

Brussels, 26 November 2001

**OPINION**

of the

Committee of the Regions

of 15 November 2001

on the

**Report from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions:**

**Annual Report on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in the European Union 2000**

**(COM(2001) 179 final)**

**The Committee of the Regions,**

**HAVING REGARD TO** the Report from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: **Annual Report on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in the European Union 2000**, COM (2001) 179 final;

**HAVING REGARD TO** the decision of the European Commission on 2 April 2001 to consult the CoR on this subject in accordance with the first paragraph of Article 265 of the Treaty establishing the European Community;

**HAVING REGARD TO** the decision taken by its President on 2 May 2001 to instruct Commission 5 - Social Policy, Public Health, Consumer Protection, Research and Tourism - to draw up the relevant opinion;

**HAVING REGARD TO** the Committee of the Regions Opinion "Equal Opportunities for women and men" (CdR 161/96)<sup>1</sup>;

**HAVING REGARD TO** the Committee of the Regions "Resolution by the CoR to the Member States with regard to proposals for future appointments in terms of equal opportunities" (CdR

237/97)<sup>2</sup>;

**HAVING REGARD TO** the Committee of the Regions document “analysis of female participation in CoR work” (CdR 242/97);

**HAVING REGARD TO** the Committee of the Regions document “Guidance to rapporteurs on incorporating an equalities impact analysis into CoR opinions (CdR 243/97)”, 1997;

**HAVING REGARD TO** the Committee of the Regions brochure: “Equal Opportunities - contribution of the CoR to the construction of Europe”, July 1998;

**HAVING REGARD TO** the Committee of the Regions Opinion “Towards a Community framework Strategy on gender equality” (2001-2005) (CdR 233/00)<sup>3</sup>;

**HAVING REGARD TO** the Report from the Commission on the implementation of Council recommendation 96/694 of 2nd December 1996 on the balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process (COM(2000) 120 final);

**HAVING REGARD TO** the Commission Communication Work Programme for 2001 (COM (2001) 119 final);

**HAVING REGARD TO** the Commission staff working paper “Women and Science : the gender dimension as a leverage for reforming science” (SEC(2001) 771 final);

**HAVING REGARD TO** the Council Decision of 20 December 2000 establishing a programme relating to the Community framework strategy on gender equality (2001-2005)<sup>4</sup>;

**HAVING REGARD TO** the European Parliament resolution on equal opportunities (A5-0198/2000 of 5.10.2000);

**HAVING REGARD TO** the European Parliament resolution on balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process (R5-0034/2001 of 18.1.2001);

**HAVING REGARD TO** the European Parliament resolution on the Gender Equality Work Programme 2001 (A5-0224/2001 of 3.7.2001);

**HAVING REGARD TO** the Council of Europe Recommendations of the Council of Ministers R (85)2 on legal protection against sex discrimination, R(96)5 on reconciling work and family life, R (98)14 on gender mainstreaming; Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1229 (1994) on equality of rights between women and men, Recommendation 1269 (1995) on achieving real progress on women’s rights, Recommendation 1413 (1999) on equal representation in political life;

**HAVING REGARD TO** the Draft Opinion (CdR 204/2001) adopted by Commission 5 on 10 September 2001 (rapporteur: **Cllr Diane Bunyan** (UK/PES) member of Bristol Unitary Authority);

## **WHEREAS**

- equal opportunity, including gender equality, is a political priority of the Committee of the Regions;

- there is an increasing problem of disengagement with local and regional politics, particularly in relation to women and other groups that are under-represented, resulting in a shortage of candidates from those groups putting themselves forward for selection;
- there is evidence from research that women and people from under-represented groups who do put themselves forward face greater barriers to be selected to stand in 'winnable' seats or positions on party lists; in the case of the CoR, members from under-represented groups are predominantly alternates rather than full members in their own right;
- women make up half of the population and half of the electorate, but are under-represented in policy-making and political decision-taking (defined by the Council of Europe as the decision-making positions people are elected to through the democratic process, serving in local, regional, national and European/supra-national spheres of governance, as well as holding ministerial and other offices in the various spheres of governance and positions within political parties; it also includes senior civil servants and chief executives);
- research indicates that the greatest difficulty women face in engaging in political life is the increasingly heavy workload of being an elected politician alongside demanding family and work commitments;
- the proportion of women in local and regional political life is lamentably low and improving at an unacceptable rate;
- the proportion of women in political life in the accession countries is a serious cause for concern and must be addressed in the accession negotiations;
- the proportion of women in the labour market, whilst increasing, is focused in the lower salary segments, or concentrated in certain categories of activity, or are more frequently in less secure contractual arrangements (e.g. temporary work), in all respects exemplified by the CoR secretariat;

**has adopted the following opinion at its 41st plenary session on 14/15 November 2001 (meeting of 15 November):**

***The Committee of the Regions***

1. reiterates its commitment to gender equality and combating all forms of discrimination, as reflected in its earlier opinion on Article 13 of the Treaty;

2. reiterates its earlier call for gender issues to be integrated into the political work of the Committee of the Regions, especially in the drafting of opinions and resolutions, consistent with the concept of gender mainstreaming;
3. welcomes the publication of Annual Reports and an annual work programme as an essential tool for implementing and monitoring the application of the Community Action Programme, and for regularly raising the issue of gender equality;
4. regrets the lack of detail in the European Commission work programme for 2001;
5. considers that the balanced participation of women and men in policy-making and decision-taking in local and regional government is imperative as a matter of human rights, social justice and the better functioning of a democratic society;
6. is concerned at the lack of gender-balance in political life in all spheres of governance, and calls for more detailed monitoring and evaluation of positive action and positive discrimination strategies, in order to enable local and regional authorities and political parties to develop appropriate policies;
7. recognises the work of the Council of European Municipalities & Region's Committee of Women Elected Members in the field of gender balance in decision-making;
8. calls for a greater effort to share experience and identify best practice across the European continent in promoting women's participation in political life, with particular regard to the situation in the accession countries. In this respect, reiterates the proposal for a CoR comparative study on this topic;
9. requests an evaluation report on progress made in gender mainstreaming in the Structural Funds;
10. welcomes the current debate on men and gender equality, called for in its earlier Opinion, recognising that men have both rights and obligations;
11. welcomes and concurs in European Parliament resolution R5-0034/2001 on balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process where it calls on the Member States to propose at the next IGC amendments to the Treaty which promote gender balance in the EU institutions and all decision-making bodies; the Committee of the Regions considers

that this should be extended to other under-represented groups, such as people with disabilities;

12. regrets the current under-representation of women in the membership of the Committee of the Regions, calls on the national nominating bodies to ensure a better balance in the next mandate, and calls on its political parties to ensure gender balance in the appointment of office-holders at the beginning of the third mandate in 2002;
13. welcomes the CoR action plan on equal opportunities and calls for its full and speedy implementation and eventual extension to other under-represented groups to ensure that the secretariat reflects the diversity of the communities that it serves.

Brussels, 15 November 2001.

The President

The Secretary-General

of the

of the

Committee of the Regions

Committee of the Regions

**Jos Chabert**

**Vincenzo Falcone**

<sup>1</sup> OJ C 34 of 3.12.1997, p. 39

<sup>2</sup> OJ C 379 of 15.12.1997, p. 65

<sup>3</sup> OJ C 144 of 16.5.2000, p. 47

<sup>4</sup> OJ L 017 of 19.1.2001, pp. 22-29

--

--

CdR 204/2001 FR-EN/HB/ET/ms .../...

CdR 204/2001 fin FR/ET/ht

CdR 204/2001 fin FR/ET/ht .../...

CdR 204/2001 fin FR/ET/ht .../...