedure based on an individual hearing of each nominee strengthened the democratic legitimacy of the Commission, confirmed the additional powers given to Parliament by the Maastricht Treaty and introduced a new dynamism between Parliament and the Commission.

This increased legitimacy was underlined by Mr Santer at the beginning of his confirmation speech to Parliament in Strasbourg. His opening remarks were:

"Parliament's vote heralds a new era in relations between our two institutions. I welcome this development because it marks a further step on the road to greater democracy in the Union, and because your vote of approval will give greater legitimacy to the Commission over which I shall be presiding."

This confirmation procedure had been preceded by a hearing of each nominee by the relevant parliamentary committee on his/her portfolio but also his/her convictions, expertise, intentions, as regards working relations, in particular with Parliament. The hearings were like American hearings, but without the sex and financial scandals, as the press emphasized. Very precise, searching, detailed, technical and sometimes provocative questions were asked. The nominees replied with varying degrees of ease, brio or awkwardness, some showing a thorough knowledge of their subject and a "democratic European motivation", which was warmly welcomed by Parliament. Others, including the new arrivals, had more difficulty with the oral test which they had perhaps underestimated.

In order to understand better how these hearings fit into the institutional set-up, "Women of Europe Newsletter" spoke to a lawyer, Mr Alain Van Solinge, Head of the Institutional Matters Unit in the Secretariat-General: *"The Maastricht Treaty does not provide any legal basis for allowing or forbidding Parliament to hold these hearings. When the Treaty which amended the procedure was negotiated, the main objective was to involve Parliament more closely in the appointment of the Commission, chiefly through the official confirmation procedure as on last 18 January. It was only after the implementation of the Treaty that Parliament thought of backing up the confirmation vote with these hearings. Initially, the Commission was hesitant, fearing that they might call into question the principle of collective responsibility. Since Parliament had no intention of doing that, the Commission accepted the hearings. On the whole, this exercise proved useful. It enabled Parliament to obtain a better knowledge of the personality and ability of each nominee, even if some*



WOMEN OF EUROPE NEWSLETTER

Dear Readers,

The beginning of this year abounds with events: the European Union welcomes three new members, Austria, Finland and Sweden, which will henceforth take part in the activities of the various institutions, in particular in the work of Parliament, which now has 626 Members, and of the new Santer Commission with the Members Anita Gradin (Sweden), Erkki Liikanen (Finland) and Franz Fischler (Austria).

One of the events which particularly affects us is the increase in the proportion of women represented in these two institutions: 171 women Members of Parliament, 27% of the whole and five women Members of the Commission 25% of the full Commission.

Yet another event was the strengthening of the democratic legitimacy of the Commission by the confirmation procedure which was preceded by the hearings of the Members of the Commission. The Members of the European Parliament, meeting in committee, questioned the nominees to the Commission on matters falling within their fields of responsibility and also on their motivation and convictions.

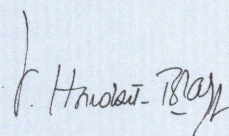
These hearings and the publicity given to the assessments by the Members of Parliament is a first in the history of the European Union and they bear witness to the closer ties between the institutions and, in particular, between the Commission and Parliament.

These are the events we are highlighting in this issue of the "Women of Europe Newsletter".

A journalist and lawyer give their own impressions of the new Commission.

Headed by President Santer, it was approved in Strasbourg on 18 January, took up office on 23 January and consists of Members who, in principle, will remain in office until January 2000.

We also present interviews of the three women Members of the Commission who have a particular interest in women's affairs, Emma Bonino, Ritt Bjerregaard and Monika Wulf-Mathies.



*Veronique Houdart-Blazy,
Head of Section: Information for Women*

of the assessments made at the end of the hearings were more or less negative or positive".

"Women of Europe Newsletter" also asked Marina Gazzo, deputy editor-in-chief of Agence Europe, for her thoughts about the hearings, in particular the hearings of the women Members of the Commission. "On the whole, the hearings seemed interesting to me, especially when the nominees were able to speak on a personal note about major topics in which they must all take an interest, precisely because of the collective nature of the Commission. This was particularly noticeable when the Members of Parliament questioned them on very important issues without seeking at all costs to embarrass them over details. Individual criticisms were legitimate, and I think it logical to publish them since the hearings were public. Edith Cresson showed that she had worked hard (perhaps less on education and youth) and that she took the "examination" by Parliament seriously. Monika Wulf-Mathies was very good, very open and political in her answers. She certainly gave the Members of Parliament the impression that she will work well with them. Emma Bonino was also appreciated for what she said on the major issues (institutional, humanitarian themes) and she stood up well to the two-hour grilling by the members of the Committee on Fisheries (for which she had been given responsibility a few weeks before). Moreover, she reacted calmly and with dignity to some very base attacks by a member of the National Front. I felt that these hearings were a good initiative even if they were not always conducted in an ideal manner. Collective responsibility is acknowledged and I think that in an institution like the Commission, which is not as well known to the people as a national government, it is not a bad thing for the Members of the Commission to have a more human and recognizable face".

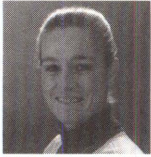
"Women of Europe Newsletter" met three of the five women Members of the Santer Commission: Ritt Bjerregaard, Emma Bonino and Monika Wulf-Mathies. You can read the interviews on pages 2 and 3.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

The Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities met on 16 November last with Anne Grete Holmsgard in the chair. Representatives from Sweden were present for the first time.

The themes broached were the mid-term report on the third action programme for equality, the preparation of a timetable for the fourth programme, the final text of which should be adopted by the Commission in June 1995 and be the subject of a Council resolution at the end of 1995 or beginning of 1996, the White Paper on Social Policy and the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference.

A new chairperson was elected: she is Marina Subirats and the two vice-chairpersons are Anne Grete Holmsgard and Kate Hayes.



Ritt Bjerregaard is responsible for the environment and nuclear safety

Women of Europe Newsletter

Could you tell us about yourself and tell us of the achievements in your professional life which give you satisfaction, in particular, as a woman?

Ritt Bjerregaard

I was born in Denmark in 1941: traditionally in my country women have no inhibitions about revealing their age.

I am married and have no children. My husband is a history Professor and has decided to stay and work in Denmark. So we only see each other on weekends. This kind of situation where one of the spouses works abroad poses great difficulties for families – for men, but more particularly for women. As I used to work in Copenhagen and since we lived on one of the Danish islands, both my husband and myself are accustomed to this kind of situation.

I was a Member of Parliament for 23 years and I very much like my job as an elected representative. I love going out towards people, speaking and having close contact with them and listening to their opinions.

Even though in Denmark it is not uncommon for a woman to hold political office, it was difficult to be a woman minister at 32: the press, in particular, was not gentle with me. One of the criticisms laid against me consisted of the fear that due to my "young age" I would not be able to say "no". And yet I was often seen as the symbol of women who fight back, who say "no" when necessary.

Being a woman has always been an integral part of my political life and I have always been very active in feminist movements. I was Vice-President of the Socialist International Women, a post I left to become Member of the Commission.

My most satisfying professional experience was my term as Minister for Education: I feel that education is very important, particularly in Denmark where the Ministry covers not only all stages right up to university level, but also research.

What is your position in relation to women's affairs: do you support "hardline" measures such as the imposition of quotas, binding laws, or do you see it rather as the product of a "gentle" natural development of society?

I think that all possible positive measures are necessary. I am in favour of introducing quotas, which have produced good results in Denmark.

For example, each time a public body is set up, half the members must be women. In Denmark, it was difficult to apply this principle to start with, and there was a great deal of discussion about whether enough qualified women could be found. So we prepared lists of women and suggested, even recommended that one or other of them be selected. Rea-

sons also had to be given if such and such a woman was not chosen when her qualifications matched those of a man. It is now a rule of law in Denmark that half the members of a committee set up by a ministry or by a public body must be women.

While legislation on the matter is important, it is also essential that women be surrounded by other women. If you are the only woman in a group of men, you are constantly confronted with problems, such as showing that you are equally capable, and you encounter situations which make life very difficult. If there are several women in one group, they support each other. I believe in setting up networks of women and in solidarity between them even where there is a conflict of interests. We must be very careful not to allow women to be confined to certain specific sectors where they only compete with each other.

Denmark has introduced very high standards of environmental protection. Will that influence the management of your portfolio?

When I was proposed as a Member of the Commission, I was very happy to have the opportunity to work in the European institutions. I really wanted the environment portfolio, but in requesting it, I feared that Denmark might appear too demanding, or wanting to progress too quickly. But, in the end, there was no opposition.

It is obvious that a large part of the public is so concerned with environmental issues that it wants economic development to be reconciled with respect for the environment. People really want to protect their quality of life. I see environment as an immediate policy, in close connection with people's daily lives.

This immediacy, the more political aspects such as the repercussions on relations with Eastern European countries with regard to the protection of the environment, this polarization between the simpler aspects of daily life and high-level political decisions fascinates me and makes me glad to be managing this portfolio.

Danish legislation relating to the protection of the environment and waste, for example, is very strict, much stricter than in other countries of the European Union. Do you intend to attempt to apply the same high Danish standards in the other Member States?

I can do nothing alone. I need the support of the Commission, the Council and the Parliament. But I would like European standards to be improved and I shall work towards that end. During my hearing before Parliament on 5 January, I maintained that I would never accept, during my term of office, that standards be aligned downwards or lowered. I am thinking in particular of the new Member States which are arriving with very high standards which must be maintained.

Do you intend to stamp your policy with a feminine label?

Environment is not a traditionally masculine policy as testified by the number of women

Ministers for the Environment in Europe. Many women are very active in that sphere, notably in Denmark. Opinion polls on the sensitivity of public opinion to the protection of the environment have demonstrated that women are much more anxious to protect the environment than men, and that they consider it a priority policy.



Emma Bonino is responsible for consumer policy, the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) and fisheries

Women of Europe Newsletter

You were presented immediately as the most radical, the most feminist woman Member of the Santer Commission. Could you tell us something more about yourself, highlighting the achievements of your professional life and the social struggles which have given you greatest satisfaction?

Emma Bonino

Above all, I want to remain myself, that is to say, a woman who is not tied to any ideology, but who has convictions and who, whatever the level of responsibility, fights resolutely to see them realized.

A woman who has based her commitment on the idea of a new humanism where the individual is the centre of politics.

It is above all on the advancement of this individual, on dignity as a responsible free person that I built my civil struggles beginning with the fight against illegal abortion.

From my own personal experience, I am convinced that the great contemporary challenges which affect our lives call for a transnational approach whether it be human rights and a system of international justice capable of providing effective protection for the individual, solidarity, the fight against hunger and under-development and for ecologically sustainable development, or the fight against the current prohibitionist drugs system which ultimately is one of the main sources of funds for organized crime.

I was elected Member of Parliament in 1979 with the conviction that it was principally for Europe to promote and guarantee the transnational nature of these values.

This conviction found an outlet in my federalist battles waged in the wake of Altiero Spinelli to strengthen the democratic legitimacy and effectiveness of the European institutions.

Comparing your professional career and the portfolios you have been given – consumer policy and ECHO – it could be said that they are tailor-made. What about fisheries:

what are your priorities for this dossier and do you intend to breathe some feminine sensitivity into it?

In fisheries, as indeed in the other areas entrusted to me, I intend to play my role as Commissioner to the full.

On such a sensitive matter as fisheries, I intend to listen to and understand the various parties in order to help define a policy which, beyond individual demands, will keep the interests of the whole of Europe at the foreground.

It is all the more important to define a truly common policy since resources in this area are limited and are managed on an overall basis at the Community level. In particular, I am aware of the need to promote the Union's trading interests, while preparing for the challenges from international competition in an increasingly open market.

However, true to my principles, I do not intend to forget fishermen's needs. Thus I am going to take an interest in the economic, social and human conditions of communities whose way of life, cultural tradition, and often, very survival are linked to fishing.

Thus, convinced of the need to ensure sustainable development and anxious to preserve the fishing industry in accordance with my long-standing commitments, I shall see to it that everybody is very much aware of the essential respect for balance in the marine ecosystem.

Do you think that the improvement in the situation of women is brought about by "hardline" feminists struggles or rather through the gradual development of a society which little by little applies the basic human rights written into the major international treaties?

The determination with which I have undertaken all my struggles must not mask the respect I have always shown for the procedures and operating rules of the institutions of parliamentary democracy, nor the importance which I have always attached to dialogue and listening to the other side.

From this point of view, I think that I can be considered an "extremist" of the democratic and non-violent approach.

While in my political campaigns, I sometimes felt it necessary to use non-violence and civil disobedience (which consists notably in the determination to want to suffer the consequences of the law that is being transgressed), I acted precisely from respect for the law and the desire to see it applied in such a way as to be more respectful of the individual.

I have adopted the maieutics dear to Socrates, and I believe my political role consists in drawing attention to the great themes of humanity and provoking the indispensable debate on the development of society in general and the defence of the rights of individuals in particular, thereby transcending the divisions between men and women.

The necessary reforms will flow from this awareness.



Monika Wulf-Mathies is responsible for regional policies, relations with the Committee of the Regions and the Cohesion Fund

Women of Europe Newsletter

You are one of five women out of the twenty Members of the Santer Commission. It is the first time that 25% of the Commission are women. What does that mean to you?

Monika Wulf-Mathies

It is a gigantic step compared with the previous Commission, which had one woman to sixteen men.

We are still far from our goal. But it must be acknowledged that a number of Member States are now coming round to recognizing that women not only make up the majority of the population but that they are also ready and able to assume political responsibilities.

Everywhere in Europe women are under-represented in decision-making. What is your personal experience: is being a woman an asset or a liability or was it unimportant to your professional career?

Basically, at the beginning, it is always a disadvantage to be a woman, because a woman must always prove that even with equal qualifications and skills she has the ability that is automatically recognized in men.

If a woman reaches a position of power, what she is capable of doing and not doing is watched particularly closely.

If a woman makes a mistake, it will not be said that "she didn't succeed" but rather that "women don't even know how to do that".

That's the negative side.

When a woman does a job well she is given more to do and the outcome is very positive. But don't forget how long it takes to reach that point. I do not agree with those women who, when they have succeeded, say that they owe it only to their merits and appear to forget the difficulties encountered along the way.

Do you think that quotas are necessary, or would more flexible measures such as information, persuasion and consciousness-raising be enough?

I am in favour of quotas. Unfortunately, we are still where we started and the introduction of these constraints has improved nothing. I hope that it will quickly be accepted that women should have careers and take on posts of power. When it is no longer a question of whether a man or a woman can do this or that, but only if such and such a person can do it, then quotas can be abandoned. My Office in the Commission is divided evenly between men and women.

You are the Member responsible for the Union's regional policy. Do you think that Community policies have already done enough for equal opportunities?

I think that the European treaties and the Court of Justice have made a great contribution to the emancipation of women and the implementation of equal opportunities. It is entirely wrong to claim that the European Union hinders the emancipation of women. In Germany, we have found that certain rights, in particular relating to social law, have been obtained thanks to the EU and Article 119 of the Treaty and not at all because Germans are particularly favourable to women.

However, it is not enough that women's affairs are only a socio-political theme and are confined to labour law and family legislation. Equality between men and women is an objective which straddles all political spheres. It must be intensified and become a priority. That will be the role of the new Commission group to be chaired by Mr Santer and of which I am a member.

I shall take care that, within the context of the regional and structural policies and the employment policy, the promotion of equality is taken seriously and implemented as a horizontal objective.

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

THE PARLIAMENT FOR THE ENLARGED UNION: OVER 27% WOMEN

The official composition of the new Parliament was announced by the President, Klaus Hänsch on 16 January at the opening of the part-session in Strasbourg.

Following the arrival of the three new Member States, 59 Austrian, Finnish and Swedish Members joined the House: 21 for Austria, 16 for Finland and 22 for Sweden.

Ten of the sixteen Finnish members are women, ten of the 22 Swedish members and six of the 21 Austrian Members, giving a total of 26 women out of the 59 new Members, or 44%.

Parliament now has 171 women out of 626 Members, 27.3% as against 25.6% in 1994 and 18.5% in 1989, an increase of 8.8% between 1989 and 1995.

The conclusion is that the arrival of three new Member States in 1995 has increased the number of women Members by nearly 2% of the total number of Members of Parliament. For more information on the new European Parliament, contact: Press and Information

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Service of the EP, tel. (32 2) 284 20 57, Fax 284 21 28, 230 58 08.

PARLIAMENT'S COMMITTEE ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights, which met on 1 and 2 December last with Nel Van Dijk in the chair, heard a statement by Claudia Nolte, President of the Council of the European Union and German Minister for Women's Affairs and Youth. She talked about some of the priorities of the German Presidency on policies relating to women: the labour market for women, preparation of the Beijing Conference and the matter of equal opportunities which needs to be looked at in greater detail with a view to the Intergovernmental Conference in 1996 and, in particular, through the widening of the scope of Article 119 of the Treaty.

The Members of the Committee appreciated the decision by Claudia Nolte to speak to them so soon after taking up office and they questioned her on the measures she intended to implement in order to "get things moving", in particular, about "atypical work" and the "reversal of the burden of proof", themes which had been neglected so far. The general opinion of the members of the Committee was that the German Presidency had not distinguished itself as regards equal opportunities and the Committee was anxious to know what specific proposals would be submitted to the Essen European Council.

Virginia Franganillo, President of the National Council of the Women of Argentina also spoke: she gave a brief talk on the situation of women in Argentina since the time of Peron's government and since women obtained the right to vote in 1951. She emphasized the role played by women in the struggle against the dictatorship and in the development of society since the eighties, in particular, the adoption in 1991 of a law which imposes a quota of 30% women on electoral lists.

Another topic raised was the Beijing Conference. Lissy Gröner, rapporteur, gave a brief account of the progress of the preparations in the presence of Barbara Simons, Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General. Lissy Gröner stressed that the holding of the Conference in Beijing should not encourage the European Union to turn a blind eye to violations of human rights in both China and Tibet.

Barbara Simons spelled out what is at stake at this Conference: make the world more human and enable women and men, young and old alike, to enjoy equal rights. She emphasized how important it was for women to have access to decision-making and to know and exercise their rights. Lastly she stressed the need to work in conjunction with NGOs. Nel Van Dijk made a number of proposals relating to the problem of representation of the European Parliament by a delegation at the Conference. She intended to write to Mr Hänsch to find out what was the exact status of the EP delegation in Beijing and she would

ask that the Committee on Women's Rights be represented at the forthcoming conference in Copenhagen and lastly that women Members of national parliaments be invited to the meeting of the Committee in February. The European Commission – Equal Opportunities Unit (DG V) – reported to the Committee on current affairs and on the symposium on women and European integration held in November 1994.

Lastly the members of the Committee strongly criticized what they considered to be a lack of real commitment by the Commission to women's affairs and suggested that the Committee be associated with the preparation of the fourth action programme, including the appointment of a rapporteur.

The Committee drew up its schedule of meetings for 1995.

For further information on the activities on Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights, contact: Mary Brennan, Secretariat-General of the European Commission, 200 rue de la Loi, B – 1049 Brussels. Tel. (32 2) 295 96 36, Fax 296 59 57.

NETWORK NEWS

WORK AND FAMILY LIFE

In Women of Europe Newsletter N° 48 we spoke of the new network which was set up in June 1994 by DG V – Directorate for Social Policy and Action – with the aim of helping to maintain a balance between private life and professional life.

One of the activities of this network is the "European Prize for Social Innovation" which will be awarded to firms and organizations which take measures to make it easier to reconcile professional life with family life or accompanying measures for "mobile" families.

This Prize will be awarded in June 1995 by a panel of judges consisting of representatives of the Commission and the Social Dialogue.

All firms and organizations in the European Union are invited to present the innovative measures which they have been able to take in order to improve family well-being in terms of flexible working time, childcare, etc. The Prize will be awarded for four categories of measures:

- flexibility in multinationals and large firms;
- flexibility in small businesses;
- flexibility in organizations (public departments and services, local authorities, professional groups, associations, etc.);
- mobility.

The prize will be a study visit for the winning organization in order to enable it to gain further experience in a model firm or organization of its choice.

For the conditions of entry, contact: Michèle Thozer-Teirlinck, DG V, Directorate for Social Policy and Action. Tel. (32 2) 299 22 79, Fax 299 38 90. The deadline for entries is 28 February 1995.

EUROPEAN GUIDANCE AND TRAINING NETWORK FOR WOMEN

The aim of EWA (Europe Work Actions) is to set up, promote and run a network of centres and organizations which, in some Member States of the European Union (Belgium, France, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain) apply the training approach "Back to Work" to measures relating to vocational guidance and training intended as a priority, but not exclusively, for women.

The "Back to Work" method was developed in France by Evelyne Sullerot in 1974. She emphasizes guidance prior to training. The first stage is self-assessment and knowledge of oneself, which makes a woman aware of her potential vocational personality and enables her to produce her own vocational blueprint; the next stage involves familiarization with the economic environment in which she will have to look for work. This method evolves in such a way as to adjust constantly to each person, to developments on the employment market, to the various types of recruitment, etc.

This method is applied by a network of over 500 instructors in over 100 towns, and some 300 000 women have already attended the vocational guidance stage on this basis.

EWA has published an interesting brochure, supported by the Equal Opportunities Unit in DG V. The brochure presents the network's activities and its working methods, and it analyses the experience gained and puts it into writing.

The authors wish to use the brochure to extend the network northwards and to introduce other partners to its teaching methods and tools, thus providing a transfer of know-how. Apart from the acknowledged aim, the document is clearly presented and it outlines an interesting overall approach designed to solve the problem of the integration or reintegration of women in working life.

For further information, contact: Françoise Werlen, EWA, 17 rue de la Cigale, F-68200 Mulhouse. Tel. (33) 89 42 41 55, Fax 89 59 31 37.

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