

Women of Europe

elections 1999

An opportunity to tilt the gender balance

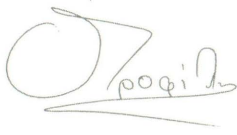
Editorial

This last year of the millennium is full of promise. With the launch of a single currency, the European Union has taken a huge new step towards integration. During these three years of transition, we will keep you informed on developments on the euro right up to its introduction in the form of banknotes and coins. A call for proposals on information campaigns on the euro, with particular reference to women, is announced in this issue.

Another important event will mark this European year - the European Parliament elections in June. We have chosen these elections as the main theme for this first issue of 1999 because they are of specific interest to women. The European parliamentarians we spoke to are unanimous in saying that women have a decisive role to play in these elections, both through their vote and their presence as elected representatives.

The third topic on which we will be focusing our attention this year is a particularly delicate subject, violence against women. The resolution adopted by the European Parliament will enable us to carry out a series of awareness raising initiatives. This is essential to tackle the root of this problem, which takes on an additional dimension with the growth in the phenomenon of trafficking in women.

So we have a very full agenda and we will do our best to keep you informed on progress on these issues. I would like to take this opportunity to wish all our readers a Happy New Year! ●



Olga Profili

Head of Section - Information for Women

The fifth direct elections to the European Parliament, the only EU institution whose members are directly elected by Europe's citizens, will be held from 10 to 13 June. Campaigns targeted at women, who represent 52% of the EU population, have started in many Member States to ensure women use their vote on election day and preferably give their support to women candidates.

Every EU constitutional reform has resulted in a strengthening of the European Parliament's position and influence. This is also the case with the Amsterdam Treaty, which is expected to be ratified by all Member States later this year. Under it, the Parliament will be able to veto proposed EU legislation if its recommendations are not taken on board in 38 instead of the current 15 legislative fields. These include certain job creation initiatives, equal opportunities and equal treatment, public health, some aspects of free movement, training, social policy and environmental protection.

At present, a total of 626 MEPs sit in the Parliament, of whom 169 or 28.8% are women. Although low, this figure compares well with national Parliaments. Only Sweden with 42.7%, Denmark (37.1%), Finland (34%), the Netherlands (30.9%) and Germany (30.1%) have more women parliamentarians. Greece (5.71%) and France (8.9%) have the lowest.

Within the European Parliament, MEPs are organised into eight political groups plus a group of non-attached parliamentarians reflecting the broad range of political parties and ideologies they represent at national level (see table below).

Campaigning for more women

Promoting a more balanced participation of women and men in political, economic, social and cultural life has been high on the EU agenda since the beginning of the 1990s. The low presence of women in positions of influence has been described as a "democratic gap". To have a substantial impact on decision-making, a "critical mass" of at least a 30% representation has been identified as necessary by researchers. A 50/50 representation would achieve equality.

Shifting the balance has been among the main objectives of the European Commission's 3rd equal opportunities action programme and remains a key action in its 4th programme. It has also been the subject of a number of declarations and charters, at EU (the Athens Declaration, the Rome Charter) and international levels (the UN Conference on Women in Beijing) urging governments to take action. In 1996, it was the subject of an EU Council of Ministers Recommendation, which asked Member States to make this a "priority objective". ●

Interviews p. 2-3

- Pauline Green
- Ursula Schleicher
- Laura González Alvarez
- Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck
- Heidi Hautala

Women MEPs by Member State and political group

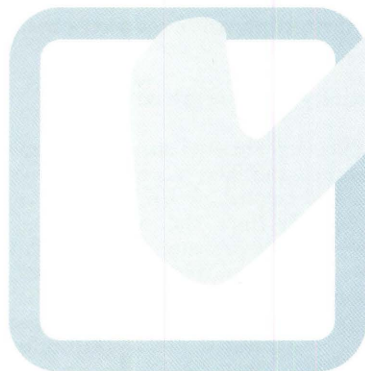
Countries	B	DK	D	GR	E	F	IRL	I	L	NL	A	P	FIN	S	UK	Women
PES	1	1	16	3	8	8	1	3	2	3	3	2	1	5	14	68
PPE	1	-	12	1	7	3	1	4	2	3	3	1	2	2	2	44
ELDR	4	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	3	-	-	13
UFE	-	-	-	1	-	5	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	9
EUL/NGL	-	-	-	-	3	4	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	10
GREENS	1	-	5	-	-	-	2	1	-	-	-	-	1	2	-	12
ERA	1	-	-	-	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	6
I-EN	-	2	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
IND	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	2	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	4
Total women	8	6	33	5	18	26	4	12	2	9	7	4	8	10	17	169
Total MEPS	25	16	99	25	64	87	15	87	6	31	21	25	16	22	87	

Source: European Parliament - December 1998

elections 1999

Women's full participation in public life vital for democracy

Women of Europe Newsletter asked five leading women MEPs to reply to two questions: why they felt it was important for women to vote in the next European elections and why they felt it was important to have more women MEPs in the next European Parliament. Right across the political spectrum they agreed that women make a vital contribution both as voters and as democratically elected representatives.



Pauline Green

Pauline Green (PES, the UK) has been a Member of the European Parliament since 1989 and is leader of the Parliament's 214-member Group of the Party of European Socialists

"To date we have failed to persuade the majority of women in Europe that Europe is for them, about them and of value to them. The European elections in June this year give us another chance to make that case.

Europe is important to women because it shapes their lives, their interests and their concerns very directly. It is Europe which has pursued the need to encourage women into work, offered training and education opportunities, promoted schemes to allow women to set up their own businesses. The EU has given women's issues a profile in each of the Member States, sometimes in the teeth of passive, if not active opposition from national governments.



© European Parliament

Europe also sets the standards which dominate the food we give our families, the way in which it is produced, packaged, preserved and handled. It ensures that goods are safe wherever they are made in the EU; that holiday hotels don't overbook and operate to high standards of comfort and safety.

The European Union gives our children whether at university or in vocational training new opportunities to study and work abroad. It enables us to defend our local environment against inappropriate development and planning, and so much more.

Having more women in the European Parliament than in most national Parliaments is an additional guarantee that women's issues will be supported.

Yes, I'd go out and vote in June!" ●

Laura González Alvarez

Laura González Alvarez (GUE/NGL Spain) has been a Member of the European Parliament since 1993 and is Vice-President of the Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left.

"In terms of numbers, we women are in the majority and the women's vote, if it is a vote for equality, is of vital importance in producing changes both in society and for the quality of our lives. Women's attention should be drawn to this fact so that they do not waste their vote and they support those parties that are struggling to do away with direct and indirect discrimination.



© European Parliament

their organisations that the promised programmes are carried out. Equal democracy is only possible with the female vote. For women, to vote is to decide on the representation that they are to have in decision-making bodies where equality must be actively fought for or else gender discrimination will be perpetuated.

The European Parliament and national parliaments must move towards the standard of having one female political representative for every male representative. In the European Parliament the representation of women is considerably higher than in national parliaments although despite this it is not even 30%. It is important that all citizens, women and men,

feel that they are represented by the politicians they elect and this includes the gender question.

In the early 1980s, the Committee on Women's Rights was formed in the European Parliament. It succeeded in bringing equality into the debate in European politics.

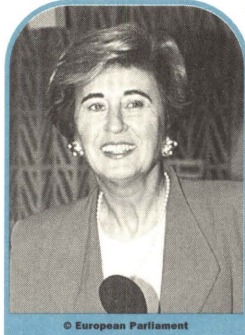
Paradoxically, the Committee risks disappearing with the restructuring of the committees in the Parliament. This committee, which was formed as a temporary measure, remains as necessary as it was on the first day - perhaps even more so - to make effective the directives and measures proposed, to promote the creation of new initiatives and, essentially, to help translate political good will into daily life." ●

Ursula Schleicher

Ursula Schleicher (PPE, Germany) is Vice-President of the European Parliament and member of the Bureau of the Group of the European People's Party. She has been a Member of the Parliament since the first direct elections in 1979.

"More women live in the European Union than men. Women also make up the majority of eligible voters and can, therefore, have a decisive influence on the elections. Women know that Europe serves the cause of peace and the prevention of war. So why should you, as a woman, precisely at the time of the European Parliament elections, give up your influence? I would encourage all women to vote in these elections and become aware of their responsibilities.

Compared to national parliaments, the European Parliament comes out well with



© European Parliament

approximately 28% women. They have introduced a new style of working in the Parliament. Not only do they press for equal opportunities for women and men in European legislation but they also persistently follow through the implementation into national legislation of EU directives relevant to women. The work of the Committee on Women's Rights, which promotes initiatives to further women's rights in all EU Member States, should guarantee that women's policies continue to be high on the Parliament's political agenda.

The greater the proportion of women voted into the European Parliament, the greater the chances will be to achieve a better balance in European politics. Ultimately, this will benefit both men and women."

Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck

Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck (ELDR, Belgium), Vice President of the Group of the European Liberal, Democrat and Reform Party, has been a Member of the European Parliament since 1994.

"Until recently and despite universal (read women's) suffrage women have had no political influence to speak of either on the composition of lists of candidates or on the programmes or policies provided and, least of all, on the way male politicians tend to behave.

It remains unclear why men resisted universal suffrage for so long. Since getting the vote, women have not voted in great numbers for religiously inspired parties, as the liberal and socialist parties feared, but kept voting for a long time as if they believed that male candidates knew best what was good for women.



© European Parliament

Women's political emancipation really began when women started to stand up for themselves in the political arena, to adopt views and state their demands. In short, since they ventured into politics themselves, no longer content to ELECT but wanting to BE ELECTED.

Remarkably, but understandably, the percentage of women elected into parliaments is higher in institutions such as the European Parliament, which have been set up more recently. This is because, the first time round, these institutions did not enjoy the same prestige as the older representative bodies, so men were less interested and women took this opportunity.

Historically, women's vote did not bring forth changes in politics. However, getting women elected has done so. Make the difference: vote to get more women elected!"

Heidi Hautala

Heidi Hautala (Greens, Finland), Vice-President of the Parliament's Green Group and Chair of the Committee on Women's Rights, has been a Member of the European Parliament since 1995.

"I am convinced that with an increasing participation of women in public life, many decisions will be different. For instance, discussions on the euro are bound to include strong concerns over maintaining public services. For women, public services do not only mean access to roads and other physical infrastructure, but also care for our children and the elderly and good schools with a free, nutritious lunch.



© European Parliament

time has come to take "positive action" in EU decision-making too. Quotas are needed for bodies, such as the Commission and the Court of Justice, which take important political decisions over women's lives. The Court, in particular, does not have a single woman member.

What about elected bodies such as the European Parliament in which 28% of all members are women? It offers a good opportunity to reach the critical mass of 40% in the forthcoming elections, matching the level of Scandinavian parliaments. To achieve this, political parties must not side-step their responsibilities. Women simply deserve prominent positions in party lists and sufficient visibility.

The fact is that women often still need to stay at home with children while men are free to participate in meetings. As soon as family responsibilities are shared between both spouses and as soon as childcare is readily available, women will be able to show their interest in public life. The European Parliament has frequently demanded concrete action for good quality childcare for all throughout the EU."

In a growing number of countries, steps are being taken to enable women to fully participate in public life. In France, a constitutional reform has been adopted to guarantee equal representation. In my native country, Finland, quotas in all public committees and bodies, apart from those where members are elected, have been successful. In the space of a few years, a more equal representation of the sexes has been achieved by setting a 40% quota! Who said there are no competent women around? In my view, the

Commission urges renewed action to combat trafficking in women

Despite "encouraging political developments" since the European Commission issued its first Communication on trafficking in women in November 1996, the number of women trafficked into the EU continues to grow, said European Commissioner Anita Gradin, responsible for Justice and Home Affairs. "This is why it is important to keep up the momentum and suggest further actions," she said presenting the Commission's second Communication in December. In it, Member States are urged to "implement their legal obligations and reinforce international cooperation between countries of origin, transit and destination" to combat trafficking in women. As the main flow of trafficked women comes from or through Central and Eastern Europe countries applying for EU membership, they too were asked to take national measures and cooperate with the EU urgently. Amongst the specific actions announced for the near future are a legislative proposal to provide temporary residence permits for victims of trafficking who are ready to act as witnesses and a Communication on support for victims. ●

Statistics and benchmarking recommended for follow-up to Beijing

Improvements in the way Member States monitored and assessed their progress in implementing the Platform for Action (PfA,) adopted at the United Nations Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, was urged by the Austrian Presidency in December. It recommended a new, more "consistent" approach using "objective and reliable" gender disaggregated data accompanied by indicators and benchmarking. Member States welcomed this effort to develop a more uniform EU follow-up. The Spanish government, which led the EU delegation to Beijing in 1995, had organised a conference in Madrid in November looking at progress achieved so far in four areas of the Platform: violence against women, education and training, employment and the economy and women in power and decision-making. A declaration adopted by the conference called on all EU Member States to join forces "so that zero tolerance of violence against women is achieved at individual, collective and institutional levels". ●

Call for proposals: information on the euro for specific groups, including women

Information activities on the euro targeting specific groups including women, young people, vulnerable groups (the elderly, illiterate, disabled, people living in poverty), consumers, local authorities and small and medium-sized enterprises will be co-funded by the European Commission under the Prince programme (information for European citizens). There are two deadlines for project submissions: 28 February for projects to start in the first half of 1999 and 15 June for projects running from September. Activities must have a European dimension, be complementary to national actions, have a maximum multiplying effect and a direct practical impact in at least three Member States. The aim is to increase the awareness of the target groups of the need to make active preparations for the changeover to the euro. The call was published in the Official Journal of the European Communities, C-5 of 8 January 1999, which can be downloaded from the Commission's Internet site: <http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/> ●

For information, contact:

European Commission
DG X, Unit D.4 'Priority Actions'
Office VM2-8/33
Rue de la Loi 200
B-1049 Brussels
Fax: (32.2) 296 33 50
E-mail: EURO@dg10.cec.be

Call for proposals: information for women and young people

A second call for proposals for projects working on transnational information and communication initiatives targeting women and young people is due to be published soon. Innovative activities seeking to inform and spark debates among both target groups on the objectives of the European Union and on policies concerning them specifically, will be co-financed up to 50%. ●

To request a copy of the call for proposals, contact:

European Commission
DG X - Information, Communication, Culture,
Audiovisual
Rue de la Loi 200
B-1049 Brussels
Fax: (32.2) 299 38 91 (women's projects)
(32.2) 299 92 02 (youth projects)

Women and sustainable development... shaping the quality of our lives

In the latest *Women of Europe Dossier* (number 46), a team of environmental experts and writers looks at the key role women have played and continue to play in achieving sustainability in different aspects of our daily lives. ●

The Dossier is available in all official EU languages.

To obtain a copy, contact:

European Commission
DG X - Information for Women Section
Rue de Trèves 120
B-1040 Brussels
Fax: (32.2) 299 38 91

STOP PRESS

Video tackles gender issue in run up to EP elections

In preparation for the forthcoming European Parliament elections, a new 29-minute video is available in French with Spanish, Greek, Italian and Portuguese subtitles, to promote awareness of the benefits of a better gender balance in the European Parliament and in all areas of decision-making. Produced by AFEM (Association of southern European women) with support from the European Commission and the French government, the film, "Femmes et hommes, décidons ensemble. Le Parlement européen: une antichambre de la parité", provides an opportunity for a number of women and men parliamentarians to express their views on the parity question. It targets more specifically the electorate in southern European Member States, where women's political representation is lower. ●

For information, contact:

Pascale Thumerelle at AFEM
48, Rue de Vaugirard
F-75006 Paris
Tel.: (33.1) 47 36 58 77
Fax: (33.1) 46 24 37 30