

Women of Europe

commission

Editorial

Women's Day, 8 March, was the occasion for different organisations and institutions to make themselves heard, both through expressing their views on the gender dimension and equal opportunities related issues or by making public their recent achievements.

In terms of the European institutions, the new President of the European Parliament, the Spanish Christian-Democrat José María Gil-Robles Gil-Delgado, opened the Parliament's plenary session in Strasbourg by saying he was in favour of the introduction, in the new Treaty, of criteria on equal opportunities policy and an explicit reference to positive action.

The European Commissioner responsible for Employment and Social Affairs, Padraig Flynn, seized the opportunity provided by the 8 March festivities to unveil the first annual report on equal opportunities between women and men in the European Union and the results of a public opinion poll "Women and men in Europe and equal opportunities".

The annual report on equal opportunities is an interesting document in more ways than one. To start with because it draws up an inventory on the issue both at Community and at Member State level. Its regularity should make it an indispensable tool for measuring progress.

The civil society was also mobilised. The EWL (European Women's Lobby) launched its European centre to combat, in partnership with men, violence against women. It also announced the creation of a "European Women's Talent Bank." Together with the ETUC (European Trade Union Confederation), it is calling for the "constitutionalisation" of equal opportunities, the revision of Article 119, the inclusion in the new Treaty of fundamental social rights and the Social Protocol and, finally, the extension of qualified majority voting.

The opinion poll, carried out by the European Commission in 1996 among over 21,000 Europeans, reveals that half of those polled consider that "equal opportunities strengthen democracy, promote personal development and improve relations between women and men". 40% of Europeans think that to eliminate inequalities, both men and women have to change and the best areas for such change were a greater sharing of family tasks and the respect of masculine and feminine identities.

Is the road to equality in diversity opening up to us at last? ●

Veronique Houdart-Blazy

Head of Section - Information for Women

Sharing environmental responsibility

Taking care of the environment is a shared responsibility involving the public and private sector and individuals as consumers. This is the message that European Commissioner for the Environment, Ritt Bjerregaard, has passed in EU policy-making since she took up office in January 1995. Her strategy to clean and protect the environment combines a series of measures such as legislation, voluntary agreements, fiscal policy including green-taxes, campaigns and education. She is also a strong supporter of the "polluter pays" principle, be it industry or the consumer. In an interview with the *Women of Europe Newsletter* she explains some of the challenges facing the EU in environmental protection and the role women play in it.

What are the biggest challenges for the EU in the field of environment and sustainable development?

The implementation of environmental legislation is not good enough and must be improved. Implementation is extremely important for the future work of the EU. It does not make much sense to adopt legislation in the EU if it is not implemented fully in the Member States. If we don't meet this challenge, we will not only damage the environment, but lose the confidence of European citizens.

The Commission last year adopted a Communication containing recommendations to Member States designed to improve implementation. These recommendations will help to ensure that European citizens are given the information, assistance and powers needed to protect environmental rights and to safeguard Europe's environment. Earlier this year the Commission for the first time proposed financial penalties against Germany and Italy for failing to comply with previous court judgements for infringing EU environmental law.

In principle, sustainable development is to leave nature in the same or a better condition than before you started using it. Let me, in this connection, emphasise the EU's obligation on global environmental problems like for instance climate change and biodiversity. These two themes will be discussed this year at environmental conferences within the framework of the UN. The EU also has a moral obligation to serve as a model for the rest of the world. And we have got the knowledge, experience and resources to be in the global environment front line.

A third big challenge is to integrate environmental issues into as many considerations and decisions as possible. Take, for in-

stance, the agriculture sector, where the Commission is working on a plan to overhaul the Common Agricultural Policy. The starting point for the reform will be the idea that there must be a greater focus in European agriculture on quality, protection of the environment, animal welfare, a return to more natural production methods and a simplification of Community law.



Ritt Bjerregaard

What do you hope the IGC will achieve for EU environment policy?

I would like to see an inclusion of environmental provisions in sectoral policies such as transport, agriculture and regional policies. Furthermore, we need to put forward a proposal reinforcing fundamental rights by introducing the right to a clean and healthy environment. By including such a right in our Treaty, we have the opportunity of being in the forefront of constitutional development in Europe. It would also be extremely important if we could achieve an increased use of qualified majority voting in the field of the environment notably in the field of green taxes. I would also like to see the Parliament taking full part in the decision-making process in the field of the environment. Finally, I would hope to see principles of openness and transparency integrated fully in the Treaty.

How can women contribute more to EU policy-making in the field of the environment?

Environmental policy is an important issue which ranks high among women's interests. Women are very much aware of the fact that each individual can take the first step with a view to achieving sustainability in the environmental field. That is quite clear from several surveys about political priorities for women and men.

In my daily work as Commissioner for the environment, I meet a lot of women taking an active part in EU environmental

Moving ahead as one, but at different speeds

policy-making. Women are contributing at every level in NGOs and several experienced and dedicated women hold key positions in my Directorate-General for the environment (DG XI). But, of course, we can all contribute to awareness of and consideration for the environment in EU policy-making.

How is it possible to ensure the new jobs being created in the environment sector are equally distributed among women and men?

There are no specific statistical surveys which show the difference between the number of men and women employed in the environmental sector, but in the EU and in trade unions in the different Member States there are special education programmes for women working in, for example, the engineering industry, in recycling, waste, clean water, air filters and so on.

The specific part of the EU Employment Initiative for women is called "NOW" and will operate until the end of 1999, so the EU is aware of the importance of giving women high priority in jobs which earlier and by tradition have been strong-arm stuff.

What do you think is the potential effect on job creation of stricter environmental regulations?

Prejudice which indicates that taking care of the environment has a bad influence on creating new jobs doesn't fall into line with reality. An EU report published in November 1996 establishes that the new jobs which are created are concentrated in the environment, services and health.

1.5 million people in the 15 EU Member States are employed in environmental sectors. This represents 1% of the total manpower in the EU. The total growth rate for jobs in the environment sector from the beginning of the 1990s has been around 2% a year.

I have no doubt that the growth of different environmental jobs will develop in the future. Environmental protection industries supplying goods and services in the area of transportation, agriculture, air, waste and water, environmental management activities and activities related to nature conservation are only a few of the growth areas.

In cooperation with the European Parliament, the Commission is planning to organise a conference on the issue of environment and employment in the Spring of 1997. ●

A proposal which would allow EU Member States to work together in small clusters and so move ahead faster than others in specific areas of EU activity and policy-making is at the heart of the debate at the IGC talks. This notion is known as "flexibility" or "enhanced cooperation", the term preferred by Members of the European Parliament. Its supporters say it is about ensuring the EU is not obliged to advance at the speed of its slowest members. Its opponents say flexibility will create a Europe "à la carte".



The European Commission is cautious about the inclusion of a flexibility clause in the revised Treaty. It recognises that support for an institutional mechanism which would allow enhanced cooperation is gaining ground. But it wants

this to come into play "where it was clearly impossible for all Member States to progress together". One example is where decisions must be taken unanimously and as a result one country or more can impose a veto and block progress. The introduction of flexibility should be based firmly on the condition that it is open to all Member States to join at any time and must be used only as a last resort.

For the Commission, the extension of qualified majority voting, a demonstration that members share a determination to work together, should be the negotiators' prime objective.

Speaking to the European Parliament, Marcelino Oreja, the European Commissioner with responsibility for the IGC, did not deny that enhanced cooperation could help overcome obstacles and lead to a smoother functioning of the Union. But he ruled out flexibility completely in areas considered "inviolable" such as the internal market and related policies and the EU's common policies (agriculture, fisheries, trade, transport, competition and cohesion).

This view is shared by Antoinette Spaak (ELDR, Belgium), a Member of the European Parliament's Committee on Institutional Affairs in an interview with the *Women of Europe Newsletter*. She believes that "only when negotiations between the 15 Member States have failed should enhanced cooperation be envisaged between countries who want to progress further and more rapidly than the others". Enhanced cooperation should be a last resort applying in cases where there is an institutional blockage. It should allow "a real deepening of the process of European integration, be dynamic and, above all, be

open to all those who are unable to join in the first core group."

Who decides that the time has come to trigger enhanced cooperation? Should unanimity or qualified majority voting be the rule in Council when deciding on this? Should there be "a substantial minimum number" of participants, as argued by the Commission, to avoid "a proliferation of circles of countries on all kinds of matters"?

Antoinette Spaak is emphatic that the Commission should retain its right of initiative to propose enhanced cooperation, with the Parliament and the Council continuing to examine, decide and vote on the issue. "Once the three institutions play their role in enhanced cooperation and the concept is written into the Treaties, this will allow, as a solution of last resort, those countries who want to move ahead to do so within the framework of the Treaties."

Call for anti-discrimination measures in the new Treaty

Political personalities and NGOs attending the conference to launch the European Year Against Racism, Xenophobia and anti-Semitism in The Hague in January, called for the inclusion of strong anti-discrimination measures in the revised Treaty.

Such an article outlawing discrimination should apply directly in all Member States without the need for legislation to be drawn up and enacted at EU level.

The outgoing Irish Presidency had already tabled a proposal in December but during the talks in January it had not secured the support of all Member States. The Presi-

dents of the three European Institutions signed a Declaration against racism to launch the Year. The signing ceremony was accompanied by a specially written song by Dutch jazz singer Denise Jannah, entitled *Different Colours, One Rainbow*. ●



Antoinette Spaak
Photo: European Parliament

Women break myths and challenge practices

The European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights is discussing the launching of an EU-wide campaign for zero tolerance of violence against women. A number of experts from organisations which have run national campaigns against violence were invited to a public hearing in January to speak about their experiences. The President of the EU Social Affairs Council, Adrianus Melkert, also came before the Committee to explain the Dutch Presidency's plans on the equality front. In addition, January saw the election of a new European Parliament President.

Violence in the open

The idea of an EU-wide campaign of zero tolerance of violence against women was supported by experts and participants attending the public hearing organised by the Committee on Women's Rights. The campaign must target men as well as women, the hearing concluded. It must better inform the public about the widespread phenomenon of physical, psychological and emotional violence perpetrated against women and children both in the home, where it often remains undetected, and at work. Speakers said the perpetrators and the victims come from all social classes and walks of life. Rising unemployment and increasing social tension is exacerbating the situation further.

Renate Augstein, from the German *Ministry of Women, the Family, the Elderly and Youth*, presented posters from a campaign supported by her ministry which tried to target men and break the myth that only certain types of people are prone to using violence.

Elaine Samson from the Edinburgh-based *Zero Tolerance Charitable Trust* was also critical of the way many government-led campaigns seemed to target only women. She said this supports the myth that women were somehow responsible for male violence and could change this male behaviour by changing their own. Violence against women must be examined in the wider context of abuse of power in gender relations.

No EU Member State could boast of a violence free society. In Sweden, for example, between 300,000 and 500,000 women are victims of violence each year and one woman is killed every 10 days, according to research presented at the hearing by Angela Beausang from the Swedish *National Organisation of Battered Women's Shelters*.

It was time for governments to address the problem of violence against women, said Maria Adelaide Pereira Alves of the *Portuguese Democratic Movement*. Women's vulnerability to violence stems from their low social status, their economic dependence on men, their poor pay and precarious work contracts.

The particular situation of migrant women domestic workers was raised by Margaret Healy from the UK organisation

Solidar. She criticised immigration laws in the UK, which allow the entry and stay of domestic workers in the country only as long as they are working for the same employer. The rights of these workers are totally dependent on the goodwill of their employer, making them vulnerable and leaving them open to abuse and violence without a possibility for complaint.

The hearing concluded that the silence surrounding violence against women must be broken, that resources should be put into preventive action and that from an early age in school, children should be taught to resolve conflicts without using violence.

The police should be trained to deal with violence in the home, centres set up to protect victims of violence and perpetrators should be offered rehabilitation. Legislation should offer effective protection to victims and make complaints against a violent spouse easier.

Dutch Presidency explains equality policy

President of the EU Social Affairs Council, Adrianus Melkert told the Committee on Women's Rights that he will push for the inclusion of a firm commitment to equality

in the new Treaty. He said he favoured the incorporation of the Social Protocol into the main body of the Treaty as well as strengthening the current Article 119 on equal Pay and the inclusion of a chapter on employment.

Adrianus Melkert said the Dutch Presidency also wanted to see progress on the proposed directives to regulate atypical work and to share the burden of proof between the employee and the employer in equality cases. He said the Kalanke ruling cannot be interpreted in a way that would jeopardise women's positive action gains.

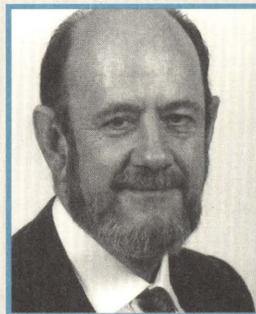
He announced that in April, with the support of the Dutch Presidency, a conference will be organised to discuss the possibility of an EU code of conduct preventing trafficking in women.

Internet control demanded

The Committee adopted its opinion on the Commission's Communication on illegal and harmful content on the Internet (*see Women of Europe Newsletter No 66*). It called for improved national legislation to fight against trafficking of women, the exploitation of children and trade in human beings for sexual purposes. It also wants in place internationally agreed legislation to prosecute providers of illegal content on the Internet.

Woman MEP challenges Presidency

Spanish Christian-Democrat José María Gil-Robles Gil-Delgado (PPE) was elected President of the European Parliament. He replaces outgoing German President Klaus Hänsch (PSE).



José María Gil-Robles Gil-Delgado
Photo: European Parliament

The President's only contender for office was French MEP Catherine Lalumière, head of the European Radical Alliance (ARE), who won a third of the votes. She put herself forward for election in protest against the unwritten practice of sharing the five-year presidency between the two main political groups, the PSE and the PPE. The two majority groups have effectively monopolised the President's office since 1989.

Four of Parliament's 14 Vice-Presidents, also elected in January, are women. Nicole Fontaine (PPE) and Nicole Pery (PSE) from France and Ursula Schleicher (PPE) were elected after the first ballot of votes. Magdalene Hoff (PSE) joined them as Vice-President after the second ballot.

Nel Van Dijk (V, the Netherlands) was re-elected President of the Committee on Women's Rights. The

Vice-Presidents are Antoinette Fouque (PSE, France), Francisca Bennisar Tous (PPE, Spain) and Helena Torres Marques (PSE, Portugal) who replaces Anne Van Lancker (PSE, Belgium).

Employment and Labour Market Committee meets

The Employment and Labour Market Committee (ELC), held its inaugural meeting in January. It was set up to support the EU Council of Social Affairs Ministers on employment-related issues. Its task is to give employment issues a higher profile in EU decision-making and make clear links with economic and monetary policy. It will monitor employment trends and national employment policies, exchange information and experience and make proposals to the Council. Two representatives from each Member State sit on the 32-member strong Committee alongside two from the European Commission. The national representatives are senior officials from Employment/Labour and Economic and Financial Affairs Ministries. Hans Borstlap, the Director General for Economic Affairs in the Dutch Social Affairs and Employment Ministry, was elected as its chair. ●

Cooperation urged to combat terrorism

The failure of EU Member States to agree to joint action to combat terrorism was condemned by Viviane Reding (PPE, Luxembourg) in a report to the European Parliament. Terrorism pursued under separatist, religious, ideological or other objectives is a serious violation of the fundamental rights of EU citizens causing "indescribable suffering" to victims and their families. In a resolution based on her report, Parliament called on Member States to standardise the way they investigate and avert acts of terrorism. All such acts should be classified as serious, extraditable offences in all Member States and the law should cover both the perpetrators and their accomplices. Governments were urged to avoid an escalation of terrorism by entering into "democratic dialogue" in search of political solutions. ●

The Information Society: a regional priority

The EU's poor and remote regions risk losing out in the information revolution if governments, regional and local authorities fail to make the right investment decisions which will ensure businesses and individuals can access and effectively use the Information Society. Companies will go where the infrastructure is best and regions left behind will find it hard to catch up later. This is the gist of a European Commission Communication "Cohesion and the Information Society" drawn up by Commissioners Monika Wulf-Mathies, responsible for regional policy, and Martin Bangemann for industry. It was discussed at a conference on this theme in Brussels. The danger of regional polarisation between the "information haves" and

the "information have nots" is great. Significant regional and country differences continue to exist in terms of the time a subscriber has to wait for the installation of a telephone line (from 8 working days to 80 working days), the quality and range of services proposed, and the price (can cost as much as 76% more). The Commission said it was ready to use the EU's Structural Funds to ensure the benefits of the Information Society were spread more evenly throughout the EU. It asked Member States, for their part, to integrate the Information Society into the broad scope of all Structural Fund programmes. ●

The Communication is available in all the official EU languages from:

Office for Official Publications

L-2985 Luxembourg

Fax: (352) 292 94 27 59

English version: ISBN: 92-78-15072-X

Women's training examined

"L'Europe et la formation des femmes" (Europe and women's training), is a publication which looks at the impact in France of EU and national policies and initiatives to promote women's training. A large part of the book describes the history and work of the IRIS network and its French members, many of which are training providers with an interest in developing women's training. It focuses on the period between 1988 and 1995 when the network was funded by the European Commission. ●

Published by

Racine Editions

73 rue Pascal

F-75013 Paris

Tel.: (33.1) 44 08 65 10

Fax: (33.1) 44 08 65 11

ISBN: 2-84108-010-2

Citizens First

Three practical guides on living, working and studying in another EU Member State have been published as part of the Citizens First campaign. The guides can be obtained in all EU languages from European Commission offices in Member States. ●

Information factsheets or news on the campaign are available on the "Citizens First" site on the Internet:

<http://citizens.eu.int>

Prostitution, sex industry condemned

Written by French journalist Claudine Legardinier in collaboration with French associations working with prostitutes, this booklet, "La prostitution," examines the historical, economic and social context of prostitution. It concludes that prostitution is an organised and global system of sexual exploitation, that a society based on respect, equality and justice should reject. The author examines many of the "myths" around prostitution, for example, that it is easy money. She is particularly critical of the clients. As she said without them, there would be no prostitutes and no sex industry. ●

Published by

Editions Milan

300 Rue Léon-Joulin

F-31101 Toulouse

Tel.: (33.5) 61 76 64 64

Fax: (33.5) 61 65 64 00

ISBN: 2-84113-457-1

"An Unexpected Journey. Vrouw en Kunst. Woman and Art"

This attractive bilingual Dutch/English publication illustrates, through words and pictures, the world and work of women artists through the ages and their contribution to the visual, plastic, performing and literary arts. It is published by *Gynaika*, a network promoting the work of women artists in Flanders, Belgium. ●

Gynaika

Handelsbeurs

Twaalfmaandenstraat 1

B-2000 Antwerpen

Tel.: (32.3) 232 22 29

Fax: (32.3) 232 68 76

E-mail: gynaika@atms.be

Gender and trade policies

"A Gender Perspective on European Union Trade Policies" is the title of a paper presented to the first World Trade Organisation ministerial meeting held in Singapore in December 1996 by *WIDE* (Network Women in Development Europe). It finds that the current free trade approach does not incorporate a gender perspective to the detriment of sustainable development. ●

Available in English from:

WIDE

Rue du Commerce 70

B-1040 Brussels

Tel.: (32.2) 545 90 70

Fax: (32.2) 512 73 42

E-mail: wide@gn.apc.org