

Women of Europe

council

Editorial

The Florence Summit may seem modest, but it managed to assert itself despite the disturbances which, for a short time, fuelled fears that it might be a "pointless" meeting. I, for example, will remember it as being a relatively important turning point for the IGC.

From a static phase, with Member State representatives presenting the positions of their governments, we have now moved towards the start-up of real negotiations backed by a tight working schedule and an obligation, so to speak, to produce results.

A decision was made to speed up the pace of work and the Irish Presidency has taken a firm and energetic grip on this both delicate and vital phase of Treaty review.

While EU leaders were trying to make good progress on the economic and democratic future of Europe in which the rights and interests of citizens are really taken into account, other leaders, in a much wider context, were questioning how we could and should, at world level, ensure decent living conditions for rapidly growing urban populations.

I am referring to the Habitat II World Conference held in Istanbul in June. The challenges there were even greater given that no single country, whatever its level of development, is currently able to control the rapid urbanisation taking place almost everywhere in an unmanageable and often chaotic way.

Women are often hardest hit by these living conditions which affect them and their children first and foremost, and they were able to make their voices heard in Istanbul. Governments committed themselves to guaranteeing women the same rights and above all to enable them to participate fully in the planning process.

As usual, the follow-up to this Conference will have to be monitored and pressure brought to bear on governments to keep their promises. As for Europe, it will also have to implement the Habitat II Action Plan as it has committed itself to do.



Véronique Houdart-Blazy

Head of Section - Information for Women

Employment to remain top priority

The June European Council held in Florence brought an end to the row over the ban on British beef which had blocked EU decision-making because of the UK's policy of non-cooperation. The agreement between the UK and its EU partners cleared the way for the Summit to return to normal business.

The row over the beef ban left some scars and heads of state had little time to consider what they said was the EU's top priority, the fight for employment. The issue of equal opportunities was also sidelined to a one-line declaration emphasising that it remained an important issue. To make up for lost time, an additional meeting of the European Council has been called for October.

The Commission's "Action for Employment in Europe: A Confidence Pact", presented by President Jacques Santer, was seen as an important contribution to the employment debate. The Summit called for structural policies to become more focused on job creation especially by better supporting Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) and local employment initiatives. They said this should not involve any extra EU funds. The Commission's new action plan for SMEs should be adopted by the end of the year, they promised. The Commission was also asked to come up with an action plan to foster innovation. The idea of setting up, next year, pilot projects on territorial and local employment pacts to promote local job creation and development was backed by the Summit. Member States were asked to select regions or cities interested in participating.

The recent agreement by the social partners to start negotiations on flexible work organisation and working time including part-time work, affecting thousands of women, was welcomed by the Council. It urged social partners to take "initiatives to enhance the integration of young people, the long-term unemployed and unemployed women into the labour market".

Spotlight on the Intergovernmental Conference

After nearly three months of talks, the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) is now ready to seek "balanced solutions" to the main political issues facing Europe today, said EU heads of state in their Summit conclusions.

The Italian Foreign Minister, Piero Fassino, who reported on the progress of the negotiations to the Council, said he was confident that the conference would be able to reach agreement as planned by mid-1997. The "first

solutions" have already been identified, he said.

A major issue was bringing the Union closer to its citizens. There was general agreement that it should be made clear that EU citizenship was additional to, and not a substitute for, national citizenship.

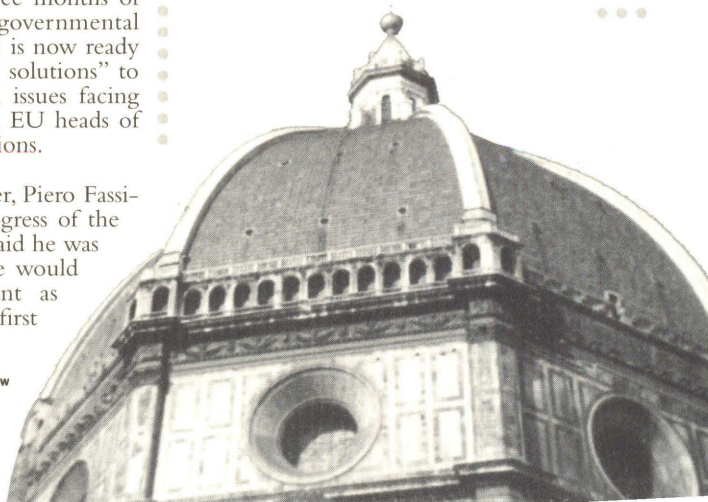
The proposed inclusion of a non-discrimination clause in the revised Treaty raised questions among the negotiators as to whether it should cover race and gender or include other factors such as religion, disability and sexual orientation. Another suggestion was that the present Treaty principle of equal treatment between women and men should be extended beyond social provisions and also include positive action measures.

Opinion was also divided as to whether fundamental human and social rights should be part of the revised Treaty. During the talks, some of the negotiators wanted the new Treaty to include rights such as the right to free expression, to freedom of association, to a healthy environment, to health protection, to equal opportunities, to work and to organize, to cultural diversity and to information from public authorities.

The functioning of the European institutions, especially with further enlargement in sight, remained a contentious issue. Negotiations revolved around finding a balance between the needs of each Member State to be well represented at EU level and the demands of efficiency to ensure decisions can be taken in an open and effective way.

Civil society warning to governments

At a parallel meeting in Florence, members of the Permanent Forum of the Civil



Society, representing 70 non-governmental organisations in the EU, criticised Member States for their "lack of collective vision and a coherent strategy" for the future of Europe.

The Forum said it "will be vigilant, and stand resolved to fight for our goal: the construction of a Europe that is based on democracy and solidarity, and that is open to all other peoples that share those values."

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Full agenda for the Irish Presidency

Boosting employment, tackling organised crime and drug abuse, preparing for the final stage of monetary union and making progress on the IGC were some of the major tasks identified by the Irish government when it took over the Presidency of the EU Council of Ministers on 1 July. Irish Foreign Minister and deputy Prime Minister Dick Spring admitted that the presidency would be "no easy task" because of the "daunting agenda" inherited at a crucial moment in EU history.

The question of employment was paramount, he said. President Santer's proposed Action for Employment in Europe: A Confidence Pact will be looked at closely. The Irish Presidency also wants to review progress made in all Member States to promote employment. This would be "a single, substantive, incisive analysis of the measures taken so far and the effect they are having," he said. The result will be presented to the European Council in December.

Mervyn Taylor, the Irish Minister for Equality and Law Reform, said the Presidency will be organising a major conference in October on the mainstreaming of equality. This will also be the occasion for the official launch of the Fourth Action Programme on Equal Opportunities. The Presidency will be pursuing two equality directives, he said. The first concerns the amendment of the equal treatment directive following the Kalanke ruling to clarify the type of positive action measures which are permissible. The second draft directive will cover the burden of proof in discrimination cases to make it easier for plaintiffs to argue their case in court. Ireland will also be tabling a resolution on the integration of equal opportunities in the Structural Funds at the 24 September Social Affairs Council.

commission

Women key to rural development

The reform of the EU's agricultural policy over the past 10 years has led to a greater emphasis being placed on rural development. More than ever before, farmers are called upon to be rural entrepreneurs. New economic activities are sought alongside agriculture to maintain rural communities and basic services to the rural population which accounts for nearly a quarter of the EU's population and almost 85% of its surface area. There are two inter-linked issues: the situation of women farmers and that of women living in rural areas.

"The increasing diversification of farm activities is leading to an even more important role for women," said Franz Fischler, the European Commissioner responsible for agriculture and rural development, during a recent conference on equal opportunities and the Structural Funds. He said the role of women was not restricted to agriculture. They played a central part in stimulating rural communities. "Women are at the forefront of the successful development of farm tourism," for example. They are also actively involved in new employment opportunities emerging in rural areas, such as teleworking.

Commissioner Franz Fischler said the EU's Structural Funds tend to benefit men more than women. Despite women representing over one-third of the active agricultural population and 10% of heads of farms, they are still seen as playing an essential but subordinate role, he said. Women in rural areas face limited employment opportunities, inadequate childcare, insufficient public transport which rarely meets their demands and a lack of training. "These disadvantages underpin the need to provide resources which can ensure equal opportunities for women living in rural areas."

Commissioner Fischler said the Commission, in response to this, has set aside 20 million ECU for 1997-1999 to fund pilot projects promoting women's participation in rural development. An additional 400,000 ECU is earmarked for information activities targeting rural women. The Commissioner is also organising a major European conference on rural development in Ireland on 7-9 November which will include a workshop on equal opportunities between women and men with a specific focus on employment. A study on the role played by women in farming and a comparative analysis of national social protection regulations for farming women were also in the pipeline, he said.

The European Parliament is also making its voice heard on rural development. Discussions are under way to see whether the

EU should become a signatory to the European Rural Charter under consideration in the Council of Europe.

The proposed Charter aims to give a framework for action in European rural areas to balance existing agriculture, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture industries, on the one hand, with a healthy environment and a capacity for attracting economic activities,

and retaining and developing the rural population.

Liam Hyland, on behalf of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, is drawing up the Parliament's report on EU rural policy and the proposed Rural Charter. He said

that EU rural policy must embrace agricultural, social, regional and environmental policies, involve local populations and pay special attention to female employment.

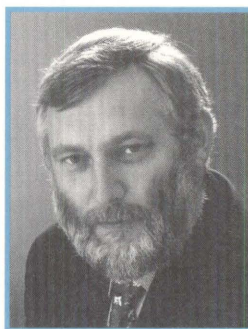
On behalf of the Committee on Women's Rights, Birgitta Ahlqvist was critical of the Rural Charter, saying it did not once mention the contributions and specific problems of women in the countryside. Yet, she explained, the problems of today's rural society often have a bigger impact on women than on men. Women carry the largest share of caring for the young and elderly as well as playing a vital economic and social role in their communities. (See this month's INFOS for publications on women in rural areas).

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Birgitta Ahlqvist
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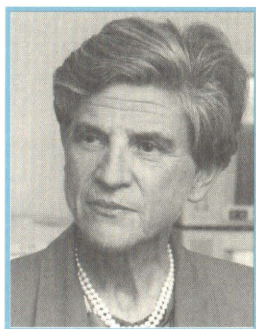
parliament

Committee on Women's Rights

Colette Flesch, Director General of DG X, gave an overview of information targeted more specifically at women within her DG. She underlined some recent positive developments including:

- the trend towards mainstreaming or including the women's dimension in all Community activities and information actions,
- the evaluation of the DG's traditional activities to match them better with the demands of women,
- developing significantly the work on publications, maintaining traditional activities and taking on an advisory role,
- priority information actions.

Speaking on the work of the Women's Information Section, Colette Flesch highlighted its publications saying they had been overhauled, both in form and content, in the last year. Since May 1996, they are distributed in the 11 official EU languages. Special issues are published on current affairs (Beijing Conference, 9 May, Europe Day). The provision of on-line information is now being examined to better reach the target public, especially since women are increasingly surfing the Internet.



Colette Flesch

The Section has established close working relationships with different bodies and networks including associative movements, local and regional elected women representatives, networks of women journalists. The Section also participates in numerous Commission working groups such as the interdepartmental group for equal opportunities and has an advisory role among certain DGs in the framework of specific sectoral policies.

Finally, Colette Flesch explained the activities being prepared specifically for women under the priority information actions:

- the "Citizens First!" information action,
- the "Euro" information action,
- "Building Europe together": under this action a conference will be held in Vienna under the theme of women and the future of Europe. A two-day symposium will take place in Turin, organized by the ILO and the European Trade Union Confederation, attended by the main women's unions on women's employment, workers' rights, equal opportunities.

Colette Flesch was invited to provide an overview of the activities of her DG regularly to the Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights.

A number of reports and opinions drawn up by Committee members were discussed. Looking at the implementation of equal opportunities for men and women in the European civil services, rapporteur Jessica Larive wanted to see a review of selection procedures and to extend the derogation on the age limit for entrance to written competitions. In her report on the Commission's communication on mainstreaming, Angela Kokkola recommended setting up a special service within the Commission's General Secretariat to monitor the implementation of equality in all Commission policies and programmes.

Rouva Riita Jouppila introduced her opinion on the Commission's communication on human rights by saying poverty, education, training, violence against women and the imbalance of women in decision-making were all issues that needed to be included. Many members wanted to see a social and human rights clause appear in all trade agreements.

Reporting on the 1997 budget, Lissy Gröner called for the reinstatement of the original 12 million ECU financial envelope for the 4th Action Programme cut by ministers to 6 million ECU. To "mainstream" the budget, she is proposing to insert a comment on equal opportunities under numerous budget lines especially those concerning the Structural Funds.

The Commission's equal opportunities activities were presented by Odile Quintin, Director of Commission's DG V/D. She outlined the current state of play on a number of draft directives and said the Commission was planning a communication on the individualisation of social rights for early next year. ●

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Women, equal opportunities and rural development

LEADER Magazine, the quarterly journal of LEADER II, the EU programme for rural development, has devoted its Spring 1996 (No 11) issue to women in rural areas. European Commissioner Franz Fischler, who has responsibility for agriculture and rural development, introduces the publication aiming to raise awareness of the important role played by women in rural development and to present them as full partners in this process. Illustrated with numerous case studies of successful initiatives, it also includes an interview with Helga Konrad, the Austrian Federal Minister for Women's Affairs and presents LEADER I's achievements for women. ●

Available in all official EU languages from

A.E.I.D.L

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Women, players in regional development

Brochure published by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Regional Policy and Cohesion (DG XVI) which provides a general overview of the situation and problems of women in the EU in general and the increasingly important role they play in European regional development. It looks at the different Community structural policies in place to strengthen economic and social cohesion at regional level and how women are benefitting from these. The preface is signed by Monika Wulf-Mathies, the European Commissioner responsible for regional policy. It showcases 13 women's initiatives which are examples of good practice supported by the EU. Available in English, French and German. ●

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The Task Force of DG X, "Building Europe Together" is organising a conference on the theme "Women and the future of Europe" in November in Vienna, Austria.

The participants in the conference will be chief editors of women's magazines and section editors of women's pages of daily newspapers. The conference will address the concerns of the European women seen in the light of the on-going Intergovernmental Conference. The results of the Mega Eurobarometer concerning women will be presented along with a Whirlpool Foundation study showing the views of European women towards work, family and society. ●

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The United Nations City Summit looks to a new future

The future of the world's cities and the management of urban resources was the focus of the United Nations' Habitat II Conference held in Istanbul, Turkey, from 3 to 14 June. This was the second UN Conference on Human Settlements (the first was held in Vancouver in 1976). It addressed the problems of housing and shelter in a rapidly urbanizing world. An estimated 16,400 people attended Habitat II including many government leaders who adopted the Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements. In this Declaration, they recognised the right to housing for all and committed themselves to improving standards of living and promoting the sustainable development of cities, towns and villages.



Today, 100 million people are homeless in the world and hundreds of millions live in life-threatening shelters. Some 40% of urban dwellers worldwide do not have access to safe drinking water or adequate sanitation. Everyday, some 50,000 people, mainly women and children, die as a result of bad living conditions. By the year 2025, two-thirds of the world's population will be living in cities.

These were some of the figures which formed the backdrop for debate at the Habitat II Conference and showed the scale of the problem worldwide. Migration from rural areas accounts for 40 per cent of the urban increase. Women migrate to cities as much as men for economic reasons. But for them, the road is much harder. Already representing 70% of the 1.3 billion people living in poverty, they are the fastest growing group of impoverished.

Overwhelmed by the rapid population growth, many of the world's cities have found themselves unable to ensure adequate shelter and basic services turning them into potential social timebombs. The UN Secretary General, Boutros Boutros Ghali, opening the Conference, said that these same urban areas are also where future generations will look to find most of their employment and economic growth. He said "we face a future for which the past is no guide." The world's "human settlements must therefore, become sustainable, productive, safe, healthy and humane."

This is what government leaders promised to strive for by signing the Declaration. Adequate housing was recognised as a universal right. Adequate means healthy, safe, secure, accessible and affordable. Governments saw their role as one of "enablers" rather than as providers of low cost housing by ensuring property markets worked in a more efficient and socially responsible manner and by facilitating the involvement in urban planning of all the stakeholders: NGOs, local populations, the private sector and local government.

They promised action to guarantee equality to women and men security of tenure, access to land, access to credit and protection from arbitrary evictions and to accompany the provision of adequate shelter with af-

fordable basic services including drinking water, energy and transport.

Local authorities, the private sector and community groups must work in partnership with governments to plan, manage and bring improvements in the urban environment. This is why for the first time at a UN



Women who migrate from rural areas often face special disadvantages which make it difficult to provide for their families in the city.

Photo above: Rural migrants in Mexico City.

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Conference, mayors of towns and cities, local authority officials, NGOs, community and women's organisations and representatives of the private sector were given a discussion platform alongside national governments and took part in negotiating the Habitat Agenda and defining the contents of the Global Plan of Action.

The EU was represented at the Conference by the Italian Presidency in the person of the Minister for Public Works, Antonio Di Pietro, who signed the Declaration confirming the EU's political will to implement the Habitat Action Plan. Welcoming the idea of wider partnerships between governments and local communities, he explained the responsibility for the Action Plan's implementation will lie with each Member State.

Women, homes and the community

Dominating the world's poor, women as a group were key to the debate at Habitat II. A special Commission made up primarily of NGO representatives, was set up by Dr Wally N'Dow, the Secretary General of Habitat II, to ensure gender concerns were carried

forward at the Conference. The final Habitat document calls for women's equal access to housing, to decision making, to improved health and the eradication of poverty.

Government leaders said that women's equality should be included in all aspects of urban development with women fully participating in the planning process. This should avoid past mistakes such as inadequate lighting of streets and public areas; the absence of daycare facilities and children's play parks; inappropriate location of public water points; costly and inconvenient public transport; and housing design that did not take account of women's specific needs when using space.

The right to property was another major issue for women. Legal systems in many countries, or local customs and traditions, bar women from owning or inheriting property. A commitment was made by governments pledging legal security of tenure for all women, their right to own and inherit land and buildings and their equal access to housing credits.

An Indian women's initiative, *The Self-Employed Women's Bank of India*, which provides loans at market rates to women, won a prize at the Conference. It was selected by an international jury as one of 12 best practice examples for improving the living environment.

Closing Habitat II, Dr N'Dow said that the Conference had shown conclusively "that the resources exist to put a roof over the head and bring safe water and sanitation, for less than \$100 dollars per person to every man, woman and child on this planet." The Conference had also shown that the viability of cities rests on their ability to provide a livelihood for their dwellers. This means greater social investment in health and in education to ensure women and men have the skills to fill the jobs of tomorrow.

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