

Women of Europe

parliament

Editorial

The Amsterdam Treaty was formally signed by representatives of the 15 Member States on 2 October. Ratification procedures by national Parliaments will get under way over the next few months. Depending on the country, these procedures may or may not be preceded by a referendum to allow all citizens, women and men, to express their opinion on this new Treaty.

A brief reminder of some of the landmarks in the short history of the Community: 1957 saw the birth of the Treaty of Rome creating the European Economic Community; in 1987 a new thrust was given with the Single Act establishing the Single Market; finally, in 1991, the Maastricht Treaty opened the way to Economic and Monetary Union and the creation of the single currency. But all these fundamental phases in the construction of Europe have taken place without the active participation of citizens. The need for citizens' greater involvement in the future has become evident for governments and representatives of the European institutions. This is why it is now up to us to translate into reality one of the main objectives of the new Treaty: to put into practice policies to explain, to open up and to make the institutions more transparent as well as to bring them closer to citizens.

Stressing the importance of information has become widespread. Success in "making" the information coming from the institutions into something that is satisfactory and adapted to the interests of our readers is much more difficult to achieve.

I am taking up my new post within the Women's Information Section at a point in time and in a context that is both exciting and full of promise for the future. This is why I would like to commit myself to maintain, and if necessary to improve, a dialogue with you. I would like to make *Women of Europe Newsletter* not only a source of information but a melting-pot for exchanges of experience and contacts which will serve to support the many women's networks and which prove, if such proof is necessary, that women are fundamental and inalienable actors in a united, peaceful and prosperous Europe based on solidarity.

In an ever-changing world, the members of our team are committed to adapting this instrument of communication and information and making it into a valuable and relevant means of meeting the needs of all those who receive it. ●

Ana Paula Laissy.

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Head of Section - Information for Women

Women take the floor

Equal opportunities took centre stage at the European Parliament's September plenary session in Strasbourg with the adoption of four reports on this subject. MEPs looked at the European Commission's first annual report on equal opportunities, before hearing about discrimination against women in advertising and the issue of violence against women. At the same time, the Luxembourg Presidency presented its programme to the Committee on Women's Rights during its September session in Luxembourg.

Further action urged

Presenting her report to the Parliament, Marie-Paule Kestelijn-Sierens (ELDR, Belgium) described the Commission's annual report on equal opportunities for women and men in the European Union as a "valuable means of assessing progress in the field". But she criticised its lack of analysis and evaluation and regretted that "other important areas of work in the field of equal opportunities" most notably violence against women or women's health were "completely disregarded or given insufficient attention".

The resolution adopted by the Parliament calls on the Commission to strengthen the strategic nature of future reports. It said they should focus more on developments in the year in question, increase the examples from Member States, provide a glossary of equal opportunities terms and a greater analysis of issues so that the annual report can contribute to the drawing up of future strategies. The resolution also asked the Commission to dedicate a section of the annual report on progress made to mainstream the gender dimension and equal opportunities.

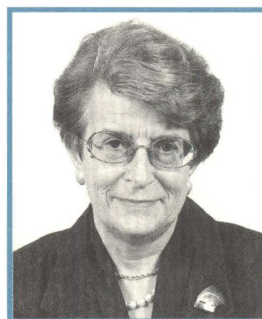
"Mainstreaming" is an unfortunate term to describe the integration of equal opportunities into all EU policies and activities, rapporteur Angela Kokkola (PSE, Greece) told the Parliament, because it is confusing to "all but a small minority already working on equal opportunities". Nonetheless, she welcomed the Commission's Communication on mainstreaming as a "huge step forward" in recognising that women have so far not enjoyed "their full share of society's benefits".

In her resolution on mainstreaming, adopted by the Parliament, Angela Kokkola calls for awareness raising and information campaigns, agreeing with the Commission, according to which effective mainstreaming "required the abolition of century old conceptions and prejudices concerning

women's contribution to society". Monitoring and evaluation had to be stepped up to measure how equal opportunities are being integrated in national and Community policies, she said. This was especially the case for the structural funds which should be used in a far more "aggressive way" to ensure women participate more in projects funded by public money. Promoting mainstreaming of gender and equal opportunities in all policies should not mean an end to positive action, according to the resolution. On the contrary, it said positive action measures should continue "for women where they are disadvantaged".

Women and advertising

The way women are portrayed in advertising is becoming increasingly "crude" and discriminatory and is often an infringement of women's rights, said Marlene Lenz (PPE, Germany) addressing the Parliament on her report. The media and the advertising industry have a vital role to play in providing role models and in influencing social behaviour. But with greater competition for consumer attention, media advertising was becoming increasingly aggressive and "the trend is towards provocation",



Marlene Lenz
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she said.

The resolution adopted by Parliament rejects "the commercial dissemination of images of women that denigrate the dignity of women or their equality with the male sex". It calls on the media to respect human dignity, implement policies of equality between the sexes and to contribute to changing attitudes so as to bring about "genuine equality" rather than "transmitting images which tend to perpetuate or exacerbate the existing discriminatory situation".

The advertising industry is invited to relinquish entirely the "denigration of women as sex objects for men" and to be "more constructively creative in their advertisements to stress the importance of women to society, at work, in the family and in public life". National regulatory

council

Amsterdam Treaty signed

bodies were asked to introduce standards for non-discriminatory advertising in their self-regulatory codes of conduct. Similar demands were made of the broadcasting authorities. The resolution also recommends the development of the *European Alliance for Self-Regulatory Advertising (EASA)* into a "fully fledged self-regulatory body" with the task of establishing European standards and regulating cross-border advertising.

Violence against women

The need to establish an EU-wide campaign for zero tolerance of violence against women was supported by Marianne Eriksson (GUE/NGL, Sweden) who is also calling for 1999 to be declared the *European Year against violence against women*.

Speaking to the Parliament on her report, she said violence against women had a direct link to equality between women and men, power relations between the sexes and men's view of women. "Violence against women is widespread and occurs everywhere in society", said Marianne Eriksson, who also warned most violence happens in the home helping to disguise the phenomenon. In Sweden, one woman dies every 10 days as a result of domestic violence.

To combat this, the resolution adopted by the Parliament urges a wide range of legislative, preventive and supportive measures at international, EU and Member State level.

The Luxembourg Presidency presents its programme

Presenting its programme to the Committee on Women's Rights which took place in Luxembourg in September, Marie-Josée Jacobs, current President of the EU Council of Ministers in charge of women's affairs, backed the Committee in its call to designate 1999 as the *European year against violence against women*.

She outlined the Luxembourg Presidency's priorities in the field of equal opportunities and spoke in particular about the proposals that have been forwarded to the Council in preparation for the November employment summit. These include proposals on mainstreaming, the promotion of women into all levels of decision-making, a commitment to redefine paid and unpaid employment and new forms of work organisation.

The Committee also examined the common position reached by the Council in July on the burden of proof directive which it said was "a step backwards" as it had not taken account of Parliament's amendments. Moreover, a range of other reports and opinions were discussed and adopted. ●

European Union foreign ministers gathered in Amsterdam at the beginning of October for the formal signing of the Treaty of Amsterdam, agreed by EU heads of state and government in June (see Newsletter No 72 & 73). The inclusion in the Treaty of the concept of European citizenship, a commitment to job creation, to promoting equal opportunities, to fighting discrimination, to protecting the environment and establishing gradually an "area of freedom, security and justice" has resulted in it being labelled by some as "The People's Treaty".

At the signing ceremony hosted by Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands in Amsterdam's Royal Palace, European Commission President Jacques Santer praised the advances of the new Treaty, particularly in the fields of employment, social affairs, justice and security. He said the EU had taken on board the criticisms raised after the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty. But outside the palace, protesters continued to call for a more social Europe.

To date, three Member States – Ireland, Denmark and Portugal – have said they will be putting the Treaty to the test by organising a referendum. If ratification proceeds without a hitch, the Treaty should enter into force on 1 January 1999.

Women come out as winners

Speaking about the new Treaty and its implications for women at a conference recently, European Commissioner Anita Gradin welcomed its provisions on equality saying that when ratified it "will provide new tools for more active work for equal opportunities".

On the employment front, Anita Gradin said the new Treaty lays down the ground to ensure no employment policy is put in place "without the situation of women being highlighted. The right to work and to earn one's own living is fundamental for women's rights in society".

Helena Torres Marques (PSE, Portugal) in her opinion for the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights also welcomed the important gains for women in the new Treaty. She said the changes made were "a step in the right direction" for equality in the EU. But she remained sceptical. Putting the promotion of equality on a par with economic convergence and the promotion of employment as one of the tasks of the EU could be "a largely symbolic gesture".

She was also critical of the new article banning discrimination which she said was "unsatisfactory both politically and from a legal point of view".

The old article outlawed discrimination on grounds of nationality and therefore had "direct effect" allowing citizens take a case to their national Courts, Helena Torres Marques explained. The new article only allows for "appropriate action to be taken to combat discrimination" under a procedure requiring a unanimous vote by the EU Council of Ministers and consultation with the European Parliament. "This is far too restrictive and undemocratic."

Helena Torres Marques wants the launching of information campaigns in each Member State, prior to ratification, "to make women across the Union aware of the gains" under the new Treaty. She stressed the need for a further Treaty review before the first wave of enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe. For women, this review should include a strengthening of the article outlawing discrimination, a legal clarification of the implications of equality between women and men on EU policies and a broadening of the present provision to ensure there is a strong legal basis for equality between women and men which goes beyond the employment field.

Ambitious targets set for jobs

In the run-up to the jobs summit to be held in Luxembourg on 21 November, the European Commission challenged EU Member States to reduce unemployment and create millions of new jobs.

In the first of its employment guidelines for Member States, one of the requirements of the Treaty's new chapter on employment, the Commission set ambitious job targets. In this document which it will present to the employment summit, the Commission urges Member States "to move progressively towards an employment rate of over 70%" (against the current 60.4%) and reduce unemployment from today's 10.6% to 7% of the working population within 5 years. "This will imply the creation of at least 12 million jobs", it claims.

To achieve these targets, the Commission is basing its recommendations around four axes: a "new culture" of "entrepreneurship"



Helena Torres Marques

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infos

Electoral systems influence women's political representation

and "employability" in EU Member States to stimulate the creation of more and better jobs and increase job-seekers' employment opportunities. It also called on Member States to promote the "adaptability" of their enterprises and workforces to respond to changing market conditions.

Strengthening equal opportunities to ensure fair prospects for women and men is the fourth axis of the Commission's guidelines. Member States were asked to actively "support the increased employment of women" and break down segregation "by making consistent efforts" to reduce unemployment gaps between women and men.

The guidelines urge faster implementation and closer monitoring of EU policies on career breaks, parental leave and part-time work which are outlined in a number of directives and social partner agreements. The standards of Member State provisions on childcare and care of other dependants should be raised to those of the "best performing Member States", it recommended.

Member States are also invited to pay "specific attention" to women re-entering the workforce after a career break, particularly to upgrade their skills and improve their access to training. Tax, benefit and social security systems should be reviewed to ensure that they do not act as a disincentive to women seeking to return to work.

The Commission also published its annual employment report - *Employment in Europe 1997* - in time for the summit as well as its draft third joint employment report. This latter report is based on Member State submissions and contains a first assessment of Member States' performance in the employment field. Like the guidelines it focuses on four main lines of action: entrepreneurship, employability, adaptability and equal opportunities.

The annual report urges more active employment creation policies. It points to the widening skills gap which is undermining "the employability of the unemployed and the adaptability of those who have a job".

In response to the Amsterdam resolution on growth and employment (see *Newsletter No 72*), the European Investment Bank (EIB) will be unveiling its three-year *Amsterdam Special Action Plan (ASAP)*, worth some one billion ECU, to the Luxembourg jobs summit. ●

Proportional representation was found to be the electoral system that produces the highest number of women elected representatives, according to a recently published European Parliament working document *Differential impact of the electoral systems on female political representation*. The study reveals that out of 162 countries world-wide, those which had achieved over 25% of female representation in their Parliaments (Sweden, Finland, Denmark, the Netherlands) used a proportional representation system. By contrast, countries using majority or weakened proportional systems (Italy, Greece, France, the UK), had much lower levels of women representatives. Within the EU as a whole, there are more women at regional government level (an average of 24.9%) than at national (20.5%) or local (20%) levels. This, it stated, is because proportional representation is used at regional level in most Member States. In France, for example, where proportional representation is used in regional elections, 12.1% of elected representatives were women against only 6.4% women in the national government which uses a majority system. ●

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

European Parliament

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Health and Consumer Protection, Women's Rights,
Culture, Youth, Education and the Media
L-2929 Luxembourg

Tel.: (352) 4300 7769 - Fax: (352) 4300 7720

Inter-parliamentary network created

To increase co-operation between Member State parliamentary committees responsible for equal opportunities, a network was set up last year at the initiative of the Belgian Senate with EU support. It includes the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights. Called the *European Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Equal Opportunities between men and women (CCEO)*, this network has now published a report on a conference it organised in May this year on *The Intergovernmental Conference: the right to equality for women and men in the European Treaties*. It has also brought out a directory containing information on the structure, history and work of the committees in each Member State. ●

Both documents are available in English,
French and Dutch. For information, contact:

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Public health in the European Union

Millions die prematurely each year in EU countries from serious illnesses according to a European Commission publication on *Public Health in Europe*. The report describes the strains facing the EU's health systems. They have to combine growing demands made on them by an increasingly health-conscious and ageing population, rapidly changing medical technology and financial difficulties because of rising costs and tighter budget controls. Since 1993, the EU's role in public health policy has been geared towards supporting Member States' efforts to improve their health systems. Most of EU support has gone to disease prevention. One successful example included in the report is the breast cancer screening initiative under the *Europe Against Cancer* programme. A large majority (75%) of women affected by breast cancer, the most common cause of cancer death among women, are aged 50 or over. But with regular screening (once every two years), the mortality rate among this age group is now falling. Another example of EU support concerns an HIV and AIDS prevention network in the field of prostitution. ●

Public Health in Europe is available
in English, French and German:

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DG V - Information and Documentation Centre

Rue Joseph II 27

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Focus on women entrepreneurs

The difficulties facing women creating new businesses or developing existing businesses were discussed at a conference *Women entrepreneurs, co-entrepreneurs and business owners* in Copenhagen last September. Over 200 people attended to examine the major problems facing women entrepreneurs such as access to finance and training. The conference also prepared recommendations for the third European Conference for Craft and Small Enterprises to be held in Milan on 20 and 21 November. These recommendations include a demand for comparable statistics on women entrepreneurs, better access to and more favourable conditions of financing including special EIB credits, better preparation in schools and training centres for girls and women entering self-employment, financial support during training and the setting up of local, regional and European networks. The conference was organised by the Danish Federation of Craft and Small Industries with the City of Copenhagen, and co-financed by the European Commission (DG XXIII) and a number of Danish and European organisations. ●

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Women influence change in social protection systems

The increasing number of women who are now in paid employment is one of the reasons behind the need to radically reform EU Member States' social protection systems. The changing nature of work and employment, characterised by greater flexibility, and the social protection needs of increasing numbers of old people, are others.

The Communication *Modernising and Improving Social Protection in the European Union*, published this year by the European Commission, recognised the gender aspect of the problem. The move towards equal opportunities for women and men and the increase in the number of working women from 46 to 61 million over the past 20 years has "had a strong impact on working life and society as a whole". The Communication confirms the widespread prediction that women's increased labour market participation will continue. This, it said will "make a valuable contribution to countering the impact of the ageing population".

This new gender balance is also making obsolete the traditional concept of social protection based on a family in which the husband is considered to be the main breadwinner and the wife not in paid employment. Family structures are changing with increasing divorced and single-parent

households. The Communication speaks of a "conflict" between the current situation and traditional family policy that "expects women to take the whole responsibility for housework and child and elder care at home".

The Communication identifies a twofold challenge for Europe's social protection systems in the equality field. To achieve equal treatment for men and women it argues they must find ways of individualising rights without penalising women who have not taken up paid employment. They must also find new arrangements to facilitate care for children and older people.

Pressures of an ageing population

Demographic trends are also forcing governments to rethink the funding and functioning of their pension and social protection systems. In 1995, 77 million European

citizens were aged 60 and over. By 2025, the Communication predicts this will increase by between 29 and 44 million people. Today's pension schemes are already straining under the weight of people moving from working life to retirement and fewer working people contributing to them.

The Communication looks at some of the alternatives being examined to make pension schemes viable. It concludes that a wholesale switch from today's "pay as you go" schemes to private pension funds is not realistic. Some Member States are increasing pension ages or basing entitlement on the number of years worked. But these solutions are seen to penalise women and, in the longer term, could work against the kinds of changes taking place in working life such as time taken off work at intervals to update skills. Similarly, the ever-growing numbers of very old people are putting pressure on healthcare and social services. ●

interview

Women at risk

In an interview with Women of Europe Newsletter, María Sornosa Martínez (GUE/NGL, Spain), who is drafting an opinion for the Committee on Women's Rights on the Commission's Communication *Modernising and improving social protection in the European Union*, said the current social model no longer corresponded to reality. The systems put in place responded to work and family structures which are now clearly outdated.

Member states must recognise social changes in society and integrate them into their systems, said María Sornosa Martínez. "The ageing population and the appearance of new family models, such as co-habiting couples, both heterosexual and homosexual, and single parent families, are factors to be taken into account in the modernisation of social protection. Without an adequate system of protection for older people, this will be an additional reason for the marginalisation and sexual exclusion of women who live longer than men."

Any reform of social protection systems must take account of women's reality, said María Sornosa Martínez. General systems and services catering for needs must look at the individual, exceptions should become the rule and everything that up to now remained outside these systems should be integrated. She gave the regulation and protection of part-time work, atypical work and telework, as examples. María Sornosa Martínez said social protection rights should be given to individuals and not families whose "structures are changing".

"Women are always among those at risk" when systems are being reformed, she said. This means that the largest part of society runs the risk of not being able to benefit from serious protection if discrimination is not overcome and if women, in terms of their rights, continue to be second-class, she explained. "A concrete example is a woman's salary which, in the family unit, is always considered as the second salary and her position in the family business is, at best, that of the assisting spouse. If reforms to social protection systems are coherent with social realities, we will be nearer the key objective of no longer being the "second sex" and achieving equality."

The individualisation of rights is our goal, said María Sornosa Martínez. "It is the only way of eliminating the dependence created by derived rights. But one thing should remain clear. As a result of sex discrimination many women do not have a pension in their own right but depend on rights derived from their husbands. This is why I am asking the Commission to carry out a study on the individualisation of tax and social protection regimes. It is becoming urgent to lay

down the necessary conditions for the practical implementation of the individualisation of rights."

A "universal right to social protection", is the only logical solution, she said. It is the same as any other universal right, such as the one for education recognised in all Member States. "The right of all individuals to an income allowing their full integration into society and to health services covering all their needs, must be guaranteed."

The debate on the modernisation of social protection systems "remains an open one and with it the objective to make possible the construction of a Europe based firmly on social cohesion and the welfare state. De facto equality, and not just its theoretical acknowledgement, is the most effective instrument to achieve equality between women and men", María Sornosa Martínez concluded. ●



María Sornosa Martínez

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