

# **THE INTERNAL POLICIES OF THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS ON GENDER EQUALITY AND GENDER REPRESENTATION**

*Modena, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2006*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Modena authorities not only for this invitation but for the organisation of this event. This is a subject that has to remain alive in our agendas to continue the necessary achievements.

The revisited Lisbon strategy has arisen again the awareness once more in our society but we cannot forget that the principle of equal treatment of men and women has been on the very heart of the European legislation since the establishment of the European Economic Community in 1957. It has been implemented in a number of fields by EU legislation over the past 30 years, and developed in extensive case law by the European Court of Justice. The Commission monitors the application of this legislation and, where appropriate, proposes new legislation.

Article 2 of the EC Treaty provides that promotion of equality between men and women is a task of the European Community. Article 3(2) provides that it should aim to eliminate inequalities, and to promote equality, between men and women in all its activities (also known as "gender mainstreaming"). There are three legal bases in the EC Treaty for EU legislation on equal treatment of men and women: Article 141(3) in matters of employment and occupation; Article 13(1) outside of the employment field; and Article 137 in the promotion of employment, improved living and working conditions.

The draft EU Constitution, signed by the Heads of State and Government on 29 October 2004 in Rome, contains similar provisions to the EC Treaty as regards gender equality, but it also contains references to equality and non-discrimination as values of the EU, and interims the Charter of Fundamental Rights. The Constitution will only enter into force when ratified by all Member States.

Gender equality is a fundamental right, a common value of the EU, and a necessary condition for the achievement of the EU objectives of growth, employment and social cohesion. The EU has made significant progress in achieving gender equality, thanks to equal treatment legislation, gender mainstreaming, specific measures for the advancement of women, action programmes, social dialogue and dialogue with civil society.

Nevertheless, inequalities remain and may widen, as increased global economic competition requires a more flexible and mobile labour force as the revisited Lisbon Strategy requests. This can impact more on women, who are often obliged to choose between having children or a career, due to the lack of flexible working arrangements and care services, the persistence of gender stereotypes, and an unequal share of family responsibilities with men. Progress made by women, including in key areas for the Lisbon Strategy such as education and research, are

not fully reflected in women's position on the labour market. This is a waste of human capital that the EU cannot afford. At the same time we cannot forget that, low birth rates and a shrinking workforce threaten the EU's political and economic role.

The current Roadmap 2006-2010 inserts itself in the Lisbon Strategy but builds on the previous experience of the Framework Strategy for equality between women and men for the period 2001-2005. It combines the launch of new actions and the reinforcement of successful existing activities. It reaffirms the dual approach of gender equality based on gender mainstreaming (the promotion of gender equality in all policy areas and activities) and specific measures.

## **THE SIX PRIORITY AREAS FOR EU ACTION ON GENDER EQUALITY FOR THE PERIOD 2006-2010 ARE**

1. **ACHIEVING EQUAL ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE FOR WOMEN AND MEN**
  - Reaching the Lisbon employment targets – 60% instead of the existing 55
  - Eliminating the gender pay gap – 15%
  - Women entrepreneurs – only 30% of women in Europe
  - Gender equality in social protection and the fight against poverty – women and children are the most affected by poverty in EU.
  - Recognising the gender dimension in health
  - Combating multiple discrimination, in particular against immigrant and ethnic minority women
  
2. **ENHANCING RECONCILIATION OF WORK, PRIVATE AND FAMILY LIFE**
  - Flexible working arrangements for both women and men
  - Increasing care services
  - Better reconciliation policies for both women and men – if men are not involved women cannot reconcile.
  
3. **PROMOTING EQUAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN AND MEN IN DECISION-MAKING**
  - Women's participation in politics
  - Women in economic decision-making
  - Women in science and technology
  
4. **ERADICATING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND TRAFFICKING**
  - Eradication of gender-based violence
  - Elimination of trafficking in human beings
  
5. **ELIMINATING GENDER STEREOTYPES IN SOCIETY**
  - Elimination of gender stereotypes in education, training and culture
  - Elimination of gender stereotypes in the labour market
  - Elimination of gender stereotypes in the media
  
6. **PROMOTING OF GENDER EQUALITY OUTSIDE THE EU**
  - in acceding, candidate and potential candidate countries

- and in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), external policy and development policy

## **PURSUING GENDER EQUALITY AT THE INSTITUTIONS**

Both the European Commission and the European Parliament place a high priority on the pursuit of gender equality.

Regarding the European Parliament, each Member State decides on the form its election will take, but follows identical democratic rules: a voting age of 18, equality of sexes and a secret ballot. European elections are already governed by a number of common principles: direct universal suffrage, proportional representation and a five-year renewable term. In any case, regarding equality of men and women even if the applicable rules are decided by each member state, the proportion of women in the European Parliament has risen steadily. At present about one third of Members of European Parliament are women. The parliament takes an active role in the promotion of equal opportunities both from the administration point of view applying internally these principles on their human resources policies as well as from a political point of view through the work of their Women's committee evaluating the Commission's proposals under the light of the respect of this fundamental right. The European Parliament has been an important partner for progress. Many women have attained the highest levels of education, entered the labour market and become important players in public life.

The European Commission, on its side, has not only promote the equal opportunities for men and women through its proposals but it has also applied the principle internally since 1988 thought-out four internal action programs.

An external Evaluation Report on the 3rd Action Programme for Equal opportunities for Women and Men was completed in October 2003, served as the basis for a Fourth Action Programme (2004-2008) which was adopted by the Commission on 28 April 2004. Some key findings of the external evaluation were:

- the majority of staff responding to a survey believed that the 3rd Action Programme had improved the position of women but that the issue of equal opportunities generally lacked the necessary level of priority within the Commission;
- there was no perception of positive changes to working practices to help reconcile private and professional commitments;
- four issues were highlighted as very important: regularisation of working hours, replacement of staff on past time and maternity leave, flexible working arrangements and childcare facilities;

The 4th Action Programme proposes a series of measures involving inter alia to:

- address barriers to career development of women;
- reconcile personal and professional life;
- improve the gender balance;
- make a comparative study of careers;

- sensitize staff to gender equality and equal opportunities;
- and protect the dignity of the person in the workplace.

The recommended measures do not prevent the different Directorates-General from adopting additional strategies to respond to specific needs. In addition, quantitative objectives have been set up since 1995, in particular with regard to the categories of administrators and managers.

Thanks to these efforts, the proportion of women in posts of higher responsibility increased: for example, the number of women directors increased from 2.6% in 1995 to 17.4% in 2004.

But advancement cannot be made without evaluation. And the Commission is not scared of criticism when this is needed to continue. The Fourth Action Programme provides for the publication of an annual report to include “an overall assessment of the programme's progress based on the individual reports of DGs and services and establish a ranking of best performing DGs”. The first report was approved on November 2005 by the Commission. The aim of this first report is principally to review the situation as regards equality between men and women at the Commission in 2004, assess the involvement of DGs in implementing the Fourth Programme and analyse the measures announced by DGs in their action programmes.

Regarding Best Practice, initiatives are taken by some DG to disseminate and implement this programme, such as:

- organisation of seminars or management meetings
- decisions taken regarding the reconciliation of personal and professional life
- nomination of "Focal points"

Finally, regarding the other institution where the Member States nominates their members, on the two consultative Committees only 17% are women in the Committee of the Regions and 83% men, the same situation exists in the European Economic Social Committee. There is still a lot of work to do.

Thank you very much for your attention.