

Women of Europe

9 may

9 May, Europe Day

Editorial

9 May is Europe Day.

On 9 May 1950, Robert Schuman, the then French Foreign Minister, and his personal adviser Jean Monnet addressed the press gathered in the "Salon de l'Horloge" in the Quai d'Orsay, and proposed the joining of French and German coal and steel production, as well as the creation of a European federation which would unite the peoples of Europe.

This declaration was the beginning of the European Union.

The European Council of Milan in 1985 wanted to make 9 May a day of shared commemoration for all citizens of the European Union, to be celebrated every year in the same spirit that prevailed in that declaration: peace in Europe, social progress, economic development and solidarity.

We have devoted this special 9 May Celebration edition of the "Women of Europe Newsletter" to the ties uniting the women of the European Union, and especially to their mutual contributions.

European construction has not left women by the wayside: it has considerably improved their rights to the extent of the authority invested in it by the Treaties.

Under the title "Europe's Contribution to Women: the Long Road to a Democracy of Equality", we have recounted for you 45 years of the history of the conquest of these rights by men and women for women - step by step.

We have also gathered testimonies from women who experience Europe from within the Commission and in their own countries, and who confirm the immense contribution made by women in the construction of Europe, as related by the President of the Commission, Jacques Santer.

In view of this "9 May Celebration" European Commissioner Mrs. Anita Gradin - one of the first women in Europe to have held a ministerial office relative to equal opportunities, and the first woman Foreign Trade Minister of Sweden - accepted to answer our questions.

She tells of her vision of a Europe of peace and security.

Let's all take it upon us to join in this spirit of celebration. ●

Véronique Houdart-Blazy

Head of Section, Information for Women

Europe's Contribution to Women: the Long Road to a Democracy of Equality

On 8 March of this year, the President of the European Commission, Jacques Santer, spoke at a conference organized by DG IX's Equal Opportunities Unit on the occasion of International Women's Day.

He declared notably that "Europe has done a great deal for women. We like to remind everyone of the essential role as a driving force that the Commission has played with regard to equality, and the considerable legislative work which has laid the legal groundwork for important changes in attitudes, in the practices on the labour market and in the development of women's individual rights. But if it can be said that Europe has done much for women, it can also be said that women have done much for Europe."

Indeed, since its creation the Commission has played a prime role as regards women's rights. It has done so by utilizing the powers attributed to it by the Treaties, essentially those relating to the labour market and to its social context. The principle of equality means nothing indeed if it is not applied and followed through.

Some may have had the impression lately that women were "sulky" towards Europe. Indeed, during the Maastricht Treaty's ratification: the consultation of citizens in certain Member States, the referenda on the adherence of Austria, Finland and Sweden; as well as the opinion polls conducted by various institutes, all brought to light a kind of mistrust, even a rejection of Europe among women.

Studies carried out by the Commission and by independent bodies also revealed a feeling among women that there was a lack of information about Europe, as well as a disinterest in European affairs and a kind of reservation vis à vis the construction of Europe. This, even if the polls claim that account must be taken of the little interest women have in "politics" in general, or at least in the way they are run.

Nevertheless, two elements defied this tendency during the European electoral campaigns.

First, political parties from the different Member States added a number of women to their lists - sometimes in high-ranking positions and even at the very top - either because they were obliged to do so (the case in Belgium and Italy) or for various other reasons, whether democratic or electoral. Secondly, an awareness campaign focusing on the need for a balance between male and female European MPs based on the concept "Vote for balance between men and women in the European Parliament", was launched by the Network Women in the Decision-Making Process (DG V - Social Policy).

The combination of these factors had largely positive results: on 19 July 1994 the European Parliament gained 146 women members as opposed to 100 in 1989, the

proportion of women thereby reaching 25.7%

The Santer Commission, the term of which will lead well into the year 2000, includes 5 women Commissioners and is therefore on a par with the European Parliament in terms of the representation of women.

President Santer also created an "open" discussion group dealing with equal opportunities, made up of several Commissioners and over which he presides. The group proposes to integrate an equal opportunities dimension in all policies adopted by the Commission.

Meanwhile the arrival of Austria, Finland and Sweden in January 1995 increased the percentage of women European parliamentarians to 27%, since 26 of the 59 new members, i.e. 44%, are women.

The conjunction of these events has revitalized the dynamics of a reasserted presence of women on the political, economic and social scenes. It has also consolidated the shift over the last 20 years from demands for equal pay, social protection and "opportunities" towards participation in equal decision-making.

Upon its creation in 1957, the Treaty of Rome, through Article 119, established the principle of equal pay for men and women for equal work: "Equal pay without discrimination based on sex". It is the only legal foundation written in a Community Treaty, one which has become all too restrictive, and which should be changed upon the treaty's revision in 1996 to include the recognition of the fundamental political, economic, social and cultural rights of women.

In the seventies, the European Court of Justice gave the article the social impact that it has today through several rulings favourable to equal pay.

Since then six directives, four recommendations and three action programmes for equal opportunities have confirmed this tendency.

The 6 directives adopted consolidate and develop not only the principle of equal pay, but also the consequences of this right as regards access to employment, to vocational training and to professional promotions, to social security and to protection for pregnant women.

Two important draft directives however, in abeyance for several years now, are still being discussed. These involve parental leave and the reversal of the burden of proof which, with regard to equal pay and treatment, would be the responsibility of the defendant rather than the plaintiff. In other words, it would be up to the employer to prove that he has not violated the principle of equality, and not up to the woman to show that she has been a victim of discrimination.

The European Commission has recently laid these two draft directives before the labour market partners who are examining them in the context of social dialogue.

The Maastricht Treaty, in its Social Charter signed by the Member States (with



Mrs. Anita Gradin - Commissioner for "Questions relating to Immigration, Home Affairs and Justice, Relations with the Ombudsman, Financial Control and Fraud Prevention" - answers questions from the "Women of Europe Newsletter" and tells us on the occasion of this 9 May Celebration, of her vision of a Europe of peace and security. You will find her story on page 3

testimonies

the exception of the United Kingdom), specifically offered the labour market partners the possibility to take part in negotiations with the Parliament, allowing the reinforcement of actions taken to promote equality. In addition, the agreement lists other measures favourable to women: the adoption of directives concerning equal opportunities in the workplace by qualified majority, the possibility for Member States to practise "positive discrimination" and the European Parliament's confirmation of the appointment of Commissioners.

Three action programmes for Equal Opportunities for men and women have been set up by DG V (Social Affairs).

The objectives of the first of these (82-85) was to consolidate the rights already acquired for women as regards employment, to complement equal treatment by enforcing individual rights and to carry out equal opportunity measures namely through positive action. The second programme (86-90) targeted education, equal opportunities for employment and training, new technology and the sharing of family and work-related responsibilities. Networks are being created alongside these programmes for the promotion of actions already taken relating to equality and the partners in social dialogue in identified sectors ("Expert Network on the Application of Equality Directives", the Network "Position of Women on the Labour Market", "Local Employment Initiatives", IRIS-The European Network on Women's Training and the Network "Women in the Decision-Making Process").

Finally the third programme (91-95), still under evaluation, focuses on the integration of women into the working environment and on the improvement of their situation in society, namely through a change in the image of women reflected in the media and to a greater participation of women in decision-making.

At the same time, the NOW (New Opportunities for Women) programme was launched. It fits into the framework of both the third programme and the structural Funds set up by the European Community. It aims at promoting equal opportunities in favour of women with regard to employment and professional life.

The fourth programme, currently being developed, will be characterized by a shift from the notion of equal opportunities in the strict sense of the word, toward the active and responsible citizenship of women in the economic, political, social and cultural spheres. This shift is the materialization of the demand for the complete fulfilment of the principle of equal rights for men and women - an indispensable condition for democracy.

The role played by the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights should also be reiterated. It was created in 1984 following a decision to transform the investigative committee responsible for reporting on the position of women in the Community, into a permanent body.

At its latest meeting, the Committee on Women's Rights unanimously adopted the opinions of deputies Marlène Lenz and Christine Crawley concerning preparations for the Intergovernmental Conference in 1996.

The Committee considers, among other things, that the preamble of the future Treaty should incorporate a specific engagement regarding the fundamental right of equality. ●

"On the Equality of the Two Sexes"

Françoise Mulfinger - European Commission

The demand for equality of the sexes was already one of the major options of the Age of Enlightenment in Europe.

"The forces would be equal if education was also equal" asserted Montesquieu loudly and clearly. In 1673, the author of the treatise "On the Equality of the Two Sexes", Poullain de la Barre considered the inequality of the sexes to be an eminently cultural phenomenon. He denounced the general acceptance of prejudice as regards the so-called inferiority of women and of their necessary dependency, and illustrated how law - both written and unwritten - is methodically appropriated by men in one area after the other. The author does justice to the position of women, reasserting the importance of their place in society.

Such issues sound oddly modern since, despite some progress, prejudice remains three centuries after the treatise on the equality of the two sexes was first written. Liberal ideology is not always liberated thinking. A dual approach to dependency has reemerged in our behaviour: "Good" dependency is when women stay at home, namely in times of economic crisis, and "bad" dependency is when impoverished women are the first victims of social exclusion.

Despite the obstacles in mentalities and the possible deviation, we should not be fooled. The end of this century is a turning point in the history of mankind, where borders become blurry, and international interdependencies are asserted. It is also a revolutionary period like no other for the position of women.

- In the European Union, women's scepticism towards the meaning in European construction, expressed through the referenda on the Maastricht Treaty's ratification and through the adherence of four new States, called out to both public opinion and the highest-ranking politicians. Policy based on "transparency" was adopted and active preparation of the Intergovernmental Conference in 1996 is foreseen. European construction will also be the patient and complex undertaking of the protagonists of all actors of civil society.

- The failure of anti-unemployment policy in most Member States has produced some novel prospects for new sources of employment, "local services", the development of undefined sectors and the specificity of enterprises launched by women. The ways of the employment world are called upon to redefine themselves to include women.

- The attempt at harmonizing professional and family lifestyles, through the evolution itself of the concepts of family and of "chosen" time, will lead to the transformation of traditional masculine and feminine roles and to a new awareness of the negative effects of unchosen inactivity on all individuals and on society.

- The emergence of an information society will alter the rapport between the individual and knowledge, will favour autonomous behaviour, will bring the different types of human relationships into question to an extent never before experienced. The relationship between men and women will have been radically modified through access to new technologies and the consequent changes.

- The social desertion of the city-suburb can have serious consequences such as xenophobic violence and politico-religious tension. New solidarity should be developed between European citizens and migrants, between social classes and between generations. From now on, women mediators in these categories have a role to play as forerunners in the safeguarding of social cohesion.

Until recently, some may have thought that European construction was a man's job. This, judging by the poor representation of women in decision-making roles at the political and administrative level and in both a national and European framework.

The awakening of civil society, the emergence of women in positions of power, the breaking up of the labour market, the increasing role of women in the media - all of these will contribute to the remodelling of European society.

From New York to Beijing and from Stockholm to Dakar, women are producing, creating, managing and governing differently.

Two tasks remain to be achieved by women:

- complete the equality process - from the application of legislation to the changing of mentalities;
- allow men to accept society's challenge as a qualitative endowment.

If that is so, then it would be safe to bet that the twenty-first century will no longer be, as Elisabeth Badinter put it, "the privileged era of one sex or the other, but rather humanity's long-awaited moment of reconciliation".

Will the women of the European Union make the date with history? ●

"The Path of the Future"

Irène Nicolopoulou

President of the European Network of Women Greek Journalists

Yesterday, while reading the Greek Sunday paper "To Vima", a photograph and its caption particularly struck me: it was a photo of Mrs. Margot Wallstrom, Swedish Minister of Culture.

The Minister handles all the cultural affairs of the Member State of the European Union from her own home, thanks to the most sophisticated of technologies.

It was a delightful surprise to see the 40-year old Minister seated on a sofa in her living-room, participating in a meeting with her collaborators 300 kilometres away, thanks to a small screen placed in front of her.

I asked myself: "how could Greek women dream of a common future with their Swedish counterparts?" How could the women of my country communicate and agree with women of a Member State, whose vocational training is far more advanced and where the mentality among the male and female population has already allowed for their participation in decision-making in that country?

In my country there is one figure of which Greek women are not at all proud. 4.7% is the representation of Greek women in the national Parliament, and it is the lowest level in the European Union with regard to the participation of women in national parliaments.

Fortunately, 4 Greek women were voted to the European Parliament in the poll last June (in the previous Parliament there wasn't a single woman among the 20 Greek parliamentarians).

One should recognize that two factors played an important role. The first was the campaign supported by the European Union for the promotion of equal participation of men and women in the European elections. Second, the European Union's legislation and policy for equality of the sexes greatly contributed to changing the

concept of equality among the decision-makers of Greek political parties.

The latter finally took account of the demands for the balanced participation of men and women on the electoral lists. That is already a big step forward! But we have a long way to go before the European Union's efforts, the Greek parties' actions and especially the Greek patriarchal society will have been able to close the gap between the position of Greek women and that of the women of other Member States.

The recently founded European Network of Women Greek Journalists, aims to work intensely so that information will become a precious tool for Greek women, who should themselves contribute to the change in mentalities in our society, and demand equal opportunities in their professional lives and in politics. ●

“German Women Investing in Europe”

Kerstin Hoth

Coordinator of the work group of female German journalists - “Dialog Europa”

Job interview: “Excellent certificates”, says the head of personnel praising to Mr. Müller, married, age 38. “When,” she asks the father of three children, “have you taken leave to raise your children? How long have you worked part-time?” Mr. Müller, somewhat embarrassed answers: “Well, in our family it’s my wife who does that”. “Then I am afraid we are unable to give you a managerial position in our firm. We insist that our management experience this kind of responsibility. But you are still young. Your children still need you. Try it and all of our doors will be open for you.” If German policy on women has not been able to make such fundamental changes in social reality, judged desirable by a German social-democrat in an article regarding the compatibility of family and work, Europe has nevertheless made it possible for more and more women to claim their rights and to cross new boundaries.

A work contract cannot be refused a woman because of pregnancy - in fact it is illegal to ask the question during a job interview - since the European Court of Justice ruled accordingly. From the standpoint of German law, this point was an “acquis”. Another example: employees working half-time were often denied the benefits, allowances, etc. that their full-time colleagues received under the terms of a collective agreement. In the eyes of the German courts, this was not discriminatory against women. European judges in Luxembourg, however, recognized disguised discrimination since it is mostly women who seek odd jobs. The fact that the German courts also focused their attention on disguised, indirect discrimination is also to the credit of European law. Those called second class employees in Germany have only recently acquired the right to remuneration when they are sick or when a work day falls on a holiday. This is thanks to a plaintiff from Oldenburg who acquired this right before the EC court in the name of numerous other women. It is perhaps not because of the preponderance of women that EC court rulings are so favourable towards them. On the contrary, the EC court presents European law logically without ideological blinkers. That is why “Europe” is beneficial for German women as well.

Polls questioning German women, namely in the new Länder, revealed a kind of scepticism with regard to the European Union. What they expect from the integration into a new western economic order is an improvement in their position. The fact is that the majority of women in the new Länder have become unemployed, and that jobs as mothers' helpers have been done away with. Conse-

quently, the European Social Fund (ESF) created possibilities to help women in ways which go beyond opportunities offered by national structures. For example, German legislation on the promotion of employment excludes financing family allowances. The ESF allows some women - those requiring assistance from third parties to care for their children or disabled family-members - to participate in retraining schemes or to acquire new skills. Over the last few years, the European network IRIS has allowed for over 80 German initiatives for the vocational training of women to participate in exchanges with partner projects from other European Union Member States and in the exchange of information. The same is true of the programme NOW which last year gave over 40 projects the chance to benefit from the skills of women from other countries - from the computer specialist to the environmental expert.

More importantly, women in the European Parliament, including 35 from Germany - whatever their party - have ensured that one quarter of those working in the European “government”, i.e. the Commission, are women. Is that too a model for Germany to follow? ●

interview Anita Gradin European Commissioner who Listens to Citizens

You have joined the Union with a heavy load of responsibilities. You are handling extremely important portfolios - questions linked to “Immigration, Home Affairs and Justice”, “Financial Control” and “Fraud Prevention”. You represent a new Member State and you are one of the five women Commissioners in the most “feminine” Commission in history. How do you envisage your mandate?

For me, the most important question concerns the Citizens' Europe, and all of my responsibilities are linked to that. If we cannot successfully handle the questions linked to immigration or judicial cooperation, we will not be able to fulfil our obligations to people living within the Union. If we cannot handle the financial management of the taxpayer's money, or fight successfully against fraud, people will not trust the European Union.

We know of your interest and commitment to women's issues (indeed, you were responsible for equality issues from 1982 to 1986 in Sweden). Do you wish and do you intend to promote women's issues in the European Union from your own portfolio? And how do you intend to do that?

Since I myself took the initiative in Senningen of forming a group of Commissioners responsible for equal opportunities, I attach great importance to the work to be done. We have already had our first meeting, and will from now on meet every second month. I am confident that both my colleagues and I will have real opportunities to make a contribution to promoting equal opportunities.

Since I am also responsible for immigration, justice and home affairs, I have a number of areas that directly concern women. Take, for instance, the situation of women refugees, of migrant women and their right to a residence permit on their own merits, or in case of family reunification. Furthermore, the internal market results, of course, in people marrying across borders - and also divorcing. There is much to be done in the area of ac-

ceptance of court rulings in one country for divorces being recognized in other countries. The same goes for court decisions on custody of children.

Could you give us a more personalized description of yourself, and tell us about the professional achievements that you are proud of?

When looking back, I am proud of having started research in the social field in Sweden. And, of course, of what I managed to do in the 60s and 70s in the field of equal opportunities: the introduction of individual taxation - which was a decisive step towards real equality between women and men in Sweden - to get rid of the “head of household” concept, to change family law so as to respond to real equality, to introduce the right to child care.

I am also proud of having been the first woman Minister for Foreign Trade in the Swedish Government.

You are a member of the group of Commissioners on Equal Opportunities. What, in your opinion, can be expected from this group?

As I mentioned earlier, the Group will be working together on a number of issues concerning equal opportunities. I am quite confident that all the experience that we represent will be reflected in the work of the Group - which is an internal Commission group - and that we will be able to make concrete contributions both to equal opportunities within the Commission and in EU policies, for women all over the Union.

How do you see the position of women inside the Commission? Do you think that you will be able to influence the situation positively in this Institution? How would you do that?

I have been working for many years with equal opportunities, both in Sweden as a minister, and as chair of Socialist International Women. I know that you have to set yourself realistic targets and formulate a strategy to reach the goal. I am myself not opposed to quotas as a means of reaching equality. The results of the policies we have pursued in Sweden are reflected in the fact that we today have a government with 50% men, just to mention one example.

Commissioner Liikanen is, as you know, responsible for personnel. He is also a member of the group of Commissioners for Equal Opportunities, and we have already had our first discussions on the matter.

Europe is now approaching its half century anniversary. What thoughts come to your mind on the eve of 9 May?

When looking to the future, what comes to my mind is the essential question of peace and security. This very question was also what, from the beginning, made me choose political life and turn to European politics. As a young girl, I listened to a speech by Paul-Henri Spaak, who was visiting Sweden, and heard him talk on the vision of European integration as a means to prevent war. Having had the very near experience of children who came to Sweden to escape the war, this seemed to me to be the way to solve conflicts without weapons. This is still for me a very basic argument for European integration. ●

European Commission

"Women of the European Commission 1984-1994"

The Equal Opportunities Unit in the Directorate-General IX - Personnel and Administration - has recently published a brochure in the form of commented statistics presenting the evolution of the position of women within the Commission, and of their presence in terms of employment over the past 10 years.

The brochure falls under the equal opportunities policy set up by the Commission for its female personnel. Its aim is to draw the attention of the hierarchy to the difficulties encountered by women, namely in climbing the ladder of the upper ranks of the hierarchy, and in bridging existing gaps.

Since 1978, actions have been taken in favour of women working in the Commission, such as the establishment of a Committee on Equal Opportunities for men and women (COPEC), and in 1988 the setting up of the first positive action programme.

1991 was a stepping stone with the creation of DG IX's Equal Opportunities Unit. 1992 followed with the launching of the second programme, the objective of which was threefold: ensuring a sufficient presence of women in those grades where they are under-represented (namely category A), tracking the career development of women in all categories thanks to training and the monitoring of promotions, and allowing the women through accompanying measures, to harmoniously combine professional and family life.

In the framework of these objectives, a system of detailed statistics was set up to assist the Human Resources Units of the different Directorates-General in elaborating their own positive action programmes.

This Unit of the DG IX is coordinating the launching of the 2nd programme, and edits an internal newsletter ("Bulletin Actions Positives"). It is also currently participating in the pilot-experiments carried out by two Directorates-General (DG V - Employment, Social Affairs and Industrial Relations, and DG XV - Internal Market and Financial Services) which consist in measures aimed at raising the awareness of the hierarchy and promoting a change of attitude in the workplace.

Laura Viqueira, Head of the Equal Opportunities Unit - DG IX - stresses that "the position of the woman is not much different than in other European institutions, national administrations or even large firms. On the other hand, it is important for the Commission to have a progress-oriented attitude and to set an example, because it is the motor in the Community's decision-making machine, in the legislative framework. It is so important, that a group for the Promotion of Equal Opportunities was created within, but also outside the Commission, chaired by President Jacques Santer, and in which many Commissioners participate."

Laura Viqueira points out that "if the Commission is not discriminatory in terms of the presence of women (they make up 45% of personnel), or in terms of salary, it is discriminatory in terms of the presence of women in the upper hierarchy. We must not forget that it is specifically mentioned in the second positive action programme that we must maintain the principle of giving priority to women with equal qualifications and merits in cases of recruitment, promotion or appeal regarding the managerial position in question".

At a conference organized by DG IX's Equal Opportunities Unit on the occasion of International Women's Day 8 March last, Jacques Santer spoke to give his support not only to equal opportunities, but to the partici-

pation of women in economic life, in the redefinition of work and in decision-making in general. He also called on women to contribute "in a positive and novel manner in the Intergovernmental Conference of 1996".

For a copy of the "Women of the European Commission - 1984 - 1994" brochure, or to receive more information about the Equal Opportunities Unit of the European Commission, contact:

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Beijing: the Review of the European Commission's "Joint Position"

With a view to the 4th International Conference on Women to take place in Beijing in September 1995 under the auspices of the United Nations, a preparatory meeting is currently underway in New York (from 13 March to 5 April). Its objective is to allow the delegations and NGOs of the various countries to elaborate a document for adoption in Beijing, which will constitute the groundwork for measures aiming at improving the condition of women around the world.

Considering the "Women of Europe Newsletter"'s printing deadline, we are unable to relay the results of the preparatory conference in New York in this 51st issue. We will come back to this very important meeting in our next issue. ●

European Parliament

European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights

The 21 and 22 March meeting of the EP Committee on Women's Rights was essentially devoted to experts' testimonies on the equality of men's and women's salaries.

The purpose was to examine the improvements to be made in the present situation, in the framework of the memorandum from the European Commission regarding equal pay for equal work.

The memorandum, which will be accompanied by a "code of good conduct" considered as a technical tool to extend equal pay, has to inform the public so that individuals will be familiar with the principle of equal pay, and so that it be applied in a satisfactory manner by national courts and tribunals.

Experts from the different Member States reviewed the context of the female labour market in each of their countries and put forward proposals which might contribute to resolving the problems.

Generally, the obstacles to equal pay are due to a lack of consideration vis à vis female labour, to the negative cultural and social attitudes, to the lack of appropriate skills among women and to the difficulty of obtaining equality through currently existing legislation.

Among the recommendations made are, namely, the need for a directive on the reversal of the burden of proof, for a change in attitudes, for the protection of acquired rights and an awareness campaign, in order for women to become more familiar with their rights.

The examination of Marlène Lenz's and Christine Crawley's opinions regarding preparations for the Intergovernmental Conference of 1996 was also on the agenda of the Committee on Women's Rights' session.

Christine Crawley brought in an oral amendment, adopted unanimously, proposing a clause in the treaty recognizing the fundamental right to equal treatment, the abuse of which would be addressed by the Court of Justice. The two amended opinions were adopted unanimously.

The Committee also unanimously adopted an opinion addressed to the Development Commission. It underscores women's vulnerability to the AIDS virus, and calls for women who are HIV-positive or who have the illness to be involved in the elaboration of Committee programmes or projects aimed at curbing the spread of the epidemic.

The next meeting of the Committee on Women's Rights on 24 and 25 May, in which representatives of the national parliaments will participate, will focus on preparations for the International Conference in Beijing.

Due to deadlines, the "Women of Europe Newsletter" was not able in its issue number 50 to update you on the European Parliament's committees on women's rights of January and February. Here is a brief overview.

The Committee on Women's Rights of 30 and 31 January welcomed Commissioner Pádraig Flynn, responsible for Social Affairs, and consequently for Equal Opportunities.

Pádraig Flynn mentioned the creation of the Group for Equal Opportunities set up by the Santer Commission, stressing that in his opinion, its work should focus on the participation of women in decision-making, on violent acts committed against women, on the effects of poverty and on the economic situation of women in general.

Finally, the Committee on Women's Rights of 23 and 24 February, was addressed by Mrs. Simone Veil, French Minister of Social Affairs, Health and Urban Affairs, and serving Chairperson of the Council of Social Affairs. She presented the lines of action that France will be developing: preparation for the Beijing Conference, for which an "ad hoc" group is developing a "joint position" for the ensemble of Member States, the adoption of a resolution on the equal participation of women and men in decision-making and the holding of a European symposium on the status of the spouses of self-employed workers. She also announced that 3 directive proposals, in abeyance, regarding parental leave, the reversal of the burden of proof, and atypical work, will be examined in the framework of discussions with the partners of social dialogue.

The Committee also welcomed delegates of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), including the Secretary General, Mrs. Elizabeth Gateau, who argued in favour of promoting the presence of women on the local and regional levels of politics. ●