

# Women of Europe

On 14 December 1999, Neil Kinnock, the Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for administrative reform, announced that he wanted to improve career prospects for European officials. He said that his aim was to double the number of women in decision-making jobs by the end of his term of office. This was good to hear. We were moving towards a situation where women are better represented, and the European institutions were cleaning up their own act. When, on 9 February, the Commission went public on its strategic objectives for 2000-05, you could have knocked us over with a feather: there was plenty of talk of promoting new forms of governance and improving the quality of life of all European citizens, but not a word about equal opportunities. We held our breath until 15 February, when Romano Prodi addressed the European Parliament in Strasbourg. One of the things he said was: 'Of course, we cannot talk of governance or participatory democracy without addressing our ability to guarantee a reasonable level of representation for women in the decision-making process. We have to ensure that all European policies fully embrace the gender equality aspect. Europe is at the forefront of progressive thinking and action in terms of decision-making and law making with regard to employment rights for women. What we now have to do is address this question in political terms too'.

Soledad Blanco  
Head of Equal Opportunities Unit

## European Commission: Whither women?



**Within the European Commission's Personnel Directorate, the 'Non-discrimination and equal opportunities' Unit is working for equality by way of dialogue with all the personnel administration departments. Paula Laissy, Head of Unit, explains why the timing of administrative reform is crucial.**

**WEN:** What is the current situation for women at the various levels of the Commission hierarchy?

**PL:** Fifty per cent of officials are women, but most of them are grade C secretaries. The higher you go, the fewer there are. At graduate administrator level A, we have only 19% women, according to the 31 December 1999 figures which our unit has compiled and published. The third action programme for equal opportunities within the Commission was adopted in 1997 and runs to the end of 2000; this is the programme which has adopted the mainstreaming option, in other words, integrating the equal opportunities aspect into all Community measures and policies. It gives us the chance to discuss the matter with colleagues from departments concerned with recruitment, training and the management of human resources. In other words, the equal opportunities issue is no longer being seen in isolation, but extends to all departments.

**WEN:** One of the main thrusts of the EC's equal opportunities policy is to improve the working environment for all. Is this beneficial for women's careers?

**PL:** If we are going to reconcile family life and work, we have to set about changing a number of habits, e.g. working late or scheduling meet-

ings late in the evening. This is something that affects women in particular, but it also matters to fathers, especially if they are divorced. Reconciling the two can give women new opportunities. With an eye to administrative reform, Mr Kinnock asked us to prepare a working document, and I myself drew inspiration from the work of the Joint Committee on equal opportunities, which brings together the administration and the trade unions and which, under President Santer, drew up a document on equal opportunities which featured proposals for changing officials' status. They included such things as making part-time working an entitlement. This would enable women to continue working after maternity leave but to carry on being an active mother without sacrificing their careers. On the basis of these proposals, the Commission drew up a consultative document which led eventually to the adoption of a White Paper. The second main aspect of our equal opportunities policy is to work specifically for women who are A grade officials. We have still to see any results from this. Although it is true to say that the arrival of new Member States has brought with it new jobs for women, the recruitment system has remained pretty much blocked: the Commission has simply replaced the people who were leaving anyway.

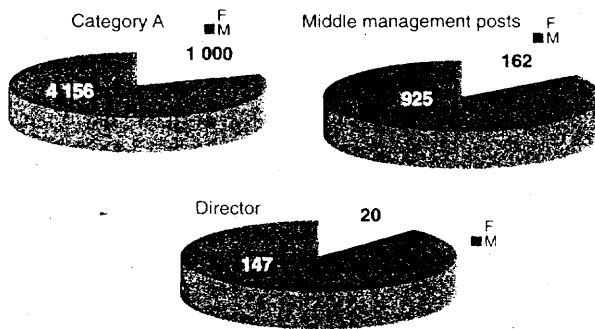
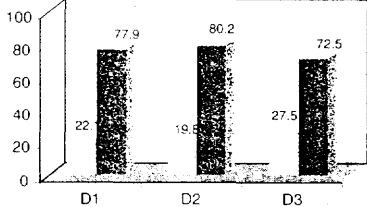
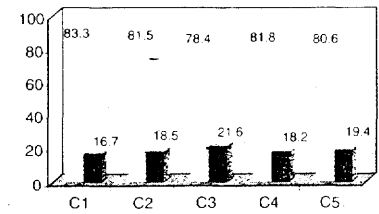
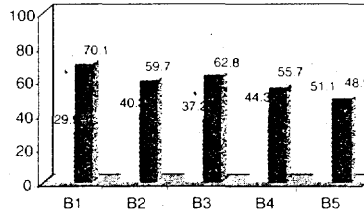
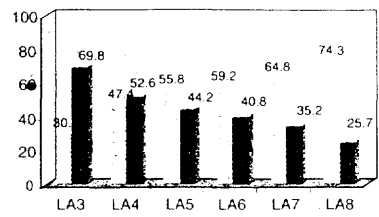
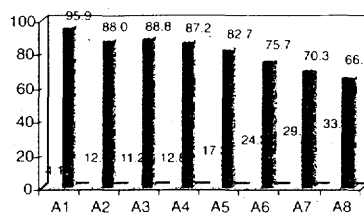
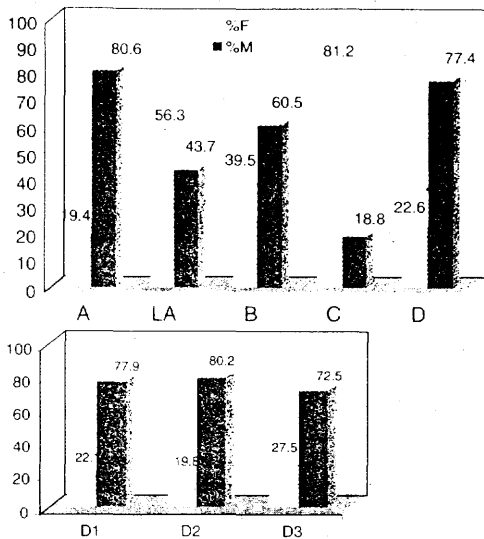
**WEN:** Women are rare at decision-making level. Is that going to change with the administrative reform?

**PL:** Mr Kinnock has come up with a very bold proposal, albeit one that has taken a mauling in the press, especially in the UK. He is proposing to double the percentage of women in Director-General and Director posts - from 10 to 20%. He is going to have to look for talented candidates; they do exist within the Commission - women and men alike.

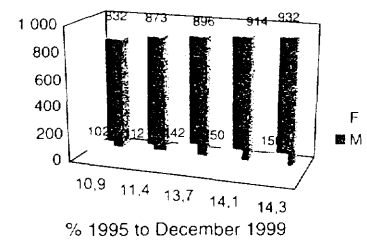
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Commission staff at 31 December 1999



Changes in middle management posts (1995 to December 1999)



Do not have discrimination and Equal Opportunities Unit. Source: Secretariat.

THE FRENCH EXAMPLE

The European institutions intend to set an example in terms of gender equality. But wait a minute — they have been upstaged by France's Banked 53rd in the hit parade for women's representation in the national legislative assemblies by the Interparliamentary Union, and outstripped by all the other members of the EU (apart from Greece), by a lot of African countries, and by some of the countries of Asia and Latin America, France, with its 11 % of women in the National Assembly and 3 % in the Senate, had plenty of ground to make up. But now it is set to become 'the first country in the world to stipulate that, for most elections, lists will have to feature as many men as women' according to Janine Mossuz-Lovau, a member of the Parity Monitoring Centre, writing in *Le Monde* on 25 January 2000. Following the revision of the French Constitution in June 1999, the Prime Minister, Mr Jospin, tabled his bill for gender parity in the Council of Ministers (the French Cabinet). On 25 January, the bill was adopted by Parliament.

The European Parliament takes stock

The European Parliament's Equal Opportunities Unit has just brought out its report (1) for the legislative period 1994-99. It quantifies progress made and pinpoints the way legal texts have been changing. As at 31 December 1998, women were in the majority (54.4 %) but where exactly were they to be found?

A fifth of all A grade officials are women. This is quite a substantial increase over 1994 (+ 19 %), thanks to the second recruitment action programme run by the Committee for Equal Opportunities 1997-2000 (COPEC). Four out of ten new recruits in 1998 were women. The report notes, however, that women are mainly to be found in the basic career grades (A8 and A7) and that women eligible for promotion are less likely than men to actually get promoted (25 % as against 42 %).

Among translation staff, there are on average more women than men (almost 54 %), but the proportion

declines the higher you go up the career scale. Over the period as a whole, it was evident that promotion opportunities were greater for men than for women, particularly in the B grade, where the number of women has actually declined over recent years.

Seventy per cent of secretaries are women. This is because women account for the very large majority of applicants for secretarial jobs (more than 90 %), and they are better at passing the tests, while 'the reverse is true for recruitment procedures for technical jobs' (category D), where they account for no more than 17 % of staff. A reflection of society at large, no doubt.

1998: A fresh start

In regulatory terms, the most important event was the adoption of a text amending the status of officials to reflect the Amsterdam Treaty's provisions on equal opportunities. Adopted by the Council on 7 April 1998, the regulation calls on the institutions to take positive action to deal with certain inequalities in the exercise of professional duties. In the wake of this initiative, the European Parliament's Bureau instructed one of its

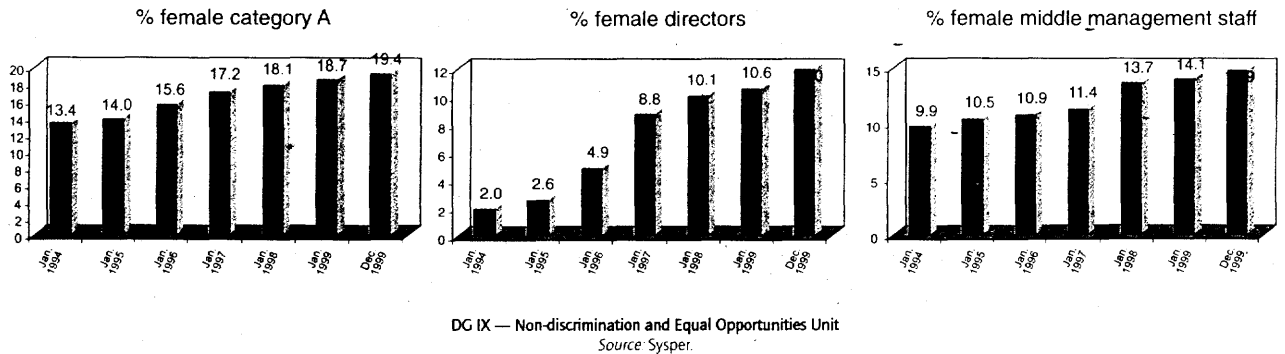
(1) Equal opportunities for men and women in the European Parliament's Secretariat General. Report on the legislative period 1994-99 and 1998 report, European Parliament, Directorate General for Personnel, Equal Opportunities Unit (January 2000).

Vice-Presidents, Mrs Hoff, to produce a report on the way equal opportunities measures for staff were being implemented. The report was tabled in March 1999, proposing certain specific measures on recruitment and career structure, along with quantified objectives in terms of percentage increases in the number of women in top jobs.

With all this happening — cooperation between equal opportunities committees from the various institutions (Intercopec) with a view to amending the staff regulations as part of the current reform process, developments and changes within Parliament itself — there is plenty of scope for optimism. Skilled and qualified women are the future in the EU institutions.

## European Commission: women in decision-making jobs

### Percentage changes in staff



### European Parliament

## Women's Rights Committee (WRC)

Invited to attend the 25 and 26 January session, Mrs Nicole Fontaine, the President of the European Parliament, had complimentary things to say about the WRC's work programme for the next five years. She also replied to questions on Parliament's staff policy and on her own position concerning gender equality in the institutions.

The WRC adopted Mrs Ghilardotti's report on the EQUAL initiative and on anti-discriminatory measures on the labour market. The rapporteur called on the Commission to make a clear distinction in its initiative programmes between priority action to combat gender discrimination and other action concerning religion, race, disability and sexual orientation. Mrs Klass's report on the social protection modernisation strategy, in which she advocated measures to promote a better balance between work and family life, was adopted after substantial amendments to strengthen the aspect

of equal treatment in social security matters. Mrs Kratsa took the view that the Commission's communication on the Community initiative URBAN ought to take more account of the equal treatment principle and should introduce added value to the other Community programmes on women's participation. Her report on urban development was also adopted.

On 23 February, the WRC held a public hearing on trafficking in women. The hearing was attended by various experts, and a victim of trafficking gave evidence. Mr Margue, from the European Commission, explained how the STOP programme was helping to coordinate the work of police forces, justice departments and social players in the fight against the trafficking phenomenon, which affected some 4 million people per year (figures from the International Organisation for Migration).

### Court of Justice

## Gender equality in the armed forces: the rule and the exception

On 11 January, the European Court of Justice held that German legislation excluding women from service in the armed forces was incompatible with the directive on gender equality. Tanja Kreil, who had previously been turned down, can now apply for a job as a technician in the German army. Germany's view had been that defence issues were a matter for the Member States. While the Court did not deny this, it held nonetheless that Member States could not use this as an excuse for circumventing the directive and excluding women from any military position in a national army. This ruling has given rise to lively debate among Germans, particularly in the European Parliament. While some see it as a violation of German sovereignty, others see it as an attack on society. The CSU MEP Joachim Wuermeling supported the ban on women in terms of 'wishing to protect the lives of women from the risks inherent in military service'. Emilia Müller, on

the other hand, herself a CSU MEP, regarded the ban as outdated 'in that women have long borne arms in the police'.

The European directive provides for exceptions to the gender equality principle where gender is an essential condition for a particular occupation. In October 1999, the Court invoked these exceptions in rejecting an appeal by Mrs Sirdar who, after working as a cook in the Royal Artillery, had requested a transfer to the Royal Marines, a request which was turned down on the grounds that the Marines did not take women. The Court held that the Marines were different from other units in that every individual, regardless of specialisation, had to be able to serve at any time in the Commandos. It ruled in favour of the Royal Marines, whose contention was that employing women was incompatible with this multi-functional role.

### INTERMINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE

From 2 to 4 November 1999, Stockholm played host to a ministerial conference, bringing together delegations from 30 countries: the Member States of the European Union, Norway, Iceland, the applicant countries and Russia. The subject was equal pay and economic independence for women. The non-Member States were urged to strengthen their equality laws, while for the Member States, equality in terms of the EU employment strategies was seen as a leitmotiv for the Lisbon Summit in March.

The Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson gave an inaugural address which was full of down-to-earth suggestions. He was accompanied by the minister responsible for equality issues, Margareta Winberg. This high-level presence was seen as a highly promising sign for the Presidency of the Council, which will fall to Sweden at the beginning of 2001.

## Conferences

### Business: women to the fore

A European forum on women in business took place in Paris on 14 February, on the initiative of the CNFDIFF and with the support of the European Social Fund. Discussion centred around business creation, specific forms of financing, time management and legislative aspects, and the forum set the ball rolling for a new European network for business creation by women, known as Eureka. More details on the Internet.

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or

[www.infofemmes.com](http://www.infofemmes.com)

### Science: input from women

On 3 and 4 April 2000, Brussels hosted a conference on 'Women and science: contributing to change', held under the auspices of Mr P. Busquin, the Member of the European Commission responsible for research. A record of the proceedings can be obtained by e-mail.

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### Women and business

With business undergoing a major makeover against the backdrop of globalisation and competition, 'Business in the 21st century' attracted plenty of people to an international congress held in Barcelona from 6 to 8 March, with the support of the Catalan authorities, and organised by the 'Fundación internacional de la dona emprendedora' (FIDEM). The main subjects touched upon were women and business management, business start-ups and the management of human resources.

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### Equal opportunities — a factor for change in business

In conjunction with the Barcelona city authorities and the Belgian Ministry of Labour and Employment's Equality Department, 'Emergences' organised a video conference, on 22 November 1999, on 'Equal opportunities for women and men: a factor for socioeconomic change in business'. The conference was held simultaneously in Barcelona, Brussels and Montreuil. The morning session gave a general overview of the situation of women on the labour market in the three countries and, in a wider perspective, at European level, with alternative sociological and grassroots input. The day continued in Montreuil with a round-table discussion focusing on what workers' representatives can do to address inequalities affecting women in their professional life.

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### Beijing+5

The UN's Economic Commission for Europe held a preparatory meeting in Geneva from 19 to 21 January 2000 to evaluate what had been done to implement the Beijing platform. Five of the major Beijing themes were investigated from the point of view of the undertakings entered into five years earlier, the persisting obstacles and the commitments for the future. The five themes are: the place of women in the economy; violence; the situation of women in armed conflicts; the situation of women in terms of decision-making; and the institutional mechanisms of decisive importance for the promotion of women. Subsequently, on 3 and 4 February, representatives of the 15 Member States met in Brussels to prepare a common position for presentation to the UN General Assembly of June 2000. The next issue of the Newsletter will be entirely given over to Beijing+5. We shall be taking a more in-depth look at these two conferences.

## Publications

### ETAN report

Following on from the Council resolution on the position of women in science (May 1999), the Commission has now published the ETAN report 'Science policy in the EU: promoting excellence through equal opportunities'. This document is the centrepiece of the debate on improving the position of women in science. It sets out essential information and formulates proposals. The electronic version is available on the Internet ([http://www.cordis.lu/improving/src/hp\\_women.htm](http://www.cordis.lu/improving/src/hp_women.htm)). A printed version is also available from the Commission's 'Women and science' sector: fax (32-2) 29-93746.

### Sexism in the media

Invisible, under-represented, stereotyped — three words to describe women in the media, according to the results of a survey conducted by the French women journalists' association and quoted in a wide range of publications and radio news bulletins. Along with the 'CFD-Ecole des métiers de l'information' (Paris), the association has now brought out a booklet discussing the place and image of women as reported in the media, and the language that commentators tend to use. The illustrations are in much the same mould. For example, the *Nouvel Observateur*, 30 July 1998, has an illustration of 73 men and 39 women; three of the women are naked, and another is clad in a bathing costume and perched on roller skates. Could it be because they see nothing of relevance to themselves that women tend to avoid newspapers? The association points out that, in 1997, 9 % of women were regular readers of a national daily, compared with 17 % of men. On the other hand, 45 % of women read a women's magazine, somewhere where they are not left in the shade.

*'Dites-le avec des femmes, Le sexisme dans les médias', Virginie Barré, Sylvie Debras, Natacha Henry, Monique Trancart, préface de Benoîte Groult, CFD, éditeur 1999, 140 pp.*

