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COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION

**"INCORPORATING EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES
FOR WOMEN AND MEN INTO
ALL COMMUNITY POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES"**

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The issues

Equality between men and women is now indisputably recognised as a basic principle of democracy and respect for humankind.

However, transforming it into legislation and practical reality presents a considerable challenge for societies with a long history of inequality behind them: in both industrialised and developing countries, inequalities between women and men are still apparent.

The challenge is to build a new partnership between men and women to ensure that both participate fully on an equal footing in all areas and that the benefits of progress are evenly distributed between them. Such a change requires not only progress in the field of legislation but also nothing short of a cultural transformation of individual behaviour as much as of attitudes and collective practices, and determined political action based on the broadest possible mobilisation.

The challenge facing the European Union is to build this new partnership between women and men, taking into account the historic and cultural diversity of the Member States, and drawing on this to develop a European approach to equality which is both pluralistic and humanistic and which constitutes the basis for action both in the Community and in the rest of the world.

The Union's commitment to this objective is a logical extension of the active role it played at the recent United Nations Conference held in Beijing, in particular its involvement in formulating the final Declaration and the action platform.

For this purpose, it is necessary to promote equality between women and men in all activities and policies at all levels. This is the principle of "mainstreaming", a policy adopted by the Community, and attention was drawn to its crucial importance at the Beijing Conference. This involves not restricting efforts to promote equality to the implementation of specific measures to help women, but mobilising all general policies and measures specifically for the purpose of achieving equality by actively and openly taking into account at the planning stage their possible effects on the respective situations of men and women (gender perspective). This means systematically examining measures and policies and taking into account such possible effects when defining and implementing them: thus, development policies, the organisation of work, choices relating to transport or the fixing of school hours, etc. may have significant differential impacts on the situation of women and men which must therefore be duly taken into consideration in order to further promote equality between women and men.

Equal participation of women and men is a crucial factor for lasting development and symbolises the level of political maturity of societies: while democracy requires equal rights for women, this in turn guarantees democracy. Meeting this challenge could therefore be part of the European project for the twenty-first century. By firmly

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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 the citizens. Furthermore, European societies would thus provide a forward-looking solution to the demographic and family changes with which they are confronted and which, given the ageing population, transform women's employment into a definite advantage for the economy which should be put to the best possible use with a view to ensuring optimum use of human resources.

2. *The acquis*

Since its creation, the Community has recognised the principle of equal pay for men and women and on this basis has developed a consistent set of legal provisions aimed at guaranteeing equal rights to employment, vocational training and, to a large extent, social protection.

In order to promote equality in practice, the Community has implemented specific action programmes since the 1980s, which, though having limited budgetary resources, have had a substantial knock-on effect. These programmes funded positive actions and pilot projects which extended the Community's field of action to the reconciliation of family and working life, women's role in the decision-making process, the participation of women in economic life and employment, etc. The Community thus promoted the creation over the years of a complex series of networks of people playing an active role in equal opportunities policy at European level but at the same time representing the cultural diversity of the Member States. It also encouraged the work of organisations promoting equal opportunities, helping to identify good practices and, notwithstanding the conflicts between rival organisations for the promotion of women, fostered the development of possible approaches towards concerted actions to promote equal opportunities.

The Community has also continued to further the cause of women and remove inequalities between men and women through its dialogue with non-member countries, in particular through its policies on development cooperation and the promotion and protection of human rights.¹ Mainstreaming of gender issues has, in actual fact, been integrated in the Community's development cooperation policy for some years.

On the strength of the *acquis* of Community law and the experience and legitimacy gained from the programmes and networks it supported, the Community has been able to participate actively in strengthening the role of women and promoting equal opportunities at international level. It played a decisive role in the preparations which enabled the United Nations Conferences in Vienna, Cairo, Copenhagen and, just recently, Beijing to go ahead. The intense interest generated by the last Conference, which was put

¹ cf. the Commission Communication on integrating gender issues in development cooperation (COM(95) 423 final of 18 September 1995) and on the external dimension of human rights policy (COM(95) 567 final of 22 November 1995).

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into practical effect in the pledges made on the platform, calls for Community action to be continued.

The Commission has also applied an equal opportunities policy to its staff for many years.

Community action to promote equality between women and men appears overall to be both significant and modest. Significant, in view of the narrow legal basis which gives specific competence only in matters of equal pay (Article 119 of the Treaty), and therefore the obligation in the majority of cases to obtain the unanimity of the Member States on proposals which do not strictly belong to this field. Significant, too, in view of the results obtained despite the meagre financial resources allocated specifically to the promotion of equal opportunities. But decidedly modest with regard to the size of the problem and the expectations it generates, and in view of the resources which might have been allocated for a long time now if equal opportunities had been recognised as a horizontal priority objective of Community policies. Admittedly, a large number of Community activities contribute at least indirectly to equal opportunities for women by, for example, generally promoting monetary stability, economic growth, development of employment, free movement, etc. But the positive effects of these actions on the situation of women are often not very apparent and sometimes uncertain.

The Essen, Cannes and Madrid European Councils stressed that promoting equal opportunities for women and men, together with combating unemployment, was one of the paramount tasks of the Union and its Member States. A determined effort must therefore be made to pursue and intensify the action already taken. The Commission intends to make an active contribution to the efforts required and to mobilise all Community policies towards this end. It has proposed a new Equal Opportunities Action Programme (1996-2000),² which should enable progress to be made in the field of legislation, the effective development of the principle of mainstreaming and the support and organisation of specific measures to promote equal opportunities. The Programme was prepared on the basis of a very extensive consultation procedure and this procedure will be continued through the work of the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities, the composition and role of which have been modified for this purpose.³ The Council recently adopted the Decision establishing this programme, reducing, however, the budget allocated to it in the Commission's proposals.⁴

3. Mobilisation of all Community policies

Action to promote equality requires an ambitious approach which presupposes the recognition of male and female identities and the willingness to establish a balanced distribution of responsibilities between men and women. It calls for the active

² cf. COM(95) 381 final of 19 July 1995. Fourth medium-term Community action programme on equal opportunities for women and men (1996-2000).

³ Commission Decision of 19 July 1995, OJEC No L 249, 17 October 1995.

⁴ Decision of 21 December 1995.

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involvement of women but also of men and the mutual recognition of their respective responsibilities. The promotion of equality must not be confused with the simple objective of balancing the statistics: it is a question of promoting long-lasting changes in parental roles, family structures, institutional practices, the organisation of work and time, etc. and does not merely concern women, their personal development and independence, but also concerns men and the whole of society, in which it can encourage progress and be a token of democracy and pluralism. This applies not only to Europe and industrialised countries but also to developing countries.

The promotion of equality between women and men, therefore, does not simply require the implementation of positive measures targeted at women, e.g. to promote their access to education, training or employment. It also requires measures aimed at adapting the organisation of society to a fairer distribution of men's and women's roles: e.g. by adapting the organisation of work to help women as well as men reconcile family and working life; or by encouraging the development of a multitude of activities at local level to provide more flexible employment solutions, again for both men and women; or by guaranteeing the rights of fathers as much as those of mothers so that both can be expected to carry out their responsibilities and duties to the full; or by adapting social protection to incorporate the trend towards the individualisation of rights into collective responsibility, etc.

The systematic consideration of the differences between the conditions, situations and needs of women and men in all Community policies and actions: this is the basic feature of the principle of "mainstreaming" which the Commission has adopted. This does not mean simply making Community programmes or resources more accessible to women, but rather the simultaneous mobilisation of legal instruments, financial resources and the Community's analytical and organisational capacities in order to introduce in all areas the desire to build balanced relationships between women and men. In this respect, it is necessary and important to base the policy of equality between women and men on a sound statistical analysis of the situation of women and men in the various areas of life and the changes taking place in societies.

This global, horizontal approach requires mobilisation, which is why the Commission has set up, under the auspices of its President, a Group of Commissioners responsible for stimulating the debate and ensuring that the concern for equal opportunities for women and men is built into all Community activities. An inter-departmental group has been appointed to prepare and monitor this work, and this is now taking note of initiatives planned or in progress with a view to identifying possible synergies and cooperation between them.

This Communication is the outcome of that analysis and is divided into two parts:

- the first part presents the Community *acquis* and prospects for future action in six areas: employment and the labour market, the status of women entrepreneurs and assisting spouses in SMEs, education and training, people's rights, external relations, information; added to these six areas is the Commission's personnel policy;

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The Structural Funds and, in particular, the European Social Fund have for a long time provided substantial financial support for measures promoting the training and employment of women. This contribution is dealt with in part III of this Communication.

In addition to its activities in the context of the Structural Funds, the Commission intends to continue the efforts undertaken in two areas:

- Firstly, it is necessary to continue to construct the legal basis for equality, in particular by means of directives and/or agreements which might be concluded by the social partners on flexible working time, the burden of proof and initiatives relating to child care, home working, equal pay and the individualisation of social protection rights. It should be pointed out in this respect that an initial agreement has been concluded between the social partners under the social protocol on the reconciliation of family and working life.
- The Commission intends to rationalise and integrate its aid more effectively for studies and pilot projects relating to women entrepreneurs, reconciliation of family and working life and desegregation of the labour market. This is one of the objectives of the new Equal Opportunities Programme which has just been adopted. Generally speaking, as far as employment is concerned, this Programme is to be used as an instrument to exchange experience and encourage analysis and debate, in association with the Member States, and taking into account the discussions and measures on employment initiated after the Essen, Cannes and Madrid European Councils. An intensification of efforts to promote equal opportunities in the field of employment is one of the guidelines agreed at Madrid, and issues relating to the organisation of work, active employment policies, new sources of employment, etc., which are the subject of these discussions and measures, are particularly relevant in this case.

2. Women entrepreneurs and assisting spouses in SMEs

Women play an important role in the administration and management of SMEs, firstly as entrepreneurs: of the 16 million SMEs in the Union (EUR 12), 20-30% are managed by women; in addition, 25-35% of new businesses are created by women. Secondly, they play a role as assisting spouses to the manager: in 60-80% of SMEs, the manager's spouse carries out administrative and management duties and he/she is, with or without official status, the manager's closest associate and may even be described as a genuine co-entrepreneur; it is generally acknowledged that the greater the assisting wife's role in the running of the company, the greater the chances of the company's survival. Moreover, in some sectors such as fisheries, the activities of each of the spouses are complementary; likewise in rural areas, where 10% of farm managers are women, farmers' wives are directly involved in the development of farm tourism and local services.

Women entrepreneurs and assisting spouses are faced with various difficulties and constraints:

- lack of business training at the time of creating the company and during its first years of existence;

- lack of recognition in economic circles, in particular with regard to accessibility of finance, and chronic lack of own capital;
- problems in reconciling family and working life;
- difficulty in obtaining access to sources of information;
- little or no recognition of the status of assisting spouse.

The Commission's enterprise policy is aimed at all sectors and all entrepreneurs, men or women, and seeks in particular to foster an environment conducive to initiative and the development of enterprises, especially SMEs, to improve their financing and to promote their integration into the single market.

There are specific measures to help women entrepreneurs and assisting spouses, though resources are limited. These include training initiatives, help in creating networks (e.g. help in creating a European association of assisting spouses), the funding of measures carried out by groups of women in the social economy field, etc. The Commission also provides financial and logistical support for the organisation of conferences dealing directly with the subject of women entrepreneurs and assisting spouses (Thessaloniki (March 1994), Paris (June 1995), Barcelona (November 1995)). There are also a number of measures included in the Structural Fund operations and, inter alia, in Community initiatives (LEADER, LEIs, NOW, ADAPT, SMEs) which may help women entrepreneurs and assisting spouses.

There is also Directive 86/613 on equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity, which, however, has had little impact on account of the mildness of the obligations it imposed.

It is intended to reinforce measures to help women in SMEs in the future, in particular by improving flexibility of work and occupational skills (including use of telematics), easier access to finance and improved access to information and advice.

Continuing its support for the conferences on women entrepreneurs and assisting spouses, the Commission is currently defining the priority measures to be included in the multiannual action programme for SMEs (1997-2000). Several initiatives will also be taken to provide better awareness of and information on the situation of women entrepreneurs and co-entrepreneurs (which will be the subject of a special chapter in the European Observatory for SMEs' annual report) and that of assisting spouses (list of training measures). Inter-departmental cooperation will be reinforced to encourage awareness of the needs of women entrepreneurs and assisting spouses in training programmes (LEONARDO) and in Structural Fund initiatives. Likewise, cooperation with the Euro-info centres at the Commission's information offices will be intensified. Finally, with regard to the above-mentioned Directive 86/613, the Commission, after consulting the partners concerned, will propose an amended Directive to provide a better solution to the problems encountered.

3. Education and Training

Education and training are powerful springboards towards obtaining equal opportunities for women, even though they alone cannot guarantee occupational integration equivalent to that of men. Enhancing women's skills also enriches the pool of human resources, which is good for competitiveness and growth, and persistent unwillingness or opposition to the recognition of women's skills on the labour market and in the organisation of work and their contribution to development can be considered a waste of human resources. By paving the way towards a change in mentalities, education and training may also have a significant influence on social and professional relationships between women and men, making it possible for each to develop their respective roles, thus promoting the reconciliation of family and working life for both men and women.

The situation of women as far as education and training are concerned has improved considerably, but substantial efforts must still be made to improve women's skill levels and to facilitate not only their access to employment but also their return to work after a break in their careers. Moreover, the persistence of social and cultural models or stereotypes inherited from the past has led to an insufficient diversification of the choice of school subjects and occupations made by women and also given them less access to decision-making posts. Thus, in most cases, they abandon scientific and technical subjects, new technologies and management and give preference to traditionally female occupations (either through inclination, low self-esteem or inadequate information); sometimes these make it easier to reconcile family and working life, but render more difficult certain choices of career, access to decision-making posts or the status of entrepreneur, etc. In this context, education and training can contribute to equal opportunities by making those concerned aware of the importance of this diversification of choice, by supporting women who choose less popular career paths and those who need another chance or assistance to transform an unstable job into the first stage of an integration process and, more generally, by encouraging changes in attitudes and mentalities with regard to trades and occupations.

One of the specific tasks will also be to enhance the value of occupations taken up predominantly by women, in this case the teaching profession, given its important role in determining the future capacity for adaptation to the labour market and dealing with the key issues facing society (the environment, for example).

Community action in the field of vocational training comprises to a large extent substantial financial support from ESF operations, which provide funding for, inter alia, measures to help women. The NOW initiative has of course brought about a significant change in this area.

Community action in the field of education has supported the development of transnational projects which have sought either to raise the awareness of or train all the players involved in education (teachers, pupils or students, parents, staff involved in education) or to develop suitable educational material on equal opportunities in order to help change mentalities at an early stage, prior to entry into the labour market.

In addition, the specific programmes in the field of higher education (ERASMUS, COMETT, LINGUA) and initial and continuing training (EUROTECNET, PETRA and FORCE) have also contributed to this objective, as has the training and mobility programme set up for researchers; however, in most cases the participation of women in these various programmes has simply reflected their participation in the labour market in general.

The SOCRATES (education), LEONARDO (training) and Youth for Europe programmes, which were devised to consolidate and rationalise external measures in the field of exchanges and pilot projects, incorporate equal opportunities either as a specific objective (LEONARDO) or as a supplementary priority for inclusion in all programme measures (SOCRATES, Youth for Europe). The LEONARDO programme focuses particular attention on women returning to work after interrupting their careers and on fields of activity in which women are under-represented. It also incorporates activities relating to the vocational training of women carried out previously by the IRIS network. It also encourages project promoters to regard equal opportunities as an essential part of all training measures.

In addition to these programmes, various education and training measures have been or are being funded, often only on a selective basis, under various budget headings and/or in the context of funding for research activities, aid for SMEs, etc.

The concept of lifelong learning is the fundamental philosophy behind the new programmes and, more generally speaking, Community action in the fields of education and training. This philosophy involves reinforcing cooperation and complementarity between programmes in the future (SOCRATES and LEONARDO) and between these programmes and the other Community measures incorporating an "education and training" aspect (Structural Funds: mainstream and the ADAPT and EMPLOYMENT initiatives, and in particular NOW; research). The monitoring and assessment of the programmes and the preparation of a White Paper on education and training will make a significant contribution in these two areas to the overall strategy proposed by the Commission under the new Equal Opportunities Programme.

4. Rights of Persons

Recognition of the principle that the fundamental rights of women and girls are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights was reaffirmed at the Beijing Conference.

The Community has contributed to the substantial progress made in the field of recognition of rights, and the European model of equality comprises a unique collection of knowledge, laws, institutions and practices which have conferred formal rights on women and have promoted their standing in the European Union. Information concerning these rights must be widely disseminated. In addition, improvements could be envisaged in the following specific areas:

- Measures aimed at curbing violence against women

With regard to measures aimed at curbing violence against women within and outside the European Union, the inclusion of the concept of "gender" in Community programmes should make it possible to improve and support measures such as:

- the organisation and financing of public awareness campaigns concerning the problems of violence against women;
- medical and psychological assistance and other types of care for women who are victims of violence;
- the development or creation of programmes aimed at providing training in this area for the legal and medical professions, social workers, teachers and the police.

● Women refugees

Following on from the Resolution of the Justice and Internal Affairs Council of 20 June 1995 on the minimum guarantees to be offered in asylum procedures within the Union, the Commission is now examining the possibility of introducing a series of measures aimed at resolving the particular problems encountered by women refugees.

With regard to women refugees outside the Union, measures should be taken to ensure their safety and integrity as effectively as possible. They should also be involved in the planning, implementation and monitoring of projects and programmes designed to help them, in order that these may best take into account their specific needs.

● Measures against trafficking of persons

With regard to measures against trafficking of persons, the inclusion of the concept of "gender" should make it possible to:

- formulate laws to prevent "sexual tourism" and the trafficking of persons, in particular the trafficking of women in prostitution networks;
- the adoption of appropriate measures in order to develop programmes aimed at reintegrating victims of such trafficking into society (legal aid, care, cooperation with NGOs, training with a view to reintegration).

The Commission took the initiative of organising a seminar and a conference on the measures which might be taken within the Union in order to work out an overall approach which would protect the victims of such trafficking (temporary or permanent residence permit, social and legal assistance, etc.) and tighten up measures against traffickers. Related questions, such as the status of certain categories of women particularly vulnerable to abuse or exploitation of a sexual or other nature, e.g. immigrant women with a work permit which does not allow them to change employer (case of temporary domestic staff), might also be dealt with.

● Other related questions

The manner in which mentalities and lifestyles have evolved has led to the diversification of family structures and histories and has increased the risk of conflict over custody of children. The difficult situations which result from this are often rendered all the more dramatic and traumatic by the fact that in this area of law there is no legal system covering questions of competence, recognition and execution of judgments in the field of family law. It is therefore proposed to extend the scope of the Brussels Convention to family matters or to draw up a new convention on this subject.

A number of problems specifically affecting non-member country nationals, in particular immigrant women resident in the Community, might also be dealt with: such problems include, for example, the free movement for a short stay of non-member country nationals lawfully resident in another Member State, on the subject of which the Commission has just presented a draft Directive to the Council (COM(95) 346 final of 12 July 1995).

The members of the family of a citizen of the Union who are non-member country nationals - normally the wife and children - obtain a secondary residence permit on reunification of the family, which means that in the event of divorce or repudiation, their right of residence ceases at the same time. For this reason, a right of residence of their own, following a reasonable period of residence, would seem to offer legal security and, where necessary, help them live independently of the person with whom they were united.

5. External Relations

The Commission made an active contribution to the World Conferences on the Environment (Rio de Janeiro, 1992), Human Rights (Vienna, 1993), Population (Cairo, 1994), Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995) and Women (Beijing, 1995), the conclusions of which concern, in various respects, the promotion of women, consolidation of the means of action open to them and their autonomy.

The World Conference on Women held in Beijing highlighted the scale of the efforts required to promote equal opportunities. It emphasised the diversity of women's situation in the different countries, in particular the continued existence in a large part of the world of major obstacles to full economic, political and social rights for women in fields such as human rights, education and health, decision-making and access to economic resources. Moreover, it reaffirmed what had been established at Rio de Janeiro, Cairo and Copenhagen concerning the essential contribution made by women to the lasting economic and social development of society.

Considerable differences exist between men and women, particularly in developing countries, with regard to their roles, responsibilities, constraints, advantages and priorities, in both the economic and social fields. Development programmes and policies which do not take these "gender issues" into account are not likely to result in real benefits for women and may even place them at a disadvantage. In order to achieve real progress for

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women, gender issues must be taken into account systematically and are the key to obtaining lasting development for the whole of society. These are the factors underlying the principle of "gender mainstreaming", which has for several years now been an integral part of the Community's development policies and its development cooperation conventions and agreements with the ACP countries, Asia, Latin America and the Mediterranean Basin. This experience has enabled the Community to develop a range of internal instruments and measures specific to this field.

In accordance with this policy, the Community is keen to ensure that its development cooperation projects and programmes focus particular attention, right from the planning stage, on the specific needs and priorities of women and men, while ensuring an equal level of participation.

At the same time, the Community is supporting large-scale positive action programmes with a view to eliminating the major disparities between women and men in developing countries, particularly in the fields of health and education.

In addition, specific programmes such as the Democracy and LINK programmes in the context of Phare and Tacis make it possible to support initiatives of NGOs which affect women more directly.

In the future, it is intended to intensify this mainstreaming of the consideration of gender issues in all development cooperation activities in the ACP countries, Asia, Latin America and the Mediterranean Basin, by applying the strategies set out in the recent communication on integrating gender issues in development cooperation.

6. Information/Awareness

Putting the principle of equal opportunities into practice requires the introduction of a communication strategy comprising awareness-raising activities for the general public and information activities relating to specific programmes, which must be targeted at those concerned by the programmes in question (e.g. assisting spouses, women farmers, women entrepreneurs, etc.).

Awareness-raising activities should help to challenge certain discriminatory prejudices and stereotypes. They must be directed at both men and women, and particular attention might be focused on young people, for whom information and awareness-raising activities would consolidate or supplement educational measures. These activities must also be adapted to the cultural context of each Member State.

Up to now, the Commission's communication policies in the field of equal opportunities have been aimed principally at specific sections of the public. This is the case, for example, of some of the publications, symposia and networks funded by DG V (women in the decision-making process, women and the media, etc.), the workshop organised by DG XII on women in scientific and technical research, DG XXIII's activities to help women entrepreneurs or assisting spouses, etc. In some cases, the activity has been aimed at all women (DG X's "Women of Europe newsletter") or at all those involved, e.g.

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DG XXII's awareness-raising activities in the field of equal opportunities in education and training.

This list of measures highlights the increasing number of initiatives taken to promote equal opportunities in the Commission's activities, but also the need for improved coordination between the departments concerned in order to establish a consistent, systematic and visible communication policy, adapted to the various target audiences.

A communication plan in the field of equal opportunities must therefore be developed with all the parties involved and a detailed inventory of all communication operations carried out by the various departments must be drawn up for this purpose.

Under the communication plan, an overall approach to information on equal opportunities as well as sector-by-sector implementation (employment, education/training, Structural Funds, cooperation/development, etc.) will be proposed, backed up by a proposal for an equal opportunities information programme.

The dimension of "equality between women and men" will have to be incorporated into all communication instruments used to convey the Commission's information policy (definition of target publics, selection of subjects and form of publications, including illustrations, use of opinion analysis tools, etc.).

The "quality" of information will have to be improved and will take into account the diversity of cultures and audiences. Communication on the subject of equality will have to be extended beyond work and the social field to all aspects of life and to sectors in which women have a particular interest: the new information technologies, biotechnologies, consumer protection and the environment, to name but a few. In the field of the environment, given women's sensitivity to improvements in the quality of life, changes in consumption patterns, etc., their opinions are listened to and they already receive assistance from DG XI via organisations and NGOs in which they are widely represented.

Equal opportunities is one of the subjects which will be developed under the "Citizens First" initiative. This initiative is one of the three main priority actions in the field of information adopted by the Commission over the next two years.

An event targeted at the general public and held on "Women's Day" on 8 March, such as the organisation of a "European Women's Day" on a topical subject, should raise awareness of this issue. In addition, events and meetings covered by the media on subjects relating to Community policies, programmes and activities should systematically take into account the need to address both men and women and the specific issues which concern them respectively.

Inter-institutional cooperation on the subject of equal opportunities could be encouraged by strengthening cooperation between the departments responsible for information within the Commission and the European Parliament. This cooperation might also be extended to other Community institutions.

7. The Commission's personnel policy

The Commission has applied an equal opportunities policy to its staff for many years.

The positive action programmes have been the main instrument through which this policy has been implemented, and the second of these, covering the period 1992-1996, is currently in force. This programme seeks to obtain an equal number of women in categories and functions in which they are under-represented and to promote their professional development by guaranteeing them equal opportunities for career advancement and training. The positive action programme also aims to guarantee accompanying measures and social infrastructure to enable everyone, both men and women, to reconcile their family and professional obligations.

This means that equal opportunities policy is automatically incorporated into all areas of personnel management: recruitment, careers, the planning and allocation of resources, social policy, the rights and obligations of officials. Furthermore, there is a special equal opportunities unit within the Directorate for Personnel and Administration, whose task is to coordinate the implementation of equal opportunities plans drawn up by each Directorate-General within the general framework of the positive action programme, and to make all staff aware of equal opportunities.

While equal opportunities has been recognised as a horizontal priority objective of Community policy, the Institution must ensure that women have a greater role to play at all stages of the planning, negotiation and decision of policies within the various Directorate-Generals. For this purpose, the Commission has stressed the importance of female recruitment in its recruitment policy, both with regard to recruitment at the starting grades and with a view to appointing more women to management posts in the future. As far as starting grades in Category A are concerned, the annual organisation of general competitions for Assistant Administrators (A8) attracted almost as many female applicants as male and the success rate of women, which has also improved in recent years, made it possible for the percentage of women recruited at this grade to rise to 27%.

Accordingly, and in the context of positive actions, the Commission adopted guidelines for the recruitment and appointment of women in 1995, when the three new Member States joined the Union. This strategy, if repeated annually, should bring about a real restoration of the balance in the years to come.

III. STRUCTURAL FUND OPERATIONS AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Structural policies constitute the main Community instrument used to correct regional imbalances and to improve employment and integration prospects. The ratio of inequality in the field of employment between economically integrated regions and regions experiencing problems is 1:10.⁵ Regions experiencing problems are those whose development is lagging behind, areas of industrial redevelopment and disadvantaged urban

⁵ The regional unemployment rates vary from 3.4% to 34.7%.

areas, rural areas, etc. The medium-term trend in the distribution of people and activities within the Community also gives cause for concern. There is a need for corrective measures to curb the trend towards increasing urbanisation and the congestion of some regions, while interior or peripheral regions are abandoned. The situation of women is worsened in such a precarious environment.

Increasing the contribution of the Structural Funds (European Regional Development Fund, European Social Fund and European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund) to the promotion of equal opportunities is therefore of great political significance. The incorporation of equality into structural policies is, firstly, a response to the need to reduce the inequalities which exist between men and women with regard to the rate of employment, the level of training, access to the labour market and involvement in the decision-making process. But it is also part of a desire to promote lasting development, by combining job and wealth creation with quality of life and preservation of the cultural and natural heritage.

Observance of the principle of equal opportunities was introduced into the Regulations governing the Structural Funds in 1993. On 22 June 1994, the Council adopted a resolution on the promotion of equal opportunities for women and men through action by the Structural Funds. However, Structural Fund operations are still relatively modest, and efforts to mobilise the partners and, above all, the national and/or regional authorities responsible for devising and implementing the programming must be continued and intensified.

1. The 1989-1993 programming period

During the 1989-1993 programming period, the ESF was the instrument most directly involved in promoting equal opportunities. Actions implemented as part of general measures to train and help young people and the long-term unemployed find employment made it possible in particular to improve the situation of women with regard to employment. It should be noted that 5% of ESF appropriations under Objectives 3 and 4 (i.e. ECU 380 million) were earmarked specifically for operations to help women. The other Funds (ERDF, EAGGF) have contributed in an indirect and less concentrated manner to the promotion of equality, firstly by their general support for development and, secondly, where appropriate, by funding training infrastructures or complementary social facilities.

From 1991 onwards, the segregation of the labour market and social marginalisation, of which the main victims were women, led the Commission to launch a specific initiative - NOW (New Opportunities for Women) - with a budget of ECU 156 million. This instrument made it possible to improve vocational training and encouraged business creation by granting direct aid. Of the numerous projects assisted under the NOW initiative (1991-1994), some 300 involved the creation of small businesses and cooperatives. Some projects raise women's awareness, bring them into contact and make them more receptive to an offer of training. By way of illustration, the establishment of a "Reception-training-social" centre in a very deprived area of Oporto, fitted out - with ERDF assistance - with the modern household equipment lacking in the area, made it

possible to satisfy the local community's everyday needs, while at the same time encouraging practical training, itself funded by the ESF.

The main achievement of the NOW initiative has been to decompartmentalise assistance by mobilising a wide range of operators. The innovative measures taken under this initiative and its transnational nature, thanks to the setting up of networks for the dissemination of experience, enabled promoters to have new programmes, methodologies and infrastructures which could be used on a large scale. In the light of its success in opening up new approaches towards greater consideration of women in all the Structural Funds, the NOW initiative has been renewed and consolidated (ECU 360 million for the period 1994-1999).

A number of good practices have also been observed under Community initiatives such as LEADER, INTERREG or pilot projects financed under innovative measures supported by the Funds. These are specific examples of coordination between promotion of the principle of equality and the overall development strategy.

The LEADER I initiative (1989-1993) encouraged the economic diversification of rural areas by supporting new activities organised by women, for example:

- in Greece a project was aimed at modernising the productive base by organising and supporting domestic industry. A women's association organised various exhibition sites and managed a centre for domestic industry and handicrafts. The project, which was launched in 1990, enabled women in the region to be given continuing training in the manufacture of local quality products and craft objects.
- in the United Kingdom, target groups (20 young unemployed people, 10 managers made redundant and some 15 women wishing to start up a business at home) benefited from start-up aid through the financing of feasibility studies, marketing and promotion costs, further training courses and training in local services.

Under the multi-fund transborder cooperation programme (Community initiative INTERREG I) between France and Spain, some 30 women with an average age of 38 from a region affected by a high rate of unemployment because of the decline in the textile industry were helped in their career plans (creation of activity or search for a job) through training measures, training courses in the neighbouring country and the setting up of partnerships for complementary projects.

The ERDF pilot projects (Article 10) also supported measures aimed at improving back-up structures for women which would facilitate their occupational or social reintegration. The issue looked at in most detail was the improvement of the quality of life.

For example, in the United Kingdom, under a scheme to regenerate inner-city areas a multipurpose community centre providing the equipment necessary for the regeneration programme was funded. The centre includes a family department offering a full range of services, including an original type of crèche which enables the occupational reintegration of the very large number of young mothers.

2. The 1994-1999 programming period

During the present programming period (1994-1999), the promotion of equal opportunities is a priority running through all the activities receiving Structural Fund assistance, with a determined effort being made to obtain greater coordination.

The promotion of equal opportunities is referred to in all ESF programming documents, especially those of Objective 3, as a priority which should apply across the board to all general measures to be supported. In a number of Member States, these programming documents also refer to a specific set of actions aimed at promoting equal opportunities (within Objective 3 or within the human resources component of Objective 1) and are intended to complement the horizontal approach adopted.

The introduction of the concept of pathways to integration as a result of the experience gained under the NOW initiative, and the relaxation of the criteria for programme eligibility, have made it possible to formulate "packages" of personalised measures aimed at integration or reintegration into the labour market. Thus, in the field of education and training, the ERDF and the Social Fund may provide coordinated and complementary assistance, the ERDF financing the equipment and installations and the Social Fund the operating costs.

Combined operations by the ESF, ERDF and EAGGF also help in carrying out measures and providing facilities which make it possible for women to reconcile their working and family life better (crèches, kindergartens, after-school activities, adaptation of transport in sparsely-populated areas, etc.). Measures which are directly linked to the provision of infrastructure for business areas and the creation or maintaining of jobs may be of direct benefit to women entrepreneurs and assisting spouses, as well as to the female employees of the enterprises supported. Generally speaking, operations relating to the adaptation of production activities, local development and improvement of the quality of life do not concern solely women but may have a more direct impact on promoting equality on account of their proximity effects.

The Community initiatives (such as ADAPT, URBAN I, LEADER II, INTERREG II) also reflect the political impetus given to equal opportunities.

Thus, in a French town, the ideas generated by the URBAN initiative about care facilities for young children led to the creation of a centre intended not only to cater for children but above all to help parents play their full part in bringing up children in an unstructured environment. In the future, European funding will enable one-parent families on a very low income to have access to jobs by creating care facilities adapted to vocational training opportunities (day-care centres with extended hours, more family crèches, etc.).

As in other fields, the Community added value is generated by bringing the various project sponsors together. The networks which initiatives such as NOW or LEADER⁶ have at their disposal constitute a prime means of exchanging practices and transferring experiences and methodologies.

Through the support given to these various measures and the strengthening of Community initiatives, the Funds facilitate the identification and dissemination of good practices and help to boost cooperation and integration under the new Equal Opportunities Programme (1996-2000).

3. Outlook

Of the proposals aimed at making sure that greater account is taken of equal opportunities, it is planned first of all to take advantage of the current programming, which means in particular that the monitoring committees will have to be alerted, in conjunction with evaluation measures.

Thought will have to be given to the indicators and ways of measuring the extent to which the principle of equal opportunities will be taken into account in the programming. Basic indicators will have to be established for certain types of measures with positive connotations for equal opportunities in order to be able subsequently to define pertinent project selection criteria for the programme monitoring committees. To this end, a horizontal evaluation study will be able to shed light on the way in which this aspect is really applied by the Structural Funds.

The production of basic regional statistics (availability of social infrastructure, breakdown of long-term unemployed by sex, female activity rates, proportion of women by socio-professional category, etc.) is also an essential prerequisite for measuring trends.

Methodological guidelines will be drawn up for the monitoring committees by several Commission departments working together.

⁶ LEADER II (94/C 180/12): "The present network must also expand its activities, in particular by establishing a methodological instrument, the European Observatory of Rural Innovation and Development, whose role will be to identify, specify, validate and facilitate the transfer of innovations implemented in rural environments."

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The efforts to achieve synergies in the current programming period imply greater coordination of multi-fund operations for the launching, financing and exploitation of the results of pilot projects linked directly to the promotion of equal opportunities (Article 10 ERDF, Article 6 ESF, Article 8 EAGGF-Guidance). In this connection, special attention will be paid to measures to assist women wishing to set up their own business, along the lines of the awareness-raising operations already carried out for the European business and innovation centres and the Euroleader programme.

Flexible programming affords scope for redirecting the multiannual programmes already adopted (1994-1999 for Objective 1 and Objective 5b, 1995-1999 for Objective 6, 1994-1996 for Objective 2). This flexibility must be used to strengthen measures which are recognised as being effective and to explore new avenues of assistance. When the reserve for Community initiatives was allocated on 4 October 1995, the Commission decided in principle to place particular emphasis on equal opportunities in URBAN II and to give a boost of ECU 100 million to the NOW initiative.

Generally speaking, the Structural Funds may make an effective contribution towards implementing the Union's and its Member States' priorities of combating unemployment and promoting equal opportunities for women and men. In this context and in accordance with the guidelines agreed by the European Council, they may in particular encourage the search for more employment-intensive growth and the optimum use of human resources.

In order to alleviate some of the constraints which primarily affect women, the Structural Funds can be used as a matter of priority for the development of infrastructures and services for the care of dependants or for investment by enterprises to assist, through new organisation of work, the creation of jobs and reconciliation with family life.

The Funds also have to contribute to the economic and social integration of urban and rural populations that are becoming marginalised. Combating the rapid marginalisation of women who are disadvantaged and/or live in sensitive areas requires a concerted effort to reconstitute social links: for example, through the creation of social centres (multi-purpose halls for sport, entertainment, distance learning, etc.) or the financing of teaching tools and business-creation support services.

These guidelines complement those relating to the promotion of new sources of employment, the adaptation of the organisation of work and skills and support for regional development and local initiatives.

A European seminar aimed at promoting equal opportunities in Structural Fund assistance will be held in Brussels on 7 and 8 March 1996, in particular to mobilise the national and regional authorities responsible for implementing the programmes and to derive maximum benefit from the efforts made. Other events are also planned, such as the organisation of exhibitions and conferences on innovation and local development for women as part of the Luleå (Sweden) Europartnership in June 1996. Lastly, promotional booklets illustrating and encouraging good practices will be produced.

IV. CONCLUSION

This Communication is one stage in a process that must be continued in order to give more concrete expression to the principle of mainstreaming than in the past. In fact, assessing the ways in which equality between women and men has been taken into account up to now in Community policies gives rise to a series of guidelines and proposals which must now be implemented.

Without doubt, there is still a lot to be done to ensure that promotion of equality between women and men actually becomes a strategic objective fully integrated into all Community policies and that the male/female dimension is taken into consideration in the planning and implementation of those policies (gender perspective). It is quite clear above all that the progressive implementation of these guidelines calls for a significant increase in cooperation within the Commission's departments and strengthening of the partnership with the Member States and the various players and organisations concerned.

The very fact that this Communication has been produced, at the instigation of the Group of Commissioners on Equal Opportunities, is evidence of the efforts that have been made within the Commission. Such efforts reflect a political commitment and a desire to give a significant impetus to Community action, thereby supporting the efforts undertaken at all levels to promote equality between women and men.

Various measures and initiatives should in the next few months give practical effect to the cooperative efforts undertaken. 1996 will see the implementation of initiatives as a follow-up to the Beijing Conference. It will also be the year of introduction of the new equal opportunities programme recently adopted by the Council, the official launch of which will give rise to a major conference in autumn 1996. Structural Fund assistance should also be confirmed, and the European Seminar to be held on 7 and 8 March 1996 will provide a forum for discussion with the Member States and the other players involved. Cooperation with the social partners will continue and attention should be drawn in this connection to the fact that they have just reached an initial collective agreement under the Protocol on Social Policy on reconciling family and working life.

1996 should lead to substantial progress in implementing the principle of mainstreaming in all Community policies, in particular in each of the fields dealt with in the second part of this Communication. For this purpose, it will be necessary to take measures to continuously monitor and evaluate the action undertaken. The inter-departmental group on equal opportunities is to contribute to this, relying, where necessary, on appropriate expert reports. It will be necessary to scrutinize policies more carefully from the point of view of equality and, therefore, in order to manage, identify and evaluate their effects, to establish suitable analytical indicators and procedures. Such a systematic evaluation will make it possible to confirm that consideration of equality between women and men in the proposed measures and, by extension, in all Community policies is being practically and effectively implemented. This will be the subject of one of the chapters of the Report on equal opportunities which the Commission now intends to publish each year and which will present the policies and measures implemented in the Member States as well as action taken at Community level.

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