

Editorial

I am particularly happy to have the opportunity to speak to the women of Europe through this editorial. I hope that this is only the beginning of a fruitful and significant cooperation between DG X, which I am honoured to head, and organisations which encourage and support the women's movement in Europe. This cooperation already exists but I, for my part, would like to give it a renewed impetus and another dimension.

We need to discuss the issue of information with the women of Europe and their representatives at all levels. Women citizens of the

Union must have access to clear and useful information of relevance to their daily lives. The dissemination of information by women and for women is a specific area of action and a personal challenge for me and for DG X. We are going to rise to

this challenge with enthusiasm and sensitivity, but also with a practical and realistic spirit. DG X services dealing with issues of interest to women will, therefore, be strengthened.

I am also seizing this opportunity to emphasise my conviction that women play a unique role in the achievement of the objectives of a unified Europe. All surveys conclude that women want to see the creation of a fairer, more tolerant, pluralist and multicultural society respecting difference and individuality and opposing marginalisation and alienation. This society must be integrated into the European vision and inspire all those working towards achieving the objectives of the European Union.

I believe it is important that this issue of the newsletter is devoted to a Europe of individualities in which people can maintain their values and their roots while acting as citizens of a wider society. A Europe in which individuals are citizens respected for their principles and specific aspirations and participate fully in the unification through a common and conscious approach and a joint concept of the history of Europe and its peoples.

I hope my skills in the field of information and culture will be useful to the women of Europe, their organisations and their associations as well as to all other citizens who believe in and share your aspirations. In this context, I would like to highlight the importance we attach to women's local and regional initiatives and those of their elected women representatives and the organisations supporting them. They are proof of the conviction that we all have -

men and women - irrespective of our ideas, our religions, our origins and our customs, that we can live together, act and create for the common good while respecting democratic rules.

Democratic, decentralised and pluricultural activities within the framework of the European Union and its institutions transpire through an equal participation of men and women. Allow me to say, however, that women's participation in this is unique in that it represents the contribution of a positive way of thinking and an approach which is sensitive to daily life which undoubtedly is closer to them. •



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To mark 9 May,
Europe Day,

this special edition of
Women of Europe Newsletter looks
at women's participation in local
and regional political life.

insights

Women in local & regional political life

The number of women elected to decision-making posts at local and regional level varies throughout the EU but in all countries the numbers are rising. Elected in greater numbers on the different political decision-making bodies within their regions and localities, they have brought with them a new outlook on local and regional development. Margot Wikström, Chairwoman of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and member of the *Committee of the Regions*, Marie-Christine Blandin, President of France's Nord-Pas-de-Calais Regional Executive and Patrizia Dini, a member of the Regional Council of Tuscany in Italy give below an insight into their work. Three women mayors then speak out about the changes they are bringing to their cities and towns. They are Catherine Trautmann, the mayor of Strasbourg (France), Edite Estrela, the mayor of Sintra (Portugal) and Leona Detiège, the mayor of Antwerp (Belgium).

In 1995, the percentage of women in regional governments in EU Member States was estimated at 26.1%. These figures compare favourably with the number of women in EU Member State governments where, in 1995, out of the 580 members of national governments, only 83 were women, that is a total of 15.7%.

system, has by far the highest representation of women in local and regional political life. For example, 42.9% of members of Sweden's regional government are women. Finland and Denmark hold the next best record. The lowest number of women representatives is to be found in Greece.

Towards a decentralised Europe

This average figure hides great national and regional variations. Sweden, where the national government operates on a parity

The move towards greater regional and local cooperation and representation at EU

level has existed for as long as the European Community itself. The *Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)* was founded in Geneva in 1951 to promote co-operation between European cities and now has a membership of over 100,000 local and regional authorities from 27 different countries.

The *Assembly of European Regions (ARE)* was founded in 1985 to promote inter-regional cooperation. It now has 235 members in 18 countries (EU Member States and countries of Central and Eastern Europe).

By 1994, EU Member States gave official recognition to this need for regional and local representation in EU policy-making. Under the Maastricht Treaty, a new institution, the *Committee of the Regions* was set up. A consultative body, the Committee plays an important role in strengthening economic and social cohesion in the EU and bringing decision-making as close as possible to the citizen. The Committee has 222 members, only 22 of whom are women.

Call for more women in elected posts

Margot Wikström became Chairwoman of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities in 1995 after a long and active career in local politics in the town of Umea. She has been a member of the *Committee of the Regions* since Sweden joined the European Union two years ago.

Margot Wikström said she regretted that the number of men on the Committee far exceeds the number of women. "Men take their exercise of male power for granted", she said. This is reflected, inter alia, in the composition of the Presidium. "Of the 35 members of the Presidium, one is a woman."

Although there are so few women on the Committee, Margot Wikström said they usually "do their homework and know what they are talking about". Like in other political contexts, she said "women do not speak just for the sake of speaking, they speak when they have something to say".

"There must be more of us!" This is important both for local authorities and regions, and for Europe. "A Citizens Europe will never materialise if women are excluded from the decision-making bodies. It is time for each individual Member State, and each political party, to get its act together on this issue."

Margot Wikström feels strongly that both politics and society benefit from women's greater political representation. As local politicians, women have "greater responsibility and influence policies much more than people generally realise". She regretted that women were still very much under-represented, both in politics and in positions of influence in society in general.



Marie-Christine Blandin © Jean-Luc Cornu

Although unwilling to generalise, she felt women had a "more unpretentious attitude to their mandate and to those they represent than men". In her experience, "women were more inclined to listen, accept other points of view and (to) compromise".

Cooperation essential between cities, between regions

Marie-Christine Blandin, President of France's Nord-Pas-de-Calais Regional Executive, echoed these sentiments.

She said "identity cannot be split up. I am a woman, I feel, I listen, I analyse, I speak, I act in my capacity as a woman activist with responsibility for an Institution and with the constant concern to make democracy live".

She works in close collaboration with four surrounding regions - the county of Kent in south east England, Flanders, Wallonia and the Brussels Region in Belgium - within the *Euroregion* network. She said such cooperation was essential. It was no longer possible for each region to work in isolation.

Some 15.5 million people live in these five regions. Together they share common aspirations about the regional development of their area but also about their daily lives. The five regions account for 5% of the EU's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), as much as London or Paris, she said. They are at the hub of many of Europe's major infrastructure works such as the Channel Tunnel development and the EU high speed train network.

"The upheaval in transport provision (...) and the management of sustainable development both at a social, economic as well as at an environmental level are new factors which have to be taken into consideration in formulating regional policy: from the control of freight traffic to the necessary priority to be given to employment, the workload is vast".

On this last point, "I signed a text jointly with Luc Van Den Brande, President of the Flanders Region, in which we condemned the closure of the Renault plant in Vilvoorde and stressed the need to build a social Europe in contrast to the liberal policies imposed on us".



Catherine Trautmann © Ville de Strasbourg

A personal approach to the job

Patrizia Dini, a member of the Regional Council of Tuscany in Italy and President of the Institutional Affairs Committee there, said she never "felt" that as a woman the political world had prevented her from remaining true to herself.

"In the context of my political-administrative activity within the Regional Council I have exercised, since 1990, a function of political management in my party and I have assumed the task of provincial administrator for the past 9 years. In all the tasks I have been given, I have always put my experience as an individual first and foremost."

But, as Assessor for the Regional Budget, it was not always easy "to reconcile my deep convictions with the need to carry out the decisions made by all my colleagues, men and women". But "the constant exchange of information and opinions between elected women representatives, which I often ask for, have helped me a lot".

Putting human values in decision-making

Catherine Trautmann has been Mayor of Strasbourg, France and a Member of the European Parliament since 1989. She has been active in city politics since 1983 when she joined the Strasbourg City Council. She is currently chairwoman of the Strasbourg Urban Community.

Catherine Trautmann said she is convinced that women, whom she considers the "first users" of the city, have a better vision of urban development. Their idea of how space should be organised is inspired by "the needs of the people they are responsible for and who are often the most vulnerable".

Women put human values back into decision-making as a fundamental criteria. It is this idea of the city that has "always guided me in my choices, whether in terms of urban equality, solidarity, the strengthening of local democracy or the design of our tramway system. For me, it is the basic condition to guarantee a sustainable development of our cities".

Catherine Trautmann feels that the future of Europe is closely linked to that of its cities. There are many examples of cooperation between European cities with Strasbourg as an active partner. An illustration of just such a cooperation is Sarajevo. "Togeth-



Patrizia Dini © Bertinucci

er with Barcelona, Bologna and many other cities belonging to the Eurocities network, Strasbourg decided, with the support of the European Commission, to help rebuild peace because Europe's 'breakdown' was unable to avoid war." This included support to reorganise water distribution networks and waste disposal and to reconstruct the city through enterprise creation initiatives, she explained.

"I want to put my experience as a locally elected woman politician at the service of Europe." When a city "is threatened, the very idea of an urban, civil and mixed society is also threatened".

Women's vision of urban development

Edite Estrela, Mayor of Sintra, a major municipality north of Lisbon in Portugal, found that women have a different and more human vision of urban development. "This vision is universal, does not belong to a particular country, but is simply feminine."

She said there are fundamental differences between how women and men operate in political life. "Women act according to reason but also according to their heart. Women's dedication is deeper but also more self-sacrificing."

For her, the exercise of power at local level was interesting and significant when considered from a woman's point of view. "Women have a greater sensitivity for the concrete problems of daily life and this is why they are so well equipped to work in local government."

"Exchanges of experience, sensitivity in the analysis of daily problems in local government, the role I play in the local decision-making structures are all important to me in the work I am developing as Mayor of Sintra", said Edite Estrela.

Managing in partnership

Leona Detiège, Mayor of Antwerp, Belgium, said it was the collaborative effort between herself and her coalition partners which resulted in the economic and social development of her city.

"I, personally, have had no pioneering role" as a woman mayor of the city of Antwerp, she said. "One of my predecessors and fellow party member Mathilde Schroyens was, in the late 70s and early 80s, after a long career in the municipal education system and alderwoman for education, the first female mayor of Antwerp," she explained. "Managing a city does not depend on being a woman or a man, but on the ability to make people work together."

"In the field of municipal government, both I and all the coalition partners in the current City Council aim to lay the foundations of stable and innovative policy-making which will respond to and meet the needs of Antwerp residents and companies established in the city."

She said the Antwerp City Council was

doing its utmost "to adopt a new style of government, bringing decision-making and services as close to the citizen as possible". The new policy aims to restore "a harmonious society" which is pleasant to live in.

She wants to make Antwerp a city that is strong on the economic front but also in culture, a city that can combat social imbalances, promote employment and take care of the environment.

Antwerp was designated the 1993 Cultural Capital of Europe. "Antwerp 93 was a large and complex project which concentrated on art, stimulated the debate about the place of art in society, showed the work of contemporary young artists and gave many artists the opportunity to create new work", said Leona Detiège.

The spin-offs were enormous for the city, she said. "Antwerp 93 enhanced the city's image and the investments made to restore and renovate the cultural and tourist infrastructure are continuing to pay off."



Leona Detiège
© Stad Antwerpen

Exchange of experience between elected European women

In 1996, the Committee of local and regional elected representatives of the Council of Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) created the European Network of Women Elected Representatives of Local and Regional Authorities. Supported by the European Commission, this network encourages the exchange of information, experience and expertise and supports women in their political careers. All the women interviewed recognised the positive contribution made by the EU to their region or city.

Rosemary McKenna, a Councillor for North Lanarkshire (United Kingdom) and President of the network said it now has over 600 members. It was set up "following a call from women elected members who wished more effective means to access information and exchange views and experience amongst each other". With this network, members have "the opportunity to



Rosemary McKenna
© T. Scott Roxburgh

learn from one another, thus strengthening their work nationally and locally", she explained. Another of the network's tasks is to support members' efforts to promote women's participation in politics at a local and regional level.

The network is greatly valued by its members. Patrizia Dini said in her interview that "it is a basic instrument of work". Edite Estrela said she valued the network as a forum for exchange of experience and for the encouragement it provides to women in positions of responsibility.

Rosemary McKenna favoured cooperation between women elected representatives

from within the EU and Central and Eastern European countries "on issues such as local democracy and equality of opportunity in local politics". This will further "the democratisation of Europe and the preparation for enlargement".

By encouraging women's active involvement in local politics, "the network will have the wider effect of furthering women's participation in politics at a national level". In addition, the information disseminated by the network will include reports not only of activities by local and regional government but also the activities of the European Union.

This should mean that "the relevance of EU activities at a local level will be better understood by women elected members at a local level". Rosemary McKenna hoped this would encourage them to take a more active interest in EU politics.

She said as part of the network's activities this year, a study will be undertaken to evaluate women's participation in local politics.

“The results of the evaluation will be used to monitor developments in this area and to publicise the status of women in decision-making, maintaining pressure on governments to act”.

European Union strengthens local and regional initiatives

All the interviewees agreed that the European Union has contributed vitally to the development of their cities, towns and regions. It has done this through funding major infrastructure projects, through its enterprise and employment creation support, through the promotion of culture and through the combat of unemployment and social exclusion. Most consider the EU's role as an essential one for the future of their cities and regions.

Patrizia Dini said the links between regions and the European Union “should be

strengthened and the barriers encountered in the past, when regional autonomy was much more limited, should be lifted”.

Edite Estrela sees EU participation in the development of Sintra as “absolutely essential”. She said “we are talking of a region of Heritage and Humanity, responsibility should be shared by all. My project for Sintra is therefore a European project”.

“Europe is visible in many initiatives in Strasbourg”, said Catherine Trautmann. This support has helped develop local infrastructures and strengthen local initiatives. Among the projects she described as “closest to my heart” was the project started in 1993 and co-funded under the European Social Fund which promotes the social and professional reintegration of people. Some 1,700 people are expected to benefit from the programme until the end of 1997.

Leona Detiège also emphasised that the European Union was contributing to the regeneration of her city through, for example, the *Local Integration Action* programme to support ethnic minority entrepreneurship.

Marie-Christine Blandin said EU financial support for the Nord-Pas-de-Calais was crucial. But she urged more direct links between regions and the European Union, bypassing central government. “Unfortunately, in France, the regions cannot negotiate directly with the European institutions. Because of its centralised structure, the State forgets the principle of additionality and benefits from European generosity to solve its national budget problems. It does not fulfil its duty of solidarity and no longer pays its share to regions in crisis”.

interview
Regional and local policy opens way for women



Monika Wulf-Mathies
© European Commission

Following the interviews with women elected representatives, who talk about how, as women, they have influenced political decisions and strategies of development in society, Monika Wulf-Mathies, the European Commissioner in charge of Regional Policy, explains here how she feels EU regional policy has enabled women to become players and partners in the functioning of the EU and to participate in national and European political life.

What do you feel women in local areas and the regions can contribute to the European Union?

For the last seven or eight years, European Regional Policy has been delivered in such a way that allows local people and thus women to maximise their input, to play a part in strategic thinking and in the submission and selection of projects. Also, the objective of European Regional Policy has become much more clearly focused. The emphasis now is firmly on creating jobs, putting to and preparing people for work.

European Regional Policy empowers women in particular to participate in the conception of economic development programmes, making their distinctive input, and formulating and putting together projects which are eligible for European co-financing. Women also benefit as people undergoing training, people who are in work or as entrepreneurs.

Do you think women have a greater opportunity to get involved and participate in political life at local level? To what extent would you see this as a first step towards their greater political involvement at national and EU level?

Women often take up the challenge of getting involved in local political life because they are faced with problems that concern them immediately. The lack of a creche or a kindergarten, for instance, or inequalities in the workplace might induce women to become active in local political life. Certainly, the experience gained at a local level is the natural first step to accessing politics at a national and EU level.

What impact do you feel EU regional policies and programmes have on women?

One of the political priorities for the implementation of structural policy is equality of opportunity for women - the others being the creation of durable employment especially by supporting research and development, and the environment. I have insisted that this idea should guide our main-

stream programmes and Community initiatives as well as our pilot projects. In order to ensure that regional policies and programmes benefit women, special initiatives like *NOW (New Opportunities for Women)* have been set up by the Commission.

A good example of how this process works in reality is the teleworking centre at the small rural community of Castelmoren-sur-France. In 1993, this small community invested in a teleworking centre capable of offering services to distant clients. After developing a clientele in the Paris region, Télergros, the company responsible for operating the centre, set about creating telesecretarial services in rural areas. These centres - there are now six of them in France - carry out administrative tasks and employ about twenty people. Most of them are women, often farmers' wives who live in the vicinity of the centre that employs them. For these women, working with these new communication technologies is a means of gaining new prospects and breaking out of the isolation of their community.