

Women of Europe

Editorial

International Women's Day, on 8 March, offered an opportunity to evaluate progress, look at persisting discrimination and see what remains to be done in the field of women's rights.

Invited to speak to the European Parliament on equal opportunities, Jacques Santer, President of the Commission, used this occasion to measure recent progress in the field by the European institutions: the EU's contribution to the UN Conference in Beijing, the adoption of the Fourth Action Programme on Equal Opportunities, the recommendation on the participation of women in decision-making and the agreement on parental leave. He reiterated his commitment to equal opportunities.

Jacques Santer also described Commission actions currently under way: the Communication on mainstreaming and a forthcoming Communication on the interpretation of the Kalanke ruling. He mentioned initiatives taken within the Commission itself such as the setting up of the Group of Commissioners on Equal Opportunities and the continuation of staff policy which, by promoting equality in recruitment and ensuring women are present at management level, seeks to serve as a model for Member State public sectors.

President Santer's commitment to women's rights is of particular importance in the context of the recent launch of the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) which will also examine equal opportunities.

In its Opinion on the IGC, the Commission includes "provisions banning discrimination of any kind, particularly on the basis of sex" into the chapter on human rights. This extension of the notion of equality of opportunity to human rights is a positive and, I hope, irreversible development, stemming from commitments made at the highest levels of EU decision-making and based on the political will expressed during the Beijing Conference.

Equal rights between men and women has now become a general, and not just sectoral, policy.



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Preparing tomorrow's Europe

The Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) to review the Maastricht Treaty on European Union, started on 29 March in Turin, attended by EU Member State Foreign Ministers and the European Commission. This is the beginning of a long negotiation process that is expected to last several months. In an Opinion on the IGC, the Commission said that the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference "is probably the last and only opportunity all 15 Member States will have to reflect together how the Union is to function in a wider framework." The European Parliament and

the Reflection Group set up after the 1994 Corfu Summit to prepare the Treaty review (see *Women of Europe Newsletter No 53*) have also put forward position papers for the start of the talks. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were consulted directly by Commissioner Marcelino Oreja and invited to present their views at two public hearings organised by the Parliament. Three issues have been the focus of debate: A citizen's Europe, giving the Union a clear identity on the world scene and preparing it for enlargement.



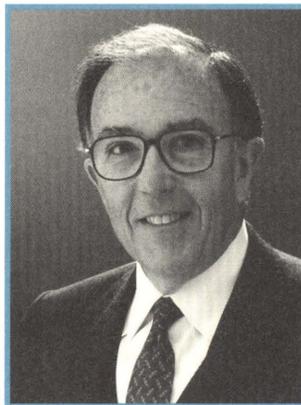
A people's Europe

The European Union must become closer to its citizens, make its presence better felt in the world and adapt its working methods to open its doors to a further 12 new Member States. Without such preparation, the European Commission, in its Opinion on the IGC, fears that enlargement would endanger "the achievements of 40 years of European integration" and "the peace and prosperity it has generated. This incomparable heritage must now be developed, and extended to the other countries of a continent that has been divided for too long."

Europe, it said, is built on a set of common values combining democracy and the respect of human rights including equality with an "open economy underpinned by market forces, internal solidarity and cohesion."

The Commission urged the IGC to clearly "signal its espousal of these values" by including in the Treaty new provisions banning any kind of discrimination, "particularly on the basis of sex, thereby extending the provisions on equal pay," and condemning racism and xenophobia. The Reflection Group in its report and the European Parliament in its Resolution based on a report drawn up by Raymonde Dury and Hanja Maij-Weggen also called for the inclusion of such clauses.

Parliament said the principle of equal treatment and non-discrimination should be included in a new Treaty chapter on European citizenship which makes clear that European citizenship "does not replace national citizenship but complements it" giving new rights and obligations towards the Union. It said equal treatment and non-discrimination should cover "race, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion or handicap." Parliament wanted the current equality provisions in Article 119 of the Rome founding Treaty "to be maintained" but also "extended to all aspects of equal opportunities in economic and social life."



Marcelino Oreja

The Commission said the social dimension of Europe "should be one of the central themes." Like the Parliament it called for "a common base of social rights for all Union citizens" and for the integration into the Treaty of the Social Protocol which currently does not include the UK. The Treaty should also allow for cooperation between Member States on social policy issues such as marginalisation and poverty, it said.

With unemployment affecting nearly 20 million people in the Union, the Commission urged that specific provisions on employment should be written into the Treaty to permit a common strategy to create jobs. The Parliament also made the same appeal.



Simplifying Europe and making it more understandable and accessible to ordinary people was urged by the Commission, Parliament and the Reflection Group. "Europe must do less, so as to do it better," said the Commission.

A clear identity on the world scene

The Union has not been able "to pursue a consistent foreign policy," said the Commission, urging effective cooperation in the future between the Council and Commission "to present a united front". The IGC, it said, should have "a clear and simple aim: to empower the Union to act rather than react, the better to defend the interests of its people." Like the Parliament, it recommends the creation of a joint analysis unit which would have the task of helping the Presidency and the Commission to prepare "more consistent" proposals for foreign and security policy.

The Commission, Parliament and Reflection Group agree on the need for a "genuine European identity" in the field of defence. The Commission said a proper common foreign and security policy must ex-

tend to common defence and that commitments to missions aimed at restoring or keeping the peace should be written into the Treaty. A "European pillar" should be developed within NATO and the role of the Western European Union reviewed.

Preparing for enlargement

To pave the way for enlargement, the Commission proposes a number of reforms. It wants an end to the national veto which is possible because of the unanimity rule that is generally applied. This gives any one Member State the possibility to block a decision in the Council of Ministers. The Commission said this rule either "paralyses" the Council "or reduces decisions to the lowest common denominator". The Commission opts for majority voting as the general rule with "superqualified" majority voting (which it leaves up to the IGC to define) for certain sensitive issues.

It backs the Parliament's proposal to limit its seats to 700. It wants the Commission President to be elected by the European Council and endorsed by the Parliament

and for the President to play a decisive role in choosing the Commission's members, which should be reduced to one per Member State.

The Parliament also agreed with the idea of at least one Commissioner per Member State but said the system of appointing the Commission needed to be reformed so "that the President of the Commission is directly elected by the European Parliament on the basis of names provided by the European Council."

The Commission concluded that a "pick and choose Europe" with countries deciding to opt out of policies they do not like such as the Social Protocol should be prevented. But, it emphasised, at the same time, this does not mean the Union should be limited "to advance at the speed of its slowest members".

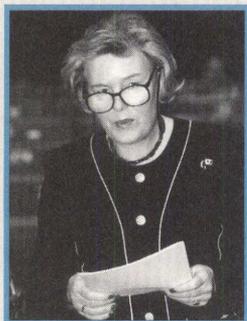
Consulting the public

Marcelino Oreja, European Commissioner responsible for the IGC, has started "a direct and regular dialogue" on the IGC with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) representing the civil society. A monthly letter is sent by him to an ever-growing list of NGOs updating them on the latest IGC developments and seeking their views and reactions. Commissioner Oreja said reform must be based on a "Citizenship Pact" between the Union, its Member States and its citizens.

The European Parliament also decided to consult NGOs in two public hearings on the IGC organised by it in October 1995 and February this year. Over 300 organisations representing thousands of EU citizens responded to the invitation. Commenting on the "spectacular participation" at the hearings, European Parliament President Klaus Hänsch said "with their presence, the citizens have proved the interest they have in European unification which has deeper roots than Euro-pessimists would have us believe. Without the participation of its citizens, Europe cannot progress."

The Parliament in its resolution on the IGC raised many of the concerns expressed by European NGOs and members of the civil society who attended the hearings. It has now forwarded the summary records of both hearings to the IGC "to act as an initial checklist of citizen's concerns about the issues which need to be faced by the European Union."

Raymonde Dury and Hanja Maij-Weggen, authors of the Parliament's report, said the hearings promoted "greater involvement by citizens, more transparency and better information." Raymonde Dury suggested that similar hearings could be held in each Member State by the national parliaments "to give impetus to participative democracy."



Hanja Maij-Weggen
Photo: European Parliament



Raymonde Dury
Photo: European Parliament

The first hearing focused on citizenship, social policy and the environment, public health and consumer policy. The second focused on culture, economic policy, public services and transport, tourism, regional policy and agriculture, foreign, security and development policies and legal issues.

The call at both hearings was clear. Europe must become closer to all its citizens: women and men, children, the young, the elderly, the disabled, the socially excluded. The social dimension had to go hand-in-hand with economic development and integration. The Treaty had to guarantee human and social rights and ban all forms of discrimination. It had to protect the environment and the quality of life. The notion of EU citizenship had to be clearly defined. Groups and associations should play a more active role to bridge the gap between EU institutions and the public in European policymaking and throughout the Treaty revision process. The next move in this dialogue remains with the IGC.

Mainstreaming now official policy

Equality between women and men is one of the basic principles of democracy and respect for humankind and among the main challenges facing the European Union, according to the European Commission in a Communication drawn up on the initiative of the Group of Commissioners on Equal Opportunities and adopted in March. "By firmly committing itself to take into consideration the respective priorities and needs of women and men in all its policies and measures, the Community would demonstrate its attachment to democracy and its attention to the concerns of citizens."

This is the principle of "mainstreaming" said the Commission. It involves "mobilising all general policies and measures" to achieve equality "by actively and openly taking into account at the planning stage their possible effects on the respective situations of men and women, (the gender per-

Mainstreaming: incorporating equal opportunities for women and men into all Community policies and activities at all levels

spective)." The Commission recognises that transforming this principle into reality will require not only changes in legislation, attitudes and collective practices but also "a cultural transformation of individual behaviour" and "determined political action based on the broadest possible mobilisation."

The Communication takes stock of EU action on equal opportunities in a number of areas: employment and the labour market, the status of women entrepreneurs and assisting spouses in SMEs, education and training, rights of persons, external relations, information and raising awareness as well as the Commission's equal opportunities policy for its own staff. It also takes a look at the Structural Funds, the Community's main financial instrument to promote employment, training and regional development. Equal opportunities was added to the rules governing co-financing under the Structural Funds in 1993.

For its part, the Commission reinforced its mobilisation effort in 1995 when it created, under Commission President Jacques

Santer, the Group of Commissioners in charge of stimulating the reflection on equal opportunities (see *Women of Europe Newsletter No 53*) supported by an interdepartmental group.

A seminar looking at how the Structural Funds can better contribute to the promotion of equal opportunities was organised by the Belgian Ministry of Employment and Labour, Department of Employment, Labour and Equal Opportunities, with the support of the European Commission on 7 and 8 March in Brussels. The Funds' objectives, strategies and mechanisms were examined to intensify efforts on equal opportunities in the future. ●

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Committee on Women's Rights

Equal opportunities in Member State and European civil services was discussed at the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights during its 22 and 23 January meeting. Rapporteur Jessica Larive told the Committee that this issue needed attention because of continuing labour market segregation, the need for a public sector model for equal opportunities and the likely consequences of the Kalanke ruling (see *Women of Europe Newsletter No 57*).

The Committee also discussed the Intergovernmental Conference and the work of the Reflection Group with Parliament rapporteurs Raymonde Dury and Hanja Maij-Weggen. Anne Van Lancker, author of the Committee's Opinion, highlighted the shortcomings of the Treaty in terms of equal opportunities, in particular the limited scope of Article 119, and called for a more explicit legal basis for the development of equal opportunities policy. Christine Crawley warned, however, of the dangers of rewriting Article 119 in the present climate fearing that current gains could be jeopardised. She suggested adding to Article 119 to strengthen it instead of rewriting it.

Representatives from the *ETUC (European Trade Union Confederation)* and *UNICE (Union of Industrial and Employers Federations in Europe)* explained the parental leave agreement reached between them. They said this was a first step towards including equal opportunities in the social dialogue process.

Sabine de Béthune, Coordinator of the *Women in Decision-making Network*, presented a statistical overview of women in finance, law, public health and education.

The Director General of DG V, Allan Larsson, told the Committee he plans to focus work on four main areas: the European social model for the promotion of equal opportunities, the role of employment policy for equal opportunities, parental leave and the Fourth Equal Opportunities Action Programme. He said a stronger social dimension in future was not a burden but an asset for Europe.

At the February 26 and 27 meeting, Matilda Grassi, Italian State Secretary for Employment and President of the Social Affairs Council, outlined the Italian Presidency's priorities in equal opportunities. These include finalising the parental leave agree-

ment and the Recommendation on women in decision-making, advancing on the draft directives on the reversal of the burden of proof and atypical work and integrating women's rights in all policies.

Helena Torres Marques regretted that several important points raised by the Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee, such as the individualization of rights, had not been included in the Commission's draft amended directive on equal treatment for men and women in social security schemes (see *Women of Europe Newsletter No 58*). This proposal was introduced following the Barber judgement. She called for an article in the revised Treaty explicitly encouraging positive measures for women.

Antoinette Fouque gave a summary of her report on the follow-up to the Cairo conference on population and development (see *Women of Europe Newsletter No 57*) highlighting areas she felt required attention such as the availability of quality health care and access to education for women and girls. The report suggests that the EU play a leading role in promoting the creation of networks and research and information facilities on these issues.

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A number of other opinions were adopted during this meeting covering parental leave, the work of the Reflection Group and the Parliament's priorities for the IGC and HIV/AIDS operations in developing countries. The committee also agreed to hold a hearing on the Kalanke ruling on 25 April and a hearing on the situation of spouses of the self-employed on 29 March.

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Resolution on equal pay adopted

The European Parliament called for a "precise rewording" by the IGC of Article 119 to guarantee equal pay for work of equal value in accordance with European Court of Justice case law. In a resolution adopted in February based on the report by Paola Colombo Svevo (see *Women of Europe Newsletter No 57*), Parliament called for the setting up of a permanent, uniform and comparable information system to enable wage differentials to be measured. It also said it wanted a survey on the causes of wage discrimination between the sexes and asked the Commission to look into non-discriminatory methods of job evaluation.

Communication on racism, xenophobia & anti-semitism

Racism, xenophobia and anti-semitism need to be tackled urgently, according to the European Commission in a Communication highlighting the EU's role in this field. In it, the Commission proposes designating 1997 as European Year Against Racism. The Communication will be covered in-depth in a forthcoming issue of the *Women of Europe Newsletter*.

Violence Against Women in the World: Differences, Similarities

At a one-day conference organised by UNESCO and the French Employment and Social Affairs Ministry in Paris recently, women from Ethiopia, Mexico, Spain, Canada, Italy and the United States spoke of the different forms of violence against women in their countries providing evidence of the extent of this problem. They expressed their concern about persisting discrimination and the worldwide industry in the trafficking and sexual exploitation of women and girls.

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Women in the City: Housing, Services and the Urban Environment

Published by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development), this book reports on a conference on women and urbanism it organised in 1994. It presents concrete examples of women's involvement in urban planning, the provision of housing and urban services and their contribution to the improvement of the urban environment.

To obtain a copy (in English or French), contact:

**OECD
2, rue André Pascal
F-75775 Paris.
Tel. (33.1)45 24 82 00 - Fax: (33.1)49 10 42 76.**

Women: Setting New Priorities

Published by the Whirlpool Foundation, this book presents the results of a survey carried out in five EU countries (France, Germany, the UK, Italy and Spain) on the changing roles and concerns of women at work, in the home and in society in general. It is the second in a four-part research study. The first, entitled *Women: the New Providers* published in 1995, looked at the role of women in the United States. The third will look at women in Asia and the fourth will draw a comparative analysis of the results of all the studies.

To obtain a copy in English, contact:

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