

Women of Europe

Beijing

Editorial

The Women of Europe Newsletter has a new look. Its new presentation - a more modern layout -, its diversified topics, its new columns take into account the analysis of the answers to the survey on publications from DG X's Information for Women Section, in which we asked you about your reading habits, your needs, your observations. The results of the survey will allow us to create a higher-quality instrument for more objective insight for the scrutinizing public that you are, and in accordance with the principles adopted by our Directorate-General in the framework of its information policy.

Already, we have decided to draw your attention to the strong points of the current events of the women of Europe. We have dedicated this 52nd issue to the upcoming World Conference on Women to be held in September in Beijing. The European Union has indeed a role of primary importance to play at the Conference in order to assert its priorities. Just a few months away from the Conference, debate at the preparatory meeting, organized by the United Nations in New York, has demonstrated the importance of the stakes and the difficulty of reaching consensus.

In this connection, the European Commission is preparing a communication to the Council of Ministers. It will focus on three major strategic themes: women in the economy, women in public life, women and solidarity. It will also reflect the importance attached by the Union to the promotion of universal human rights, of which women's rights form an integral, unalienable and indivisible part. Further, it will touch upon the Community's mandate and interests in terms of women's participation in development. The fight against violence, economic independence and women's participation in decision-making also are among its primary concerns. For its part, the European Parliament, which is finalizing a draft resolution, opened its doors to women's organizations on the occasion of a public hearing held by the Women's Rights Committee.

These initiatives are a well of hope. They demonstrate the Community's commitment to respect the diversity of women's experiences and to encourage the women of the Union to share their experiences with women from all parts of the world. ●

Veronique Houdart-Blazy

Head of Section - Information for Women

Preparations for the World Conference on Women

A Path Full of Pitfalls

Just a few weeks away from the United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held in Beijing from 4 to 15 September, the different delegations are working relentlessly in order to finalize the platform proposal on the "promotion of women" to be submitted to the States on the basis of the five regional platforms, national reports and conclusions of the numerous advisory and experts' meetings.

The stakes are high. A meeting of this kind - preceded by those of Mexico in 1975, which signalled the international decade of women, and of Nairobi in 1985, where the strategies for prospective action for the promotion of women were adopted - only takes place once every 10 years. The results, however, risk falling short of initial ambitions, due to the considerable disagreement among the countries on numerous topics.

During the preparatory meeting in New York from 15 March to 5 April, organized by the UN Commission on the Status of Women which is providing the conference secretariat, the participants had to part one another, after three weeks of lively debate, leaving important questions unanswered. These were questions on poverty, education, violence, armed conflicts, equal rights within economic and political structures, the media, the environment, but also the particularly controversial issues of human rights and health.

The European Point of View

In light of the many critiques made of the original project, the amendment work on the platform proposal was divided and distributed to numerous informal groups to which observers were not allowed access. In her report, Mrs. Antoinette Fouque, Vice-Chairperson of the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights, present in New York, claims that the "commotion seems to have been due, in large part, to the observations and pressures coming from nationalist and fundamentalist forces which are trying to undo all of the progress made by women and who, through a small number of countries, have deliberately attempted to slow down the Conference process and to undermine the will of the majority to promote human rights for women".

Firmly committed to women's rights, the European Union, proposed of course, a series of important amendments, placing birth control under the "human rights for women" section, considering violence as a violation of the fundamental rights of women, expanding women's economic rights, particularly means for child care and specific measures to counter unemployment. But it had to resign itself to a series of modifications during the Conference preparations, such as the disappearance "in the name of realism" of all use of numbers and all cal-

endar scheduling as well as to the non-recognition of war-time rape as an act of terrorism, torture or genocide.

A Communication Before the Summer

Despite these difficulties, the European Commission is currently finalizing its position. Two working documents were elaborated before the New York meeting, which examined the Union's "major concerns". These will be the topic, before the summer, of a communication to the Council of Ministers which will focus on several priority themes: human rights, economic independence, women and decision-making. "Today in the world, a large number of women are looking to the

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European Union," declared Mrs. Fouque.

The European Union should then offer a series of instruments for the promotion of women's fundamental rights and the democratic process, in particular specific clauses, inter-alia, making the respect for women's rights an essential element in agreements with third party countries. It stresses, furthermore, the growing need for measures susceptible of reconciling career and family responsibilities. It also proposes to take concrete measures against violence, exclusion and poverty, while ensuring surveillance mechanisms. It insists that women must be considered as dynamic actors and not as victims.

For its part, on the basis of Mrs. Lissy Gröner's (PSE, D) report, the European Parliament's Women's Rights Committee should present to the June or July plenary session a draft resolution (see minutes of the Women's Rights Committee, page 4).

The Presence of NGOs in Question

The Beijing Conference also raises controversy between Chinese authorities and non-governmental organizations (NGO). Indeed, the latter learned on 31 March - i.e. only five months before the formal opening of the Conference - that their forum, planned for 30 August to 8 September, would be held over fifty kilometres away from Beijing, in a site lacking adequate infrastructure and means of communication. The United Nations NGO Committee, responsible for the organization of the

IGC '96

Preparing XXIst Century Europe the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference

NGO Forum, has given the Chinese Committee a rather short time to find an alternative location meeting the needs of the numerous participants and journalists to attend the Forum.

Aware of the problem, Mrs. Gröner, who had called for support of the NGO Forum, requests in her report that the working conditions for the NGOs be the best possible. "The European Parliament protests the fact that the NGOs were not granted permission to participate and that the NGO Forum is located so far away from the official Conference that contacts will be difficult (...) All of the necessary conditions must be met in order to ensure the participation of NGOs in the official Conference, which includes their participation as observers in the editorial committee," she insists. Mrs. Fouque expressed the same concerns and confirmed that the representatives of the NGOs present in New York have organized a press conference to voice their concerns.

Such uncertainties have not stopped the NGOs from carefully preparing their forum. Invited to Brussels 25 April by the Women's Rights Committee, several of the NGOs were thus able to formulate their priorities (see minutes, page 4).



Mrs. Antoinette Fouque
Vice-Chairperson of the
European Parliament's
Women's Rights
Committee
Photo: European Parliament

ACP Requests

For their part, the ACP (Africa, Caribbean, Pacific) governments expressed, in a resolution, their wish to declare in Beijing that there can be no sustainable and viable development without "the participation of women in the decision-making process at all levels of society." Such participation should be based on "constitutional and legal guarantees" and put into practice "daily in all sectors of life."

The ACP also stresses the necessity to continue to combat poverty and violence and to protect access to education, health and employment. But their wish to send a joint delegation to Beijing seems strongly jeopardized, the European Parliament not having given its approval for the freeing of the necessary funds. "It is very important that the demands of the women from these 70 developing countries are taken into consideration at the Conference," insists Mrs. Gröner, who hopes that the European Parliament Development Committee will convince the Parliament to change its position.

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The 1996 Intergovernmental Conference, the purpose of which is to review the Maastricht Treaty, will be a paramount rendez-vous for Europe and its future. A few months away from the deadline, preparations are speeding-up. The "reflection group", composed of representatives from the Member States of the different Community institutions, officially began its work on 3 June in Messina.

The European Commission is represented in the group by Commissioner Marcelino Oreja, responsible for Institutional Affairs. Two MEPs are representing the European Parliament: Elmar Brok (D, PPE) and Elisabeth Guigou (F, PSE), former French Minister of European Affairs.

In accordance with the mandate attributed by the European Council of Corfu in 1994, the European Parliament and the Commission adopted their evaluation report of the Treaty on European Union.

In its report, the European Commission gives a fairly comprehensive review of the first eighteen months of the Maastricht Treaty's implementation. According to the Commission, the Treaty had a real impact, since it allowed for an extension of the European Parliament's mandate, the reinforcement of the Commission's legitimacy, the enhancement of the Union's authority and the launching of an economic and monetary union, "the foundation of which is laid and no re-negotiating of texts is necessary".

But it also revealed important gaps that will have to be bridged to meet the Commission's priority objectives: "make Europe a citizens' affair" and "welcome into the Union" the new states of central and eastern Europe "while preserving the 'acquis' of forty years of European construction."

"It is not inevitable that a movement founded on a spirit of openness and solidarity is translated by weakening and dilution - widening and deepening are perfectly compatible," the Commission asserts, according to which the arrival of new countries will render necessary the improvement of the decision-making mechanisms, in particular through resorting increasingly to majority-voting rule.

More Transparency, Democracy, Efficiency

The Commission proposes two areas for thought. First, to act in a "democratic, comprehensible and transparent manner." The Union must reinforce the concept of European citizenship and elaborate a "fundamental text", a summary of rights and duties of the European citizen. Another indispensable reform is the decision-making procedure. "There must be an end to the incoherencies and ambiguities, the sources of multiple procedural conflicts," opines the Commission, favourable to a more direct and more visible involvement of the parliaments in the control and orientation of the national choices affecting the Union.

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has called for greater
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The second area for thought is "efficient, coherent and supportive" action, invoking both the Treaty's deficiencies and the "excessively restrictive" interpretation that has been made of it. The report, in particular, criticizes the systematic recourse to unanimity which stops the Union from having a foreign policy proportional to its economic might, and favours a true common security and defense policy. The same regrets hold true in terms of judicial and home affairs, where there is a blend of "inadequacy of the available instruments", "extreme redundancy of the decision-making process" and "complete absence of transparency".

"The principal challenge of the upcoming conference is not to extend the Union's mandate, declares the Commission, which would like to guard against a Europe à la carte. "Each State freely choosing to associate itself with this or that Community policy, and disassociating itself with the other, can only lead to a non-Europe," it warns.

Against a Two-speeded Europe

The European Parliament shares this point of view, opposing a two-speeded Europe. After a marathon vote, indeed the MEPs adopted in a plenary session, in Strasbourg on 17 May, a report which criticized the democratic deficit of the Union and favoured redefining the decision-making process and preparing the Union for future enlargement.

The debate was launched in the Parliament by the Irish President Mrs. Mary Robinson who gave a speech on the topic, calling, in particular, for greater consideration of the citizen, for an efficient functioning of the institutions in a future enlarged Europe and for the lessening of economic disparity. She underscored the need to find imaginative and innovative solutions in Europe, while insisting on the importance of peace-keeping, the respect for human rights and the fight against the evils of unemployment and social exclusion.

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ference



In its report, the Parliament wished not only to see a simplification of the decision-making processes, but also a strengthening of its mandate in this area. It also called for co-decision on a greater number of issues and the right to consultation on all international agreements and on budgetary reform. Another proposed modification is that of the voting procedure in the Council of Ministers, with an extension of the qualified

majority vote and unanimity required only for very particular problems (amendments to the Treaties, resources, electoral system,...). All this, combined with a double-vote system which would simultaneously represent both a majority of countries and a majority of the Union's population.

The Parliament recognizes the pertinence of the schedule and convergence criteria proposed for economic and monetary union and proposes to accompany them with a clear commitment to favour employment. It also wishes to give greater importance to citizenship and to combatting racism, and suggests that the Union should join the Council of Europe's Convention on Human Rights, and that a new article be introduced into the Maastricht Treaty, where the principle of equal treatment and non-discrimination based on sex, religion or age would be proclaimed.

With regard to the institutions themselves, the report offers several modifications: the election of the Commission president by the European Parliament, the possibility of censuring the Commissioners individually, a reinforcement of the Parliament's role and a greater budgetary role, and greater authority for the Court of Justice. Finally, the Parliament proposes to submit the results of the Intergovernmental Conference to a referendum throughout the European Union. ●

council of ministers

For the Equal Participation of Women in Decision-making

According to a resolution adopted by the Ministers of Social Affairs at their latest meeting on 27 March, "the equal participation of men and women in decision-making" must be encouraged "in order to produce changes in structures and attitudes, indispensable for true equal access to senior-level positions".

To this end, the Ministers promised to do everything possible and invited the Member States to de-

velop a global and balanced strategy including a wide range of measures (statistics on the number of women in senior-level positions, incentives for NGOs and other groups, support for scientific research, information and awareness campaigns).

As for the employers' and workers' organizations, they must "take every necessary step to actively promote women's representation among decision-makers."

The Union also invited the Commission to intensify its information, awareness and research-incentives campaigns, and to set up pilot-actions to this end. Finally, the ministers also requested that the Commission should elaborate a draft recommendation on the same topic, to be submitted to the Council. ●

news from the networks

Dublin Seminar

The Network "Women in Decision-making" Seeks Solutions to Under-representation

The organization of the European seminar "Strategies for a Balance Between Men and Women in Political Decision-making" held in Dublin last 23 and 24 March, under the auspices of the European Commission and the European Network of Experts on "Women in Decision-making" created in the framework of the Third Medium-Term Action Programme For Equal Opportunities (1991-1995), marks an important step in efforts undertaken to improve the status of women in European society.

Government delegates, Union officials, members of political parties, women's organizations, media experts - nearly 100 people were gathered to find solutions to the problem of the poor representation of women in high-ranking public positions. "A democracy which cannot manage to ensure equal representation of men and women is a totally imperfect democracy," stressed the Irish Minister for Equality and Legal Reform, Mr. Mervyn Taylor, in opening the seminar.

This concern is all the more important since disparities remain in political, economic and social life, such as the continued segregation of women in so-called "feminine" positions without any real chance of accessing more important sectors, the difficulty of reconciling family life and career, and the mode of political socialization, marked by the predominance of a masculine model.

The objective of the seminar was to examine a series of proposals allowing to open positions of authority to women, including legal measures such as

quotas and awareness campaigns. Six working groups were formed.

The first was devoted to "legislative measures". Concluding the work, Mrs. Eliane Vogel-Polsky, group rapporteur, deemed it imperative to "find and apply legal mechanisms adopted by law, having constraining effects and making results compulsory, namely equal participation in elected and designated political assemblies". First, however, there must be the international, constitutional and legislative establishment of a fundamental right to equality between men and women as a substantial and autonomous right.

The second was on "recruitment strategies". The participants underscored the importance of organizing training for women, of considering certain sensitive areas, like the national and regional context, and of opting for very diverse forms, such as counselling or pilot-actions. The group recommended stimulating such programmes through Community co-financing.

The third group reflected on the "action and awareness campaigns". It concluded that such campaigns should clearly identify the objective, which is to change the existing culture and attitudes, but also to assume very diverse forms (petitions, posters, conferences, etc.), to use the media, and to choose target groups appropriately, while providing for a legislative arm - quotas.

The topic of quotas was discussed in more detail by the fourth group "Quotas". According to their conclusions, "increased representation of women in decision-making bodies would have results going beyond the sole function of democratic legitimization, producing great social changes in favour of men and women". The rapporteur, Mrs. Isabel Romano from the European network "Women in Decision-making", pointed out that quotas - controversial and often considered as "discriminatory" and responsible for "impassable thresholds" -

are, on the contrary, "a means of creating true democracy for each person" that must complement other measures (the obligation to have a man and a woman on each electoral list, limiting concurrent mandates,...).

The fifth group concentrated its work on "The Principal Actors: political parties, the employers' and workers' organizations and NGOs". It concluded that these actors should ensure solidarity and cooperation between women. They should include the principle of balanced participation in their statutes, elaborate an action plan, develop strategies, increase financial resources and take advantage of the opportunities offered by the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference.

Finally, the last working group devoted itself to the more specific problem of the "Participation of Women as a lever for political revival". It underlined the importance of collaboration between men and women, beyond political parties, to strengthen a "non-defensive" strategy and to define new priorities. In this "positive" attitude, the group also noted the possibility of using the present need for political change in order to rectify the under-representation of women. ●

European parliament

Women's Rights Committee

Gathered under the chairmanship of Mrs. Nel van Dijk (Greens, NL) 24 and 25 April, the Women's Rights Committee met with non-governmental women's organizations to debate with them the Beijing conference. It also adopted Mrs. Hedy d'Ancona's (PSE, NL) report concerning the Third Community Action Programme on equal opportunities between men and women (1991-1995). The Fourth Programme proposal, which the European Commission will present in the coming months, should be launched in January, 1996.

Beijing Conference

A large part of the meeting was dedicated to debate with NGOs on the organization of the Beijing Conference. Mrs. Lissy Gröner (PSE, D), given the task of writing a report on the topic, invited them to present their positions in order to take them into consideration in her report. Several of the NGOs, therefore, were able to formulate their priorities.

Promoting the recognition of equality between men and women on the civil, political, economic and social levels is the priority of *Amnesty International*.

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)

will support, in Beijing, the principle of a new social contract between men and women in order to promote equality between the sexes in public and private life and to recognize the central role of the employment of women.

Reminding that poverty strikes in northern countries and southern countries alike, the *European Network of Associations Against Poverty and Social Exclusion* stressed that the work undertaken at earlier conferences, in particular in Copenhagen on social development, should be used as pillars.

Defining a strategy and clear objectives is an imperative prerequisite for the *European Women's Lobby* which has insisted on the ne-

cessity to create ties between the Beijing Conference, the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference and European Union programmes favouring women.

As for *Women in Development Europe (WIDE)*, their priority is the respect for economic rights and a more coherent analysis of the causes of poverty in the framework of government development policies.

Finally, the *Migrants' Forum* asks that each national delegation should include a woman immigrant among its members.

Community Action Programme

Deploring the absence of adequate criteria for measuring the success of the Third Action Programme, Mrs. d'Ancona says she is pleased that the Commission plans to publish an annual report on the equality between the sexes and to establish a system to control the implementation of equal opportunity in all Union policy.

The Fourth Programme will also have to focus on a more limited number of sectors, in order to avoid any dilution of resources:

- the development of partnership between the Union, the Member States and the employers' and workers' organizations, the two latter playing, like all other non-governmental organizations, a fundamental role in the definition of priorities upon practical implementation;
- the earmarking of more substantial funds to programmes in operation in the Member States;
- and the improvement of information and awareness campaigns.

In addition, the report recommends the reconciling of private life and career as well as placing greater importance on the needs of less favoured women, notably the elderly, refugees and immigrants. It is also necessary to ensure that Member States apply the existing legislation in this field more strictly, while providing for sanctions made by the European Commission on the more recalcitrant States.

Besides the different recommendations for the future Community action programme, the report comes back to the concept of "full citizenship" debated at the UN Conferences in Cairo and Vienna, and finds that it depends on the equal distribution of public and private responsibilities between men and women and, therefore, should include economic, political, social and cultural activities. ●

Erratum : Contrary to what was announced in issue n° 50 of the *Women of Europe Newsletter*, it is **Carmel Foley**, and not **Kate Hayes**, who was elected vice-chairperson of the *Advisory Committee for Equal Opportunities* on last 16 November, along with **Anne Grete Holmsgård**.

Condemnation of Fundamentalist Terrorism Against Women in Algeria

On 6 April in Strasbourg, the European Parliament adopted in plenary session a resolution on the situation in Algeria, in which it "strongly condemns the blind acts of terrorism" committed in that country. Furthermore, it saluted the "courage" of its inhabitants, "particularly women, who have led the fight - endangering their lives - against fundamentalist intolerance, against any project of society which would distance women from political, social and economic life as well as from democracy, equality, the respect for the fundamental rights of citizens and the freedom of press".

The Parliament says it is "profoundly shocked" by the recent assassinations of journalists - which brings the number of victims from the press to 32. In particular, the resolution mentions the murder of Rashida Hammadi, well-known television journalist, and that of the president of the Larbaa tribunal - the fifteenth magistrate assassinated since 1994.

The MEPs, however, deplore "the extent of the reaction of the armed forces" and find that, from now on, it is up to the Algerian government to "make proposals for dialogue". They demand, therefore, "the immediate cease of all military cooperation" between the Member States of the Union and Algiers, as well as the Union's prohibition of any deportation to Algeria of "democrats whose lives are threatened". ●