

Women of Europe

editorial

Dear readers,

I wish to thank each and every reader who took the time to complete the questionnaire that DG X's Women's Information Section sent out earlier this year to all subscribers to the Women of Europe newsletter.

The results are now in. They allow us to become better acquainted with you and to identify your level of satisfaction with and your expectations of our publications.

As you may have guessed: our readership is primarily composed of women (92% of those surveyed).

There is little difference in terms of satisfaction and expectations whether with the Women of Europe Supplement or the Newsletter. The specificity of the publications are the same: they provide a source of information on Community activities and on themes affecting women in the European Union.

Our readers view the Newsletter as an instrument for communication that should be lively, dynamic, "interactive"... They find all of the different sections interesting, but especially appreciate the "information/communication" section.

As for the Supplements, they are read when the topic is of particular interest to the reader.

Readers expressed a desire to see both the Newsletter and the Supplement address, first and foremost, social matters and, secondly, economic and political issues.

This very specific study, aimed at measuring readers' interest in the Section's publications, was carried out simultaneously with a more general analysis. Its objective was threefold. The first objective was to reach a better understanding of how women view the European Union, its concept and its institutions. In addition, their personal experience of the European Union and how they view the status of women in Europe were considered. Finally, the analysis examined women's satisfaction with the information available to them on Community activities in the Member States.

The two studies lie within the scope of the Information Policy carried out by the Commission for more than two years now which reaches out to citizens, taking into greater consideration of the expectations of the targeted audiences.

We will come back to the results of the questionnaires in more detail in a later issue, and we will continue to improve upon these information resources that you appreciate so much.

Veronique Houdart-Blazy

Head of Section - Information for Women

European Forum for Science and Culture: Women in the European Project

“Women in the European project” was the theme of the latest European Forum for Science and Culture which took place in Echternach (Grand Duchy of Luxembourg) from 20 to 22 July. These seminars have been organized regularly since 1992 by the European Commission's Forward Studies Unit. They assemble intellectuals (journalists, authors, researchers), European civil servants and members of the Commission to jointly examine an important aspect of the future of the European Union.

President of the European Commission, Jacques Santer, and Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs, Padraig Flynn, focused the July seminar on the examination of the role played by women in the various EU Member States and the conditions allowing for the creation of a true partnership between the women of Europe and the Union. Only 28% of women in the European Union are "pro-European" who support the Maastricht Treaty and the completion of the Internal Market according to a survey presented by Colette Flesch, Director-General of DG X - Information, Communication, Culture and Audiovisual Media.

A substantial lack of information only worsens that situation (barely one in four women surveyed felt they were "very well" or "fairly well" informed on the European Union), as does Europe's inability to address women.

But such weak support also

seems to be the result of the industrial model being called into question, which further reinforces the image of a Europe perceived as a threat to general well-being and to employment. "It is not surprising with the questions now being raised about the industrial model, that the 'European project' might also seek a new breath of life", Marjorie Jouen of the European Commission's Forward Studies Unit explained. Benefiting, thanks especially to Europe, from a triple emancipation - political, economic and legal - which can in itself be a guarantee of democracy and a driving force for progress for the entire community, women are henceforth coming up against the individualization of the social structure (social protection systems which focus more and more on the individual, instability in the family structure, precarious employment, the abandon of systems of collective representation), which makes them particularly sceptical of the current model.

Added to these problems are the difficulty of reconciling both working and family life, the emergence of new, even greater obstacles or weak participation in political institutions due to inhibition or disillusionment. Marjorie Jouen, who identifies three possible scenarios, adds that it is this "growing dissatisfaction which is giving rise to several contradictory aspirations".

First, reversion, where women's emancipation would be called into question.

"Participants in the European Forum for Science and Culture, the theme of which was "Women in the European Project".
In the centre is Colette Flesch, Director General of DG X - Information, Communication, Culture and Audiovisual Media.



Second, a process of radicalisation aiming at formally obtaining respect for equal rights through the introduction of positive discrimination. Third, deeper involvement allowing the European Project to gain legitimacy in the eyes of all, by improving the status of women and putting to better use the qualities they contribute to society. Participants in the Forum concluded that of the three, "that opportunity is certainly the most promising". This point of view is shared by Colette Flesch according to whom "women especially should be able to benefit from the new possibilities (for choice, promotion, abolishing distances, from the diminishing importance of physical factors and the re-adjustment of work schedules) offered by the information society".

Concrete proposals

Mrs. Pintasilgo, former Prime Minister of Portugal and Vice-President of the United Nations University in Helsinki, warned: "If we want to reconcile Europe and women, we must abandon ideologies, propose viable alternatives and begin to view the world in a new light". That is a tall order for the Commission which in fact

gathered an impressive number of proposals. Some recommendations were very concrete, such as the idea to consult with women on new European issues: biotechnology, the information society, local development, consumer protection, youth... The Union could "label" exemplary actions, local initiatives, Europe-Mediterranean- or European Union-CCEE co-operation networks promoted by women in the fields of the arts, democracy and standards of living. Other proposals were more general, more ambitious, such as opening reflection- or experimentation workshops on non-remunerated work carried out by women, on the re-organization of schedules or even the reform of social protection systems. The Commission could also reduce the cost of future transition by encouraging the Union to launch studies (on the social and economic costs of inequality, relations between the public and the private spheres) and to utilize new instruments (partnership with NGOs, abandoning the traditional criteria for competition in all its political decisions). Hella Hasse (author, Netherlands) stressed, "I believe women - and men for that matter - have a great deal to contribute to the transformation, the

metamorphosis of Europe - and perhaps in a very decisive manner".

For his part, Jacques Santer, President of the European Commission declared: "We must create a mobilising project for our children, to ensure that our new Europe, which is now extending more and more towards the East, is capable of changing their lifestyle. It is important that each one of us is able to find a source of motivation to participate in this post-industrial information society." ●

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Fourth Community Action Programme on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men

On the initiative of Padraig Flynn, Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs, the Commission adopted the fourth medium-term Community Action Programme on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (1996-2000) on 19 July.

The programme acknowledges the essential role played by the Community in improving the status of women in European society. Nevertheless, in spite of three successive programmes, article 119 of the Treaty which establishes the principle of equal pay and despite the new regulations of the Structural Funds which integrate equal opportunities as part of their objective, disparities between the two sexes remain substantial. Women suffer from high unemployment, frequently hold low-level jobs and participate very little in political and social life. In keeping with the objectives reaffirmed clearly at the European Council Summits of Essen and Cannes, the goal of the fourth programme is to continue and to intensify actions undertaken, to consolidate existing Community legislation (six directives, several recommendations and resolutions) and to integrate equal opportunities into the formulation, implementation and enforcement of appropriate policy.

While wishing to intensify the actions and to build on the complementary roles of existing mechanisms, the Commission hopes to promote six major objectives:

- draw the attention of the political and social communities to equal opportunities;
- promote equal opportunities in a changing economy;

- stimulate policy for the reconciliation of working and family life for women and men;
- favour equal participation of women and men in decision-making;
- reinforce the conditions for exercising equal rights;
- support the launching, the implementation and the evaluation of actions adopted to achieve these aims.

The programme proposes the initiation, the support or the development of the following measures:

- methodological, technical and financial support of integrated projects aimed at identifying and transferring good practice in the economic, business and employment fields, the reconciliation of working life and the participation of women in decision-making;
- setting-up of the mechanisms for observation and follow-up of policy pertinent to equal opportunities, as well as carrying out studies examining all economic, social and legal matters related to equal opportunities;
- on-going evaluation of activities undertaken in the programme's name;
- execution of all actions associated with exchanging, diffusing and informing about the Community acquis, to the widest possible extent with regard to equal pay, equal treatment and equal opportunity, as well as to the results of the initiatives undertaken.

The instrument for execution

Partnerships between the different national, Community, regional and local actors will be encouraged. Following con-

sultation with the new Advisory Committee for Equal Opportunities, the Commission suggests that 20 to 40 pilot projects should be supported. The Commission will also pursue measures to launch the action described in the memorandum on equal pay, while encouraging studies, information exchanges and research. To that end, a joint co-ordination structure (ANIMA) will be set up to provide, in the name of the Commission, the necessary technical assistance to promote, develop and evaluate the programme's numerous proposals. ●

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Committee on Women's Rights

The adoption of a resolution which will oblige the media and advertising agencies to portray a realistic image of women is one of the priorities of the Spanish Presidency on the issue of equality between men and women presented in July to the Committee on Women's Rights by Cristina Alberdi, serving chairperson of the Council of Ministers for Social Affairs. Such a resolution will request all Member States to declare unlawful any publicity that is discriminatory against women.

The Presidency will also support proposals in the Fourth Action Programme on Equal Opportunities adopted in July by the Commission, including initiatives concerning reconciliation of working and family life, and the participation of women in decision-making. According to Mrs. Alberdi, it is indeed important to eliminate the prejudice responsible for the small proportion of women occupying high-level positions, and to institute an obligation which would ensure the real participation of women in decision-making. The programme, which identifies six major objectives and creates a new body called ANIMA, was welcomed by parliamentarians who viewed it as a good working base for the future, despite some shortcoming gaps.

Beijing: an evaluation seminar for late November

The Beijing Conference was another issue discussed by the Committee on Women's Rights. There, in its role as spokesman for the Union, Spain focused on themes such as poverty, education and training, the protection of health and hygiene as well as contraception. Cristina Alberdi invited members of the Committee on Women's Rights to participate in a seminar to be held in late November to evaluate the results of the Conference.

Finally, when asked about the project for the reversal of the burden of proof, the Spanish minister admitted that it would be very difficult to reach any agreement on a European legislative text given the differences existing between Member States. The Presidency did commit itself, however, to reaching an agreement on the proposals relating to parental leave and the reconciliation of working and family life. The Committee also examined several preliminary reports, in particular that of Celia Villalobos Talero (PPE, E) on equal pay, and that of Nel van Dijk (V, NL) on the 1996 budget. ●

For further information on the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights, contact:

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Jacob Söderman, the first European ombudsman ever takes up office

Henceforth, the interests of all citizens of the European Union will be protected, thereby offering Europeans greater democracy. For the first time ever in the history of the European Union, a ombudsman will settle cases of maladministration on the part of the Community institutions. After much deliberation, Jacob Söderman was finally elected the Union's first ombudsman at the European Parliament's plenary session of 12 June in Strasbourg. Mr. Söderman won the election by 241 votes against 221 for Siegbert Alber and 6 abstentions. "It is up to you to pave the way, and in that task you can rely on the full-fledged support of the Parliament", exclaimed the President of the Parliament Klaus Hänsch who was clearly satisfied with the result which should have come just after the June 1994 elections.

An innovation of the Maastricht Treaty, the ombudsman is elected by the European Parliament following each election to serve for the entire duration of the term. The ombudsman, is prohibited from holding any other political office or practising any other profession. As he is entirely independent, he may receive no instruction from any government or other body. More restricted than the European Parliament's Committee on Petitions which applies the same basic principles, his role consists in investigating cases of maladministration in the activities of the Community institutions or bodies and proposing solutions. Presented with a petition or acting on his own initiative, the ombudsman opens an investigation. If there is evidence of "maladministration",

the institution in question is given recommendations to which it must reply within a three-month period. A report is then sent to the European Parliament.

Born on 19 March 1938, the first ombudsman in the history of the Community, who was to take an oath before the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg on 27 September, holds a degree in law from the University of Helsinki. Former Justice and Social Affairs Minister, he served from 1989 as parliamentary ombudsman in Finland. "In the Nordic system", he asserted following his election, "the principal idea in terms of performing the duties of ombudsman lie in his complete independence, his impartiality in handling each case and in his professionalism".



Jacob Söderman
Photo: European Parliament

While it is a first in the Community, ombudsmen exist in nearly every country of the Union, in the form of national mediators (in ten Member States) or mediators serving a Community or a region (Belgium and Italy). In Germany and Luxembourg, the role is carried out by parliamentary committees on petitions, while Greece only grants the right to petition. ●

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5th European Conference of Women Elected Representatives of Local and Regional Authorities: "Women, Politics, Democracy"

On the initiative of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), the city of Dublin played host to the 5th European Conference of Women Elected Representatives of Local and Regional Authorities from 6 to 8 July 1995. The conference, organized with the support of the Commission, centred around the theme "Women, Politics, Democracy". Four hundred officials from 23 countries of western, central and eastern Europe made the journey to contribute their own experiences to the debate.

"At a time when, more than ever, European development must rely first and foremost on the participation and support of its citizens, it is vital that women take part in local and regional politics, the level best suited to any sustainable solution", asserted Pasqual Maragall, Chairman of the CEMR, Vice-Chairman of the Committee of the Regions and Mayor of Barcelona. During the course of their work, participants focused on a series of factors revealing the low rate of women in politics: the structure of society, political representation, traditions, culture and the lack of information and adapted training. "The rise in the number of women in decision-making and in politics comes about through greater information and communication efforts", underscored Véronique Houdart-Blazy, Head of the section - Women's Information in DG X / Information, Communication, Culture and Audiovisual

Media. While Margareta Pietikinen, Finnish MP, declared: "The structure of political operation must take account of a woman's day, for example by scheduling meetings at times of the day that do not conflict with family life."

Participants asked for strengthened community legislation on matters of equal opportunities, for the creation of social infrastructures and for the improvement of social protection for housewives, pregnant, divorced- or retired women or women working under precarious conditions. Overly burdening family responsibilities make any real engagement in a professional activity impossible, explained Krystyna Rawska, Mayor of Swietochlowice (Poland).

The right to be different and the right to equal status

Participants underlined that "democratic parity" involves the full integration of women - on an equal footing with men, at all levels and in every aspect of the functioning of a democratic society. For some countries the system of quotas is a means to that end. For other countries, more adapted measures must be chosen. The Mayor of Sintra (Portugal), Edite Estrela declared: "The status of fully-fledged citizenship to which women are entitled, should guarantee them equal status alongside men - equal rights, equal condition, equal opportunities... But it should also guarantee them the right to be different, which must not interfere with the universal nature of the rights to which all must have access. (...). The truth is that difference is not acknowledged, nor are the formal, acknowledged rights implemented."

A three-point resolution

The resolution adopted by participants suggests that the structure of European society must progress while taking into account the demands of women, in a way that would facilitate their participation in public life and, in particular, politics. It also underlines the importance of information, training, education and culture which must contribute to projecting an image of women with a role and dignity equal to those of men. Equal political representation of men and women in elected assemblies must be guaranteed in order to fill the current democratic deficit. The officials asked the Union to intensify legislative work on equal opportunities, to heed proposals from the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights with respect to the revision of the Treaty on European Union and to ensure an equal representation of men and women within the European institutions. ●

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The Committee of the Regions of the European Union

To strengthen the economic and social cohesion among Member States, to develop an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe and to make decisions as close as possible to the citizens - it was in order to meet these objectives that the Treaty on European Union provided for the association of territorial communities in European development and for the creation of a Committee of the Regions (CR) providing consultation and comprising the representatives of the local and regional communities.

Chaired by the Frenchman Jacques Blanc, Chairman of the Regional Council of Languedoc-Roussillon, the Committee of the Regions is composed of 222 members, only twenty or so of whom are women, nominated for a period of four years by the Council of Ministers. The Committee's constitutional session took place on 9 and 10 March 1994 in Brussels.

In accordance with the Treaty, the Committee must be consulted on certain issues concerning standards of living: education and youth, culture, public health, trans-European transport, telecommunications and energy networks, economic and social cohesion and the environment. The members of the Committee - who are elected or designated officials of the local and regional communities and, therefore, close to citizens and territorial interests - are the most qualified on such matters in Europe. The Committee may also be consulted each time the Council and the Commission deem it appropriate, when the Economic and Social Committee are to render a decision on a matter of regional interest, or simply on its own initiative.

Why so few women?

Speaking on the weak representation of women in the CR, Claude du Granrut, Vice-Chairperson of the Regional Council of Picardy and member of the Committee explained: "The CR is not representative percentage wise of the number of women with responsibility at the local level. For example, I am the only female French member. As elected local officials, we are strong in number, but few women are chairpersons or mayors of large cities; we do not occupy top hierarchical positions."

Indeed, according to estimates made in 1994 by the European Network "Women in Decision-making", only 10.1 % of the women elected to local bodies hold an executive-level position and 4.1 % hold the title of chairperson. The Network further explains, however, that the reasons for such a weak representation of women in local and regional bodies are difficult to determine, due, in particular, to the varying territorial structures from one Member State to the next, to the differences in the politi-

cal and electoral systems and to the manner in which candidates are selected.

Not particularly troubled by the poor representation of women on the Committee, Mrs. du Granrut adds "We are very few, but we are all elected officials and are, therefore, accustomed to working as such". With regard to women's contribution to the work of the Committee of the Regions, Mrs. du Granrut explains that, proportionally, the percentage of reports handled by women members is slightly higher. "There aren't any strictly women's issues, but there are important issues that are likely to be of interest to women, such as the information society", she asserts. "I, personally, have reported on many issues, for example European structural planning, Europe against AIDS, the right to vote and to eligibility in municipal elections, the Ariane project..."

Work in committees

In addition to the one handling institutional affairs, seven committees were set up, covering a range of issues from regional and economic development to vocational training, from infrastructural planning to urban policy and from a "citizens' Europe" to social and economic cohesion. Since its creation, the CR has been able to deliver a large number of recommendations (42 in 1994) in these various fields, for example on matters pertaining to health. "We represent the community, the average citizen. We may also become the mouthpiece of the Union for the people by whom we are elected", declares Claude du Granrut.

The role played by the Committee of the Regions may be strengthened in the coming months. The Commissioner for Regional Policies, Monika Wulf-Mathies, has indeed indicated that the Commission wishes to consult the Committee on a greater number of proposals (industrial and agricultural development, road transport, peripheral regions, etc.) including, over the years to come, enlargement or the development of Mediterranean policy.

But the Committee of the Regions is hoping for another kind of metamorphosis - the kind that would allow a change of status. In its contribution to the Reflection Group which is preparing for the Intergovernmental Conference of 1996, the Committee of the Regions expressed its aspiration to accede to institutional status while maintaining its advisory role. Determined to participate as fully as possible in the IGC, the CR also formulated various recommendations: to include an explicit reference to the role of local and regional communities in the principle of subsidiarity, and to secure a right to appeal before the European Court of Justice. ●