

Women of Europe

the Cannes summit

New steps towards the widening and construction of the European Union

Editorial

The 4th World Conference on Women recently held in Beijing (4 to 15 September) under the auspices of the United Nations provides the UN and its Member States with an opportunity to take stock of the measures adopted ten years earlier in Nairobi to promote the emancipation of women by the year 2000, and to define appropriate objectives in order to adopt policies and take action to achieve equality between men and women and to improve the lot of women throughout the world.

Ten years after the Nairobi conference, and despite the success of some actions waged in favour of women in industrialised or developing countries, women are still particularly affected by exclusion, poverty and armed conflicts. Furthermore, the recognition of their basic rights is far from certain.

Consequently, the persistent poverty of women, the low level of participation in the decision-making process, the unequal access to education and health, as well as violence against women, were all central topics of the discussions in Beijing, on which the European Union tried to make headway. The aim of the EU was to take an active part in this conference, in particular through its activities on equal opportunities, cooperation and development, and the promotion of human rights and democracy.

The promotion of the role of women is an essential component of the different actions waged by the European Union to attain the overall objective of consolidating democracy, the rule of law and fundamental liberties.

At a time when there is a discernible setback in the fight against discrimination of women, or when they are the victims of their determination to achieve emancipation in some countries where religion is a weight upon their lives, the Beijing conference affords a glimmer of hope to further the idea that equality is the compulsory point of departure for sustained development and that the fundamental rights of women and of young girls constitute an inalienable, integral and indissociable part of universal individual rights.

We will have the opportunity to further discuss these issues in future editions. ●

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The European Council that closed the French Presidency of the European Union was held in Cannes on 26 and 27 June. This Council, which brings together the Heads of State and of Government twice a year to examine essential questions for the Union, convened for the first time with the newly expanded 15 Member States.

"We must send a message of confidence, and stress our firm determination to create the conditions for a new beginning", declared the French President, Jacques Chirac, in a letter addressed to his colleagues in the European Union a few days before the meeting.

Yet, after two days of negotiations, the results have fallen short of expectations on priority issues (employment, economic and monetary union, the Inter-governmental Conference (IGC) of 1996), and on the main questions left in abeyance (the Europol Convention, external financing).

On the other hand, the Summit did make headway on the preparation for the accession of associated countries to the European Union. The Heads of State and of Government had, in fact, invited to a joint lunch and a working session their counterparts from the eleven countries concerned: six from Eastern and Central Europe (Poland, Hungary, Rumania, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Bulgaria) the three Baltic countries (Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania), Cyprus and Malta.

Beyond the rather general discussions, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe received a financial package of ECU 6.69 billion over five years as part of the agreement on the global external financing package.

For their part, the Mediterranean countries, which benefit from a scheme to restore balance between North and South, obtained ECU 4.68 billion for the same period. Finally, after intense discussions, the Fifteen decided to appropriate ECU 13.3 billion to the eighth EDF (European Development Fund), or in real terms, a reduction of the amount earmarked for the 70 ACP countries (Africa, Caribbean, Pacific) over the last five years.

Fight against unemployment and for equal opportunities: Major tasks for the Union

"The Union must endeavour to better meet the reasonable expectations of citizens, i.e. mobilise all means and resources, including those of the Member States along priority lines, to fight effectively against the scourge of unemployment," stressed the conclusions of the Summit.

Pointing out that the unemployment rate will persist at "unacceptable levels" in 1995, the European Council came out in favour of monetary and budget policies "aimed at achieving stability", that can help bring down interest rates and boost investment and growth.

The European Council also called for the development of local initiatives for employment, in particular in cottage industries, natural products and environment-related services.

The introduction of keener competition to get the internal market to work properly must be compatible with equal treatment of citizens, "including equal rights and equal opportunities for men and women," the Council underscored.

With these high principles and with the intent to put an end to speculation on the calendar for economic and monetary union (EMU), the Heads of State and of Government also reaffirmed their determination to "prepare the transition to a single currency by 1 January 1999 at the latest, in strict compliance with the convergence criteria, timetable, protocols and procedures provided by the Treaty."

New challenges in Europe

The European Council, which will analyse in Madrid the report of the Reflection Group preparing the IGC of 1996, concentrated on setting a number of priorities to this end, namely to analyse the principles, objectives and instruments of the Union to face the "new challenges in Europe," to enhance the common foreign and security policy, to make greater efforts to meet requirements in justice and internal affairs, to enhance the democratic character, transparency and efficiency of institutions, to fortify the support of public opinion, and to further ensure the implementation of the principle of subsidiarity.

Finally, in addition to the expressed wish for a rapid start of the Community financing of trans-European networks, the Cannes Summit entrusted to Carl Bildt, the new mediator of the Union in former Yugoslavia, a five-point plan to try to restore peace in the Balkans. ●

council of ministers

Priorities of the Spanish Presidency

After France and before Italy, Spain has since 1st July assumed the Presidency of the European Union. Javier Solana, the Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs, outlined the four priorities of this six-month period to Euro MPs convened in a plenary session in Strassburg on 12 July. These priorities are: the economic revival of Europe in a context of social integration, a Europe open to citizens, a Europe open to the world with stability, security, freedom and solidarity, and finally the Inter-Governmental Conference of 1996.

In Mr Solana's view, it is time to dispel "the fears and fantasies" about Europe. The debate between a federal European State and an inter-governmental Europe is a "false debate," because the "real dilemma of Europe" is the choice between "integration and disintegration." "The vitality and future of the European States will be guaranteed only by moving ahead on integration," he pointed out.

From the Bosnian drama to the globalisation of the economy, from unemployment to the establishment of an efficient European Union, great challenges are looming on the horizon.

Employment at the centre of the discussions

A matter of overriding concern, unemployment will once again become the focus of discussions these next months. "The top challenge for Europe is a strong, job-creating economy," stresses the work programme of the new Presidency. While forewarning about fiscal imbalances and the stability of prices, the Presidency will introduce a monitoring procedure covering economic and social aspects, which will lead to a first annual report at the Madrid European Council.

The Spanish Prime Minister also promised to submit to the Heads of State and of Government in December, a reference scenario for the introduction of a single currency in the Union.

These different exchanges should not eclipse other objectives.

The first such objective is the consolidation of an integrated economic area, with fiscal harmonisation, the development of the information society, the internal energy market, the ecotax, the management of air traffic, the definition of a universal telecommunication service, the debate on the revision of the "Television without Borders" directive.

The second objective comprises the budget of the European Union for 1996 and the fight against fraud.

The third objective aims to deepen the social dimension of the Union, in particular the definition of the role of social policy in measures in favour of employment, the support of initiatives in favour of women and the elderly and the fight against racism and xenophobia.

A Europe of citizens

The Spanish Presidency intends to "promote policies closer to the daily life of citizens," as declared in its work programme which calls for furthering the le-

gitimacy, efficiency and transparency, while strengthening the identity and plurality of Europe and the construction of an area of freedom and security (prevention and fight against terrorism, common policy on immigration and asylum, a judicial area).

Underscoring the importance of the World conference in Beijing which took place during its term of office, the Presidency wants to see progress on planned initiatives in favour of equal opportunities for men and women, in particular by re-examining proposals for directives on reverting the burden of proof and on the means and resources for reconciling family and professional life. It will also endeavour to have the fourth programme for equal opportunities "rapidly approved."

A crucial moment for Europe

For its part, the IGC of 1996 will be the focus of particular attention, as the heads of State and Government meet informally in Majorca in September to, according to the programme, "contribute to the discussion on such questions and to prepare for the conclusions to be drawn on this matter at the next European Council in Madrid."

Aware of arriving at a "crucial moment" in European life, Spain wishes to build a Europe open to the world in the upcoming months, by stressing the enlargement of the Union. "We have to do it, and we



Javier Solana
Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs at the presentation of the work programme of the Presidency.
Photo: European Parliament

have to do it well," otherwise, it "would be a failure for all Europeans...an unforgivable failure, because these forty years of Community experience have enabled us to acquire the requisite technical capacities for meeting the challenges of enlargement," Javier Solana warned the Euro MPs.

Spain will therefore endeavour to give as much shape as possible to the pre-accession strategy and will organise joint ministerial meetings with the countries of Eastern and Central Europe. This will not hinder threshing out other problems, like the Bosnian drama. ●

France, Spain, Italy Three Presidencies and a new impetus to the Mediterranean policy

The strengthening of ties with the Mediterranean basin remains a major priority because, in the view of the Spanish Presidency, "the Mediterranean region is of preeminent geopolitical importance for Europe. The Presidency will therefore encourage the implementation of the new Mediterranean policy (...). One of the strong points of the Presidency will be the organisation of the Euro-Mediterranean Conference."

Announced at the European Summit held in Essen in December, this conference has up to now been jointly prepared by this troika (France, Spain, Italy) whose "team spirit" has attained a particular dimension in this area. The meeting, to be held in Barcelona on 27 and 28 November, will in any event afford an unprecedented opportunity for the countries concerned to define their future relations together.

A corollary to the policy of opening to the East, an ambitious policy of cooperation with the South could thus include a political dialogue, a sustainable and balanced economic and social development, the fight against poverty, and a better understanding between cultures.

This partnership will therefore help identify a certain number of common principles and interests, chart a plan of action (regional integration, greater financial cooperation, private sector investment), and promote trade.

European Parliament

Committee on Women's Rights

The Committee on Women's Rights of the European Parliament organised a public hearing on 25 and 26 June on the violation of individual rights linked to sex. A few weeks before the Beijing Conference, speakers denounced violence of all sorts against women in a very large number of countries, accused of failing to comply with democratic rules or of adopting effective prevention policies.

Rape, torture, prostitution, forced sterilisation, and sexual mutilation are constantly on the rise, despite commitments undertaken by international organisations. Several representatives of such organisations, in particular Mareik Raastake of Amnesty International and Olöf Olafsdottir of the Council of Europe, have underscored the urgency to adopt concrete measures flanked by adequate financial means and resources. Actions required include raising public awareness, a systematic and public denouncement of acts of violence, encouraging the access of women to education and vocational training, punishing perpetrators of violence, etc. Other measures were also proposed in the course of the hearing, such as specialised training for police officers and social workers, Community financing, the creation of an observatory to gather data, and the preparation of Community directives.

As many speakers pointed out, time is running out. Namgyal Phala, a member of the Organisation of Tibetan Women in Switzerland, explained that the Chinese had not hesitated to arrest, torture and murder Tibetan women who had rebelled against the occupation of their country.

Hafsa Limai Koudil, an Algerian film producer who has been hiding in France for several months, emphasised the degree to which "modern" women in her country, accused of spreading ideas contrary to

fundamentalism, were the preferred targets of terrorists.

Yet the situation is far from reassuring inside the European Union itself. For instance, Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi, the representative of the "Grouping of African Sisters," denounced the numerous violations of the rights of the three million African women living in the European Union. Soile Pohjonen, professor of law at the University of Helsinki and chair of the advisory committee on women, outlined the problems of violence and rape in marriage and intimate relationships, and underscored the gaps in the legal and police systems of her own and other countries of the Union in this matter.

The situation is all the more alarming as new forms of violence are merging virtually everywhere through computerised networks.

At this public hearing, Mrs Anita Gradin, the Commissioner responsible for "Questions on Immigration, Internal and Judicial Affairs," took the floor to denounce organised prostitution rings involving women and children and the need for better international cooperation. "A change of mentality is needed," she stressed. ●

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Committee on Civil Liberties

The trade in human beings in Europe was the subject of a public hearing in the European Parliament on 22 June at the initiative of the Committee on Civil Liberties and Internal Affairs: one of its members, Maria Paola Colombo Svevo (EPP, Italy) prepared a report on the subject.

According to Georges Remion, of the Brussels Health Observatory, international agreements define the trade in human beings as the "recruitment and abduction of persons for vice and prostitution to satisfy the needs of others."

Yet the difficulty of indicting the perpetrators, the extreme poverty of the countries of origin, the often legal facade of the activities hinder the effective fight against this phenomenon. Even more serious is the fact that the victims, who increasingly come from



Maria Paola Colombo Svevo
 author of the report on the human being trade for the Committee on Civil Liberties.
 Photo: European Parliament

Central and Eastern European countries, in particular the Czech Republic, Poland, Russia and the Ukraine, are nearly always considered as criminals and are repatriated without further ado.

According to Frank Laczko, of the International Migration Organisation (Budapest), they should be assured of protection while developing a consistent policy between the countries of Western Europe (cooperation between national police forces, precise definition of the crime of the trade in human beings, prevention). These were

the objectives raised by delegates, convinced of the seriousness of the situation. ●

networks

Social Innovation Prize awarded for the first time

In connection with activities pursued by the different networks of the European Commission, the European Prize for Social Innovation created in 1994 by the Directorate General for "Employment, Industrial Relations and Social Affairs" and organised by the *Work and Family Life* network, has just been awarded to several companies and organisations throughout the Community.

The Prize rewards three categories of multinational organisations, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and public or para-public organisations, which have introduced, since some time, appropriate procedures and practices reconciling professional and family life, in particular thorough flexibility, a different approach to working time (working time flexibility, telecommuting, career interruptions, sabbatical leaves) and measures for the mobility of families (at national and trans-national levels).

The Multinational Prize was awarded to Dragerwerk AG (Germany) for the 50 possible flexible timetables offered to its employees; the SME prize went to Danvalve (Denmark) for flexibility based on the individual needs of the employees, and the public organisation prize to the Sainte Camille hospital (France) for services (ironing, housework, sewing) offered to its employees.

Special rewards were also presented to five companies: Dupont de Nemours Italiana S.p.A. (Italy), Steuerberater Zoll (Germany), Dan Post (Denmark), FOLKSAM (Sweden) and Gargnäs Elteknik (Sweden). ●

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IRIS network becomes independent

Created in 1987, IRIS, the European network for the training of women, became a non-profit, independent and self-managing association on 30 June of this year. It will retain the name of IRIS, followed by a.s.b.l. (the French acronym for non-profit association). In signing an agreement with this new association in Brussels, the Commission has recognised the important role IRIS plays for the policy of equal opportunities in vocational training and the need to continue this policy.

IRIS a.s.b.l. will pursue the same objectives, i.e. promote equal opportunities in vocational training systems, develop the training of women and create links and partnerships throughout Europe.

environment

Quality of urban air and environment: a European colloquium

Under the terms and conditions of the Agreement, the association must submit an annual management report to the Commission which, moreover, has authorised the former to create its own database from that of IRIS. Finally, members will have to remit a modest annual contribution to cover operating expenses.

At the end of June, the IRIS network organised a major colloquium in Brussels attended by 250 training specialists, persons working in the field and decision-makers from all over Europe to examine together the situation of women in training and employment in a global context. ●

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The quality of air in cities is a precondition to the improvement of the daily life of citizens. To consider such problems, together with possible solutions and the instruments available to that effect, the "Quality of Urban Air and Environment" Unit of DG XI and the Brussels Environmental Management Institute have organised a colloquium on the quality of air in European cities to be held in Brussels on 23, 24 and 25 October. Some 250 persons, policy makers, scientists, and pollution measurement specialists are expected to attend and take stock of the situation.

In addition to the on-going discussion on the role of pollution in the outbreak of respiratory ailments, the timing of this colloquium is all the more propi-

tious as the Council will soon have to adopt a framework directive on ambient air quality.

Stepping up the exchanges of experience, the Commission suggests that measures to induce potential polluters to stricter controls be added to this instrument. ●

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Women and town planning

Starting with the observation that women are "absent or virtually invisible at all decision-making levels concerning the choices that create and run the urban and living environment," a working group of several organisations coordinated by the association *Eurocultures* has drawn up a draft of a "European Charter of Women in the City."

The two main objectives of this project are to define a "new philosophy of the City," and to take account of the "gender dimension in a pluralistic society." This entails more awareness for the actors concerned, but also the emergency of increased social responsibility and the development of another urban planning vision, capable of promoting greater social harmony.

For women to be "ensured full rights to the cities" and be able to bring their perception and vision to bear, the twelve points of Charter pertain to: active citizenship, equal democracy, equal opportunities, participation, daily life, sustainable development, security, the right to housing and decent living environment, the gender dimension, education, the role of the media and networks.

These are some of the indispensable elements for a better understanding of the many obstacles women encounter in their daily lives. Women could therefore capitalise on their experience and skills to promote a better quality of life, improve public transport, or simply create a safe urban environment. Such small revolutions require strategies at local, national and European levels. ●

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Green paper on the single currency

To allay uncertainties, sensitise key actors, and stimulate public support for the single currency, these are the main aims of the Green Paper on the modalities of switching to a single currency adopted on 31 May by the European Commission.

In this publication intended to serve as a basis for discussion, the Commission has set out, in precise fashion, its ideas for a successful transition to the final objective of Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). It is based on an irreversible conclusion: Europe will have a single currency by the end of the century. According to the Maastricht Treaty, which does not set out the modalities on how to get there, the EMU will be launched by the end of 1997 at the earliest, but no later than 1 January 1999, with the participation of those States which meet the necessary economic convergence conditions.

The single currency will then become a reality: a more efficient single market, greater international stability, enhanced monetary sovereignty, stimulation of growth and employment, the disappearance of exchange charges.

A three-stage scenario

The Green Paper outlines a specific, three-stage reference scenario:

* Stage A: The European Council decides to launch the single currency and designates the countries that will take part in the process.

* Stage B: The EMU goes into effect one year after this decision at the latest, with an irrevocable fixing of parities, a single monetary policy conducted in ECU by the new Central European Bank, the switch-over to the single currency for a certain number of operations on the financial and money markets, and the progressive issue of new public loans in ECU. This "critical mass" of operations in the single currency as of the fixation of parities will ensure the stability and irreversibility of the process.

* Stage c: Three years at most after Stage B, the transition phase is completed with the rapid introduc-

tion (in a few weeks at most) of new notes and new coins, as well as the general modification of the methods of payment.

This scenario has numerous advantages in the Commission's view. It takes due account of the needs of European citizens and of the need for a pragmatic approach, for convenience and cost limitation. It also rests on solid economic bases, as results have to be measured by the strict application of the convergence criteria. Finally, it meets the needs of banking circles by avoiding an extended circulation of two types of notes and coins.

The Green Paper also contains an exhaustive list of legal and technical problems raised by the introduction of a single currency. It examines not only the implications for the banks, financial markets, companies and governmental authorities, but also for those whose participation is vital, i.e. the consumers.

The Commission moreover wants to implement an important communication strategy to convince citizens of the advantages of the single currency and to explain, in concrete terms, how its introduction will affect their daily lives.

Reactions and comments to the Green Paper have been very positive on the whole. At Cannes, the European Council has given strong political impetus to the consultation process initiated by the Green Paper. Waged by the Commission, The Council and the European Monetary Institute, this process will be continued so that final decisions can be reached in Madrid before the end of the year. ●

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