

# Newsletter

# Women of Europe

## Editorial

The 'deneutralisation' of the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights has been on the agenda for a while. So what is it all about? At present, this is what is known as a 'neutral' committee, that is to say its members may also sit on other committees whose work is of interest to them and where they can advance the cause of equal opportunities. However, a proposal to deneutralise it is going to be discussed by the new Parliament at its first plenary part-session in July as part of the general reorganisation of Parliament committees.

What are the implications? According to members of the Women's Committee, if their committee is deneutralised many of the 29 % of women MEPs will no longer be able to sit on it as they will have to opt for other, more specialised committees. Although the vast majority of the members of the Women's Committee are in favour of keeping it and are vigorously defending its neutrality, it has been mooted, in the name of 'mainstreaming', that it should simply be abolished on the grounds that, as with the environment, problems of equal opportunities should be integrated into the other EU policies. Watch this space ...

**Olga Profili**  
Head of Section, Information for women

## Women and men in positions of power: the aim is still to achieve a balance



**All the Member States accept the principle of equal rights for men and women. This does not mean, however, that equal rights really exist.**

**While the number of women at decision-making level varies from State to State, they are still often under-represented, especially in the economic field. The Paris Conference (15 to 17 April 1999), organised at the request of Martine Aubry, the French Minister for Employment and Solidarity, with the support of the European Commission, reviewed the situation in Europe.**

Over three days, representatives of national public authorities, NGOs and researchers submitted their reports and described their experiences of radically different situations: 30.9 % of the members of the German Federal Parliament, for example, are women. This figure is the result of sustained pressure by women's organisations; however, according to a survey carried out in Hesse, where the principle of 'positive discrimination' was adopted in 1994, public bodies hardly put this policy into practice at all. In Austria, a determined policy introduced a 40 % quota for the recruitment of women to the civil service. In Ireland, where there are no laws and no quotas, just hard work by women's organisations, says Mary Henry, a member of the Irish Senate, 36 % of MPs are women. France (10.9 % women in the National Assembly and 6 % in the Senate) and Greece (6 % women MPs) bring up the rear in the area of parliamentary representation.

### Europe as a driving force

It is never very nice to be bottom of the class in Europe; this is where European statistics can play a very useful role when combined with more practical measures supported by

the EU. Pádraig Flynn, Member of the Commission with responsibility for employment and social affairs, has also announced the evaluation next year of the measures adopted by the Member States to increase participation by women in decision-making processes. This study was called for in 1996 in a recommendation by the Council of Ministers. Its purpose will be to assess progress and compare the situation in the various Member States. Mr Flynn also pointed out that in 1984 only 17.3 % of MEPs were women; the arrival of Austria, Finland and Sweden brought this figure up to 26.4 %. The Commission's various information tools should help increase this ratio still further at the next election.

The Paris Conference is the third devoted to the theme of women in power in the Union. In Athens in 1992 for the first time women in top political posts signed a declaration making parity between men and women a fundamental democratic objective. The 1994 Rome Conference ended with the adoption of a charter which paved the way for the Council recommendation of 2 December 1996 on the balanced participation of women and men in decision-making and the introduction of the fourth action programme for equal opportunities in the European Commission.

In his closing speech to the conference, Lionel Jospin, the French Prime Minister, welcomed the fact that the Amsterdam Treaty makes equality between men and women one of the EU's guiding policies. He stressed the democratic deficit arising from the under-representation of women and said political action alone could bring about an equitable distribution of power. In particular, he referred to the 'Il tempo delle città' initiative organised by Italian women who, in an attempt to juggle private life, work and the city, joined forces to improve the coordination of the working hours of the administration, schools, crèches, shops,

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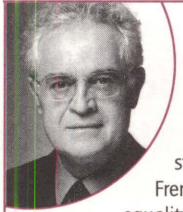


## PARIS DECLARATION

**The conference resulted in the Paris Declaration in which the Ministers and Representatives of the Member States attending undertook among other things to:**

- **adopt and support appropriate measures to pave the way for true equality;**
- **collect and make use of statistics, based on common indicators, on the participation of women in political and professional life, the voluntary sector and the trade unions. They recommended a number of binding or incentive measures aimed at governments, the European institutions and political parties, and covering the electoral process and the appointment of members of bodies involved in decision-making in the public sphere, designed to encourage balanced participation by women and men in the decision-making process.**

*The full text of this declaration can be obtained from: Ms Joëlle Timsit, at the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Fax (33-1) 43 17 51 63).*



public transport and working life. He also mentioned two measures recently adopted in France: on 10 March the French Parliament unanimously adopted a draft constitutional law incorporating in the French Constitution the principle of equality of access to public office and posi-

tions. Finally, next year the French Government is going to introduce a national action plan on equal opportunities in all areas of political, economic, professional and social life. Mr Jospin concluded by quoting Jean Monnet, who said that the resistance of men and objects was commensurate with the extent of the change one was attempting to introduce; indeed, it was the clearest sign that change was on the way.

## United Nations Committee on the Status of Women: 43rd Annual Session

The 43rd Annual Session of the United Nations Committee on the Status of Women was held in New York from 1 to 19 March 1999. The first two weeks saw the completion of the analysis of the strategic objectives of the 'Beijing Platform for action', launched in 1996. It reached conclusions on women and health and institutional mechanisms for promoting equal opportunities. After four years' work, the additional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was adopted on 12 March. This protocol includes two procedures, the first enabling women or groups of women to lodge complaints about infringements of their rights with the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the second authorising the committee to investigate cases of serious or systematic in-

fringements of women's rights. In its final week, the committee met as a preparatory committee for the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on 'Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the 21st century' (Beijing + 5). The European Union has insisted on the need to maintain the achievements of Beijing and not to reopen discussion on the platform. The progress made in implementing the recommendations of the platform at national, regional and international level must be evaluated, paying particular attention to the instruments used. The EU has given its full support to participation by the NGOs in the process of preparing for Beijing + 5. At European level, the European Women's Lobby has played a vital role in coordinating the contribution of European NGOs to this process.

## Violence against women: European determination

The problem is far from solved but the EU is showing its determination by building up European know-how and helping to set up effective tools for preventing and combating violence against women and children. By way of a reminder, the European Parliament has three times voted for Daphne initiatives, thereby enabling the Union to test the feasibility of a large number of innovative measures and set up networks of NGOs working in this field. The most recent call for proposals forms part of the European campaign for 'Zero tolerance of violence against women', launched on 8 March by Ms Gradin, Member of the Commission with responsibility for justice and home affairs. The EUR 2 million campaign will give priority to transnational projects aimed at changing male attitudes towards violence.

The Union has now moved up a gear, with preparations for a Council decision on a multiannual Daphne programme for 2000-04. The Member States are discussing the legal base on which the programme should be founded; most seem to favour Article 152 of the Treaty (previously Article 129), covering human health in the broadest sense, including respect for physical and moral integrity and dignity. At its April part-session Parliament approved this point of view – with 36 amendments. The matter will therefore go back to the Council at the end of May and be tabled for a second reading in the new Parliament in autumn 1999.



## Committee for Women's Rights

MARCH PART-SESSION

### Women in the decision-making process

**Heidi Hautala** (Greens, Finland), Chair of the Women's Rights Committee, spoke forcibly on the place of women within the European institutions, mentioning the possibility of quotas, which for some represent an interim solution only of use in achieving the fixed objectives (30 % of key posts in the European Parliament, for example, to be occupied by women).

Danièle Portaud, a member of the French Senate, regards quotas as temporary quantitative measures which do not rule out other means, such as limiting dual mandates.

Although the quota system is voluntary, not imposed, it has produced excellent results in the Nordic countries: Johnny Ahlqvist described the situation in Sweden, where some parties have almost 50 % women.

Elsewhere, however, the situation is very different. In Portugal, for example, the quotas were rejected by Parliament and the parties opted for 'spontaneous regulation'. An Italian law also provided for male and female candidates to alternate, but it was repealed by the Constitutional Court, leading, according to Tiziana Parenti (an Italian MP), to a significant drop in the number of women elected in 1996 compared with the 1994 elections. Fiorella Ghilardotti pointed out the striking difference between the north and the south of Europe in the attitude of political parties and in mentalities in general.

Most of those present felt that the reason for the persistent imbalance in decision-making forums lay with the mentality of men and women. Ms G. Kuppe (Bundestag) mentioned the role of the media, which should rethink the way in which they present women who work hard in public life.

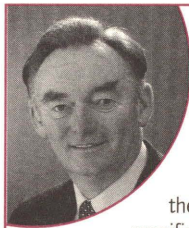
The type of electoral system was also blamed (proportional representation being more favourable than 'first past the post', for example). Some people raised the question of applying the quota system to political parties.

Francisca Bennasar Tous (EPP, Spain) said that Parliament must retain its role as a driving force by opposing discrimination, proposing measures allowing the best possible combination of family and work, combating violence, and launching initiatives to inspire people and overcome scepticism.

APRIL PART-SESSION

### Incorporating equal opportunities for women and men into Community policies

On 20 April 1999, the Women's Committee attempted to evaluate the present European Commission's efforts at 'mainstreaming' and identify the issues on which the next European Parliament should concentrate.



Mr Flynn, for the Commission, attended this last meeting before the election of the new Parliament and the formation of the new Women's Rights Committee. He stressed the importance of the entry into force of the Amsterdam Treaty, which stated specifically that equal opportunities was one of the Union's aims and formalised the principle of 'mainstreaming'. He also stressed the importance of the guidelines for employment in 1999 and the new Structural Fund regulation.

**Birgitta Aseskog**, Equal Opportunities Director for the Swedish Ministry of Industry and Employment, reported on the way in which this type of policy had been implemented in the various ministerial departments in Sweden (circulation of statistics, publicity campaigns, training, etc.) since 1994. She pointed out, however, that 'mainstreaming' should not replace traditional positive action to promote the status of women.

Magdalene Hoff (Vice-President of the EP) presented a report on the current situation in the European Parliament: there were very few women in top posts and none at all at A1.

A number of MEPs stressed the importance of the challenges still to be met (the balance between men and women in the decision-making process, strengthening the position of mainstreaming, particularly against the background of enlargement). The members declared that one of the main challenges for the future would be to maintain the momentum for equality and that the Women's Rights Committee would need to be more vigilant than ever.

Finally, before the vote on the interim report on the fourth action programme on equal opportunities (1996-2000), Lissy Gröner (ESP, Germany) listed the Committee's recommendations to the Commission: these included the need to submit a proposal for the fifth action programme, the organisation of gender-awareness training courses and the gathering of specific statistics in a number of areas. The report was adopted unanimously.

### 1 MAY: THE TREATY OF AMSTERDAM ENTERED INTO FORCE

Several of its provisions directly concern women

**Article 2:** *'The Community shall have as its task (...) to promote throughout the Community a harmonious, balanced and sustainable development of economic activities, a high level of employment and of social protection, equality between men and women (...).'*

**Article 3** states that *'(...) the Community shall aim to eliminate inequalities, and to promote equality, between men and women'*.

**Article 137** of the EC Treaty (formerly Article 118) says that *'(...) the Community shall support and complement the activities of the Member States in the following fields:*

*(...) — equality between men and women with regard to labour market opportunities and treatment at work'*.

**Article 141** (formerly Article 119) states that *'Each Member State shall ensure that the principle of equal pay for male and female workers for equal work or work of equal value is applied. The Council (...) shall adopt measures to ensure the application of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation, including the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value. With a view to ensuring full equality in practice between men and women in working life, the principle of equal treatment shall not prevent any Member State from maintaining or adopting measures providing for specific advantages (i.e. positive discrimination, ed) in order to make it easier for the under-represented sex to pursue a vocational activity or to prevent or compensate for disadvantages in professional careers'*.



### New look for the newsletter

In 1998 we conducted an opinion poll among readers of the Women of Europe Newsletter. As you suggested, we have decided to give our newsletter a more up-to-date look and make it more informative. We hope that this first edition will live up to expectations.

### Directive on pregnant workers: how is it being applied?

The Member States were supposed to have transposed the 1992 directive affording special protection for mothers-to-be by the end of October 1994. On 16 March 1999, the European Commission adopted its report on the progress made. The report is fairly positive but identifies a number of problems and differences between Member States.

The directive requires employers to take all necessary steps to ensure that pregnant workers and their babies are not exposed to health risks at the workplace. It also establishes a number of rights in connection with employment contracts: pregnant women may not be dismissed for a reason connected with their condition or be compelled to perform night work which could damage their health. They are entitled to paid maternity leave.

The report mentions a number of disparities: for example, maternity leave ranges from 14 weeks to 28 weeks and the rate of pay varies considerably. Particular problems with transposal have led in some cases to infringement procedures, especially for failing to provide for any maternity leave at all. The report listed a number of areas which continue to cause concern: the right to return to one's job after maternity leave, differences between categories of workers covered by the directive, and the difficulty of reconciling the health issue with the principle of non-discrimination with regard to women.

### Religious fundamentalism

On 23 and 24 March 1999 an international seminar was held in Paris on religious fundamentalism with the title 'Education: Religions, fundamentalisms'. Representatives of the major religions which exist side-by-side in our countries and experts from the voluntary sector in the Mediterranean countries discussed ways of preventing religious fundamentalisms from exerting undue influence on young peo-

ple, and especially young girls. A document setting out practical proposals was sent to the relevant ministries in the countries represented; the proposals were concerned primarily with the various means – education, arts, culture, sport – of encouraging education allowing a variety of opinions and beliefs to be represented with due respect for the dignity of the individual. The signatories called for financial resources to be made available for implementing their proposals. The seminar was organised by the French Coordination of the European Women's Lobby.

The full text of the proposals can be obtained from **Bernice Dubois, CLEF**,  
Tel. (33-1) 42 22 45 16 or (33-1) 40 47 65 95.

### Top 99: equal opportunities in a family-friendly working world

Top 99, the fifth Women's Fair, was held in Düsseldorf in mid-April. On the fringe of the fair, a meeting of experts was held, as part of a seminar on European social audits, to discuss a Europe-wide system of incentives to create a working environment more accommodating to the family. The debate centred mainly on whether there was a need for legislation to introduce incentive systems; no definite conclusion was reached. The event was supported by the European Commission and organised under the German Presidency. It presented relevant European audits, experiments and competitions. The German 'Total E-Quality' award was presented on the first evening of the symposium to 10 German companies by Christine Bergmann, Federal Minister for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth.

**Institut für Personalwesen und Internationales Management**  
**Fachbereich WOW,**  
**Universität der Bundeswehr Hamburg,**  
**email: eunefwi@unibw-hamburg.de**

### Jeans demo

On 10 March 1999, women paraded through the streets of Strasbourg in jeans in protest at the judgment of the Italian Court of Appeal that it was impossible to rape a woman wearing jeans. The demonstration was organised by Luisa Todini, MEP.

Information:  
**Ms Todini,**  
**Fax (32-2) 284 93 43 or**  
**e-mail: ltodini@europarl.eu.int**

### Commission drops case after German transposal

The Commission decided to drop the case on transposal into German law of Directive 96/97/EC on equal treatment for men and women in occupational social security schemes, after the German authorities announced their intention of transposing the measures in this directive into German law.

### Managing our time

A transnational seminar on finding a balance between professional and family life was held in Lille on 3 and 4 June 1999. It was organised by the European network 'Work and family life', with the support of the European Commission's DG V (Industrial Relations and Social Affairs), for human resources professionals, researchers and trade unionists.

For further information: France:  
**Mme Jeanne Henocque c/o Positis**  
**Fax (33-1) 44 05 15 99**  
Belgium:  
**Claude Fonteyne c/o CERINM**  
**Fax (32-6) 784 1950**

### Publications

#### Women and science

The proceedings of the 'Women and science' symposium, organised by DG XII and the European Parliament on 28 and 29 April 1998 in Brussels, have now been published under the EUR-OP catalogue number CG-NA-18354-EN-C. The text is available through EUR-OP's usual distribution networks and costs EUR 31.5.

#### Images of women in the media

A transnational study of the image of women in the media has been conducted by Professor Ullamajja Kivikuru of the University of Helsinki at the request of the European Commission's DG V (Employment and Social Affairs), Unit D.5. Her findings have just been published by EUR-OP under the catalogue number CE-10-97-122-EN-C. It costs EUR 15.

To obtain a document published by the Office for Official Publications of the European Communities:  
<http://www.eudor.com:8443/accueil.html>

