

Work Programme 1997: concentrating on the real priorities

Editorial

The Commission's 1997 work programme, presented to the European Parliament in October by European Commission President, Jacques Santer, places the European citizen right at the centre of Community policies and reminds us that these policies are not ends in themselves - but rather tools to serve the public. This is the reason for focusing on the information campaigns related to the Intergovernmental Conference, the Euro and the Single Market.

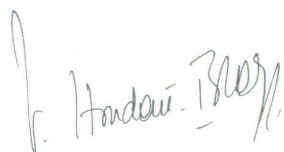
As citizens, we appreciate this emphasis on and reminder of the human dimension of Community activities. As women, we regret the lack of reference to a "gender dimension". Only one reference is made to equality of opportunity in a paragraph dealing with reform of employment systems.

Of course, it could always be argued that the policies contained in this programme apply to women as well as men. In our opinion, however, this "asexual" aspect of policy creates obstacles to the achievement of effective parity and the possibility for the greater majority of women to exercise and enjoy their full rights.

Women are, however, at the focus of many initiatives and concerns in this work programme. They are, for example, leading players in the *European model of society*, with its specific emphasis on education and training, economic and social cohesion, consumer protection, environmental protection as well as freedom and security within society. On this last point, a public opinion poll among European women highlighted the fact that the majority of women consider the fight against crime and drug-dealing to be a major priority.

It has been said that 1997 will be a turning point, with the events occurring during the year shaping the image of the Union in the 21st century. It will also be a pivotal year for women: will the IGC provide European women with a broader legal base for real equal rights? How will mainstreaming be implemented? What follow-up will be given by the Council of Ministers to documents such as the Communication on trafficking in women for the purpose of sexual exploitation?

Can we speak of responding to citizens' concerns without considering those affecting more than 50% of the population, i.e. women? ●



Véronique Houdart-Blazy

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Next year will be a turning point for the EU. It will be a year when major EU deadlines come to term, namely the conclusion of the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC), the preparations for the transition to the third stage for European Monetary Union (EMU), and initiating work on "Agenda 2000", to cover enlargement and provide a financial package for the Union for the 21st century. These issues are central to the European Commission's 1997 work programme, alongside a continued effort to generate growth and create jobs.

European Commission President Jacques Santer said that in 1997 the Commission will reform "what does not work" and concentrate "on the real priorities". Presenting next year's work programme to the European Parliament, he said citizens' loss of confidence in politicians and constitutional systems means that "our institutions need a full-scale overhaul to make them more democratic" and more transparent. The Commission will be guided by the need to show the Union benefits everybody and that it is efficient. "Building Europe means working for peace, prosperity and well-being. It means working for the people of Europe."

Reforms will be based on three concepts: decentralisation, rationalisation and simplification. Four main political priorities dominate the 1997 work programme:

- to support growth and employment, and promote the Euro,
- to take practical steps to promote the European model of society,
- to enhance Europe's profile on the world stage,
- to prepare for the future.

Growth, employment and the Euro

Putting into practice the measures in the Confidence Pact for Employment (see *Women of Europe Newsletter No 65*) is the Commission's number one priority. Part of this strategy is to ensure the Euro can be introduced on schedule on 1 January 1999. "We will soon see the beneficial effects (of EMU) on employment - for employment is the real target. EMU is nothing but a means to that end," President Santer told the Parliament.

The Commission will step up pressure on Member States to transpose directives into national law and apply them properly and

will ensure the completion of the single market is included in this strategy. A number of laws are still waiting to be adopted. Particular attention will be paid to simplifying existing legislation under the SLIM (*Simplification of Legislation Internal Market*) pilot project.



To improve the competitive environment in Europe, the Commission will present its fifth framework Research and Development programme to include research geared towards meeting "ordinary peoples' needs in areas such as health care, nutrition and the way we live." It will also be presenting concrete measures on the information society following its Green paper published this autumn (see *Women of Europe Newsletter No 65*).

The Commission wants to see a reform of employment systems. It will work closely with Member States to launch major employment projects. It promised "specific work" to enhance equal opportunities, social protection, the organisation of work and worker information and consultation. It also promised to "reshape" the EU's structural policies in 1997 and issue new guidelines for rural development.

The European model of society

For the Commission the single currency and the single market were not objectives in their own right. They were part of building a Europe of solidarity with a "human face faithful to its own model of society and closer to each individual's concerns".

Five areas have been selected for a specific focus: education and training, economic and social cohesion, consumer interest, environmental protection and individual freedom and security.

In 1997, the Commission wants to see an end to the remaining barriers to free movement for people. It said it would press for every possible step to be taken to stamp out the "scourges" of drugs, terrorism, organised crime as well as "the trafficking and sexual exploitation of the most vulnerable members of society."

The EU on the world stage

The EU is the world's biggest donor of development aid and is a major economic and commercial force on world markets. Yet its political clout globally does not always reflect this. The Commission wants to develop further its relations with non-member countries so as to strengthen commercial collaboration and better contribute to world peace and development. "The Union's identity as perceived by the rest of the world must be one of coherence, effectiveness and visibility".

Respect for human rights and democracy will remain an issue in its aid policy and the Commission said it will introduce stricter controls on the quality of cooperation measures.

Preparing the future

To prepare for the year 2000, enlargement and financing of the Union will dominate the agenda. The Commission will continue developing relations with non EU Member States, in particular countries applying for EU membership. It will present separate opinions on each accession application and a global strategy on enlargement of the EU when the IGC ends in 1997.

The Commission said 1997 will shape the Union of the 21st century. "But while it is necessary to design tomorrow's Europe, we must not forget today's world." A Europe which generates growth and creates jobs "will be better able to rise to the challenge of Agenda 2000." ●

The European Commission's 1997 work programme is available on the EU's Internet site:

<http://europa.eu.int/en/comm/co97pr/index.htm>

parliament

Committee on Women's Rights

A public hearing on "Mainstreaming and the Structural Funds" organised by the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights was marked by the absence of three European Commissioners - Monika Wulf-Mathies, Franz Fischler and Pdraig Flynn - who were invited to attend. Committee chairwoman Nel Van Dijk (Greens, NL) said she was deeply disappointed. She said she would ask Parliament President Klaus Hänsch to invite President Santer and the group of Commissioners for Equality to a special meeting with the Committee in March.

Three funds make up the Structural Funds. These are the European Social Fund (ESF), under the responsibility of Commissioner Flynn, the Regional Fund (ERDF), under the responsibility of Commissioner Wulf-Mathies, and the Agricultural Fund (EAGGF), under the responsibility of Commissioner Fischler.

Angela Kokkola (PSE, Gr), who is drawing up the Committee's report on mainstreaming, said at the hearing that the gender dimension should be part and parcel of all EU policies and programmes, particularly the Structural Funds. So far, the measures taken were "inadequate and irregular." Activities targetted at women were treated as additional to and not an integral part of EU funding activities.

Mainstreaming evaluation indicators and control mechanisms should be built into the Structural Funds, urged Candida Medeiros Soares, an expert from the Portuguese Employment Ministry. She also wanted the fund's rules simplified and made more flexible.

Her appeal for strict evaluation and monitoring was supported by Avila Kilmurrey, Director of the *Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust*, one of the invited speakers at the hearing. She said to ensure equality is mainstreamed, there is a need for a combination of political will, better information systems and tools for action. This means realistic budget lines, strict evaluation and monitoring procedures and equality proofing.

Political willingness to ensure the effectiveness of mainstreaming and a single comprehensive vision of the concept by the EU and Member States, were also urged by former Spanish MEP Teresa Domingo Segarra,



Angela Kokkola
Photo: European Parliament

now Professor of Economics at the University of Valencia.

All participants called for increased resources to fund measures targetted specifically at women and tighter management to ensure the principle of equal opportunities is respected in all projects, including those concerning infrastructures.

Equal treatment in occupational social security schemes

Legal experts from the Commission and Parliament continued the politically sensitive debate on Parliament's amendments

to the Commission's proposal to update the directive on equal treatment for men and women in occupational social security schemes (see *Women of Europe Newsletter No 65*). The disagreement concerns the use of different actuarial data for women and men, such as life expectancy, when calculating occupational social security benefits. To try and reach an agreement, an extraordinary committee meeting has been called during the November plenary session.

An opinion by Nel Van Dijk (Greens, NL) on measures to protect minors in the EU was adopted with small changes. ●

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Women key to successful demographic policies

The current world population of 5.7 billion people is continuing to increase by 94 million a year. This is despite the adoption, two years ago, of the global plan to curb population growth at the 1994 Cairo Conference on Population and Development. 90% of this population explosion is in the poorest countries. At the same time EU countries are facing an ageing population partly caused by the low birth rate.

The Cairo Conference was a turning point, said MEP Antoinette Fouque (ARE, France), author of a European Parliament report on the EU's follow-up to the action plan adopted there. The link between women's education levels and lower fertility rates, between their increased participation in working life, economic independence and smaller families, was established. Improving women's status became one of the key issues of the action plan, she said. But nearly two years after its adoption, "the results are still very disappointing".

Every year "500,000 women still die as a result of early or repeated pregnancies, complications following childbirth and clandestine abortions", Antoinette Fouque explained. 94% of them are in developing countries. "Nearly 150 million women are left with a long-term illness or disability as the result of pregnancy and 300 million women who do not want more children have no access to contraception. Sterilisation is the most widespread method of family planning," she said.

The equation "population growth = poverty and pollution" was challenged by Antoinette Fouque as being ill-founded. "A French person consumes 155 times more energy per year than an inhabitant of Mali and an American twice as much as a French person. A European baby consumes 10 times more natural resources than an African baby," she said.

MEP Francisca Bennasar Tous (PPE, Spain), author of an opinion for the Committee on Women's Rights on the European Commission's 1995 annual report on the demographic situation in the Union, said that improving the status of women "was the main engine of any demographic and human development policy."

She said "women constitute more than half of the world population, are the main producers of wealth, carry out two thirds of all the work performed but received only one tenth of the world income and own 1%

of property." In Europe, 80% of the poor are women, she said.

She saw no contradiction between the phenomenon of a rapidly growing population in developing countries and a shrinking population in the EU. In an interview with the *Women of Europe Newsletter*, she said that this reflected "the different stages in our development".

In both cases, women have a pivotal role to play. In the EU, the population is ageing rapidly partly because fewer babies are being born. This is directly linked to the situation of women, she said. In Spain, for example, where the birth rate is Europe's lowest, wo-



men's unemployment is highest. Many Spanish women in insecure jobs feel they cannot commit themselves to having a family, she explained. The EU will continue to face an ageing population until better conditions are created to enable women to reconcile employment with motherhood and private life. In developing countries, pointed out Francisca Bennasar Tous, measures are needed to help women better plan their families so that they can develop an economic activity outside the home and overcome poverty.

In Cairo, it was agreed that a total of 17 billion US dollars would be needed by the year 2000, to implement the action plan. No population targets were set but efforts were promised by signatory states to reduce the number of deaths among children and women, to provide universal access to reproductive health and family planning, and to primary education for all. It was also agreed that individuals should be guaranteed the right to decide freely how many children they wanted to have and when.

Several donor countries promised in Cairo "to increase their contributions substantially," said Antoinette Fouque. But this has not happened. The only EU countries to have acted on their promises are the Netherlands, which raised the proportion of its external aid budget for population from 1.5% to 4%, and Germany, which from 1996, allocated 4% of its global development aid to population measures.

The EU has set aside 300 million ECU as its contribution to the follow-up to the Cairo Conference up to the year 2000 with 50 million ECU released in 1995. But surprisingly, there has been little uptake by partner developing countries because of the "complexity and slowness" of procedures.

The European Parliament, adopting a resolution based on her report, asked the EU and the Member States "to fulfil the financial promises made at Cairo." It said it wanted at least 10% of EU budgets destined for cooperation and population programmes with Mediterranean, Asian, African and Latin American countries to go to "specific measures" favouring the employment and education of women. This should support women in their efforts to become economically independent.

Parliament reaffirmed that freedom of choice regarding reproduction was a "fundamental human right." It condemned any discriminatory, coercive or violent policy of family planning such as enforced sterilisation. It called for improvements in what it considered to be a "wholly inadequate" access by women to information, to health services, reproductive health and the various family planning options.

Projects funded under the European Development Fund, cooperation or humanitarian aid programmes should be assessed for their impact on population and include the provision of primary health care and family planning, Parliament said.

To guarantee the success of any population and human development policy, discrimination against women, north and south, had to end, said the Parliament. It requested that women are "systematically" included as "beneficiaries and participants in the design, planning, implementation and evaluation of all development projects and programmes." Could not a similar demand be made concerning all projects and programmes targeted at EU Member States? ●

New funds for women in agriculture and rural areas

European Commissioner Franz Fischler, responsible for agriculture and rural development, has launched a new initiative to encourage and support innovative actions (pilot and demonstration projects) which have direct impact on the income, employment, status and living conditions of women farmers and women living in rural areas.

Examples of actions eligible for funding include the promotion of quality regional and local agricultural production and the development of complementary activities such as tourism and crafts.

Training and new activities linked to the protection of the environment or new services as well as the development of networks for the exchange of experience, are also encouraged. ●

The call for projects was published in the Official Journal of the European Communities No C 284 (pp 21/22) on 27 September 1996. The deadline is 20 February 1997.

For further information:

European Commission

DG VI.F.1 - Rural development

Rue de la Loi 130, B-1049 Brussels

Tel.: (32.2) 295 88 34 - Fax (32.2) 295 10 34

Call for action to combat illegality on the Internet and protect minors

The Internet now reaches an estimated 60 million users in 160 countries worldwide. It is revolutionising a number of economic sectors and has become a powerful influence in the social, educational and cultural fields. Although most Internet content is for legitimate business or private use, the European Commission said it also carries "an amount of potentially harmful or illegal content or it can be misused as a vehicle for criminal activities."

The Commission has just published two complementary documents on the subject. These are a **Communication** spearheaded by Commissioner Martin Bangemann, responsible for Industry, reviewing the spread of illegal content on the Internet and a **Green Paper**, published on the initiative of Commissioner Marcelino Oreja responsible for Audiovisual Policy and Information, on the protection of minors and human dignity in the rapidly developing world of new audiovisual and information services. Both documents seek to find ways to strike a balance between freedom of speech and public interest, between policies designed to promote the new services and the need to ensure that the opportunities created by these

services are not abused. They call for greater cooperation between Member States and on an international level, the use of filtering software and parental control and rating systems, the encouragement of self-regulation by content and access providers and educational and awareness raising actions. ●

Both papers are available on the EU's Internet site:

<http://europa.eu.int>

Comments on the Green Paper are invited before

28 February 1997 to:

European Commission

Directorate General X

Gregory Paulger, Unit X.D.3.

Rue de la Loi 102, Room 5/23,

B-1049 Brussels

E-mail: gregory-paulger@dg10.cec.be

First Annual Report by the European Ombudsman

Nearly 300 complaints were received by European Ombudsman Jacob Söderman (see *Women of Europe Newsletter No 55*) between July and 31 December 1995. According to his first annual report, he had completed the examination of 45% of these complaints by the end of 1995. Of these, 80% were considered inadmissible because they did not concern matters within the Ombudsman's mandate. 20% of the complaints originated from the United Kingdom, 16% from Germany, 13.5% from Spain and 10% from France.

The 30 complaints which were admissible included 24 against the European Commission, two against the Council of Ministers and one against "another Community body." They involved allegations of a lack of transparency, refusing access to information, work and contractual relations between the institutions and outside agents and recruitment. ●

A brochure explaining "How to complain to the European Ombudsman" is available from:

The European Ombudsman

1 Avenue du Président Robert Schuman

Boîte postale 403,

F-67001 Strasbourg Cedex

Tel.: (33.3) 88 17 40 01 - Fax: (33.3) 88 17 90 62

Women's rights = human rights

This report gives a summary of a public hearing organised by the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights in June 1995. Women from within and outside the European Union described the extent of gender-specific human rights violations. They talked from personal experience and from the experiences of NGOs and other organisations working in this area. ●

Available in French, English, German, Dutch and Spanish from:

the European Parliament

Rue Belliard 97-113,

B-1047 Brussels

Tel.: (32.2) 284 36 84. Fax: (32.2) 284 49 55

Women in Islam

This study, carried out for the European Parliament by freelance journalist Geneviève Delaunoy, looks at the situation of Muslim women in Mediterranean countries of the Near and Middle East and Maghreb countries. It examines the situation of women in pre-Islamic society and explains their status and rights under contemporary Islamic law. The author provides an overview of Islamic women's fight in the different countries covered by the report to achieve full citizenship in terms of health, education and their integration into public life as well as the debate within Islam and between Islam and the modern state on issues of women, law and constitutional democracy. ●

Available in French, English, German, Dutch and Spanish from the European Parliament.

(see address above)

The challenges of demography for the 21st century

"Les défis de la démographie: quelle qualité de vie pour le XXI^e siècle?" Written by Louise Lassonde, social anthropologist and demographer, this publication takes as its starting point the action programme and recommendations adopted at the United Nations Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994. It identifies the main political, economic and ethical challenges facing the international community to organise and provide for the 10 billion people estimated to be living on the planet by the year 2050. ●

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