

Equality Policies in Europe, Μαδρίτη (στα αγγλικά)

**EQUALITY POLICIES IN EUROPE Madrid, 11
May 2002 Speech by Anna Karamanou MEP
Chairperson of the European Parliament
Committee on Women's Rights
and Equal Opportunities**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour and pleasure to speak before you today about the main initiatives taken by the European Parliament Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities in order to promote equal opportunities for women and men not only in Europe but also in the other parts of the world.

I had the privilege to be elected President of this Committee for the second half of the Parliamentary term until the next European elections in 2004.

After a brief review of the work of the Committee since the beginning of this Parliamentary term, I shall share with you what I see as our main priorities for the near future. I would be pleased if we could reserve at the end a time slot for an exchange of views so that I can take on board your remarks and share them with my colleagues in the EP.

Since the beginning of this Parliamentary term the EP Women's Rights Committee has produced 20 reports subsequently adopted by

the Parliament in the Plenary. These reports called attention to and for action in a number of policy areas which are crucial for women. Let me quote in particular our 1999 initiative on a European campaign to fight violence against women in Europe which led to a new Community Programme – called "DAPHNE". This programme, which will last until 2003, promotes preventing measures to combat violence against children, adolescents and women. Among the significant issues introduced by the Parliament when it had to decide with the Council of Ministers of the Member States on the programme (under the co-decision procedure) I should mention the importance of inducing public opinion awareness and that of alerting (or involving) the media to actions against violence against women.

The blindness to violence against women which has been the unsaid rule for so long must be stopped.

Another form of violence against women which has been of growing concern to the Committee is women trafficking. Around 500 000 victims of trafficking enter Western Europe annually, and the number of victims is on the increase. Flows from Central and Eastern European countries have dramatically increased, in addition to the existing flows of immigrants from Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and Asia. The specific impact of globalisation on poorer nations and individuals is translated inter alia in rising levels of migration in Europe, matched by a dramatic increase in abusive and irregular situations for thousands of women and girls who are often compelled to prostitution. In a report on European actions to combat organised crime, we asked, on the grounds that trafficking in women is an intolerable violation of fundamental rights, that the fight against this "new form of

slavery in modern society" should become the first priority of Community action.

Against the same background, we proposed measures against female genital mutilation and denounced the brutality of this so-called "traditional practice" which should be considered an offence against the integrity and dignity of women. Within the framework of the European asylum legislation, women arriving from third countries should be informed about their rights. Consulates of European countries should, when issuing visas, provide information on the consequences of practising female genital mutilation, information that should also be provided on arrival in the host country. Health professionals, social workers and teachers should also be instructed to provide such information and to play a role in the protection of victims of such acts.

Our fight for better information to women has covered most areas of the European Parliament action. For instance, before the launching of the Euro, we insisted on specific information campaigns for women, considering that, in our society, they are still the ones to deal with daily shopping. Since the entry into force of the Amsterdam Treaty, we have a duty to ensure that the "fight against inequalities and the promotion of equality of women and men is a part of every Community policy. This is what we call in our "jargon": gender mainstreaming. Our Committee has the duty to monitor closely the implementation of this new principle in the Treaty. Through the opinions that we give on all sorts of subjects, we can mainstream our goals and ideas into all areas of Parliamentary action. In this context, we will analyse how and if our opinions and proposals are followed and applied by other Committees of the European Parliament and turned into reality.

The new Community Framework Strategy for Equality which entered into force in the year 2000 was proposed by the European Commission (My compatriot Anna Diamantopoulou) in this new "mainstreaming" logic as the Fifth Five Year Action Programme on gender equality. The novelty is to introduce and monitor the changes of the roles of women and men in our society in all Community policies. The Committee welcomed this Commission initiative and contributed to its shaping before its adoption. It continues to monitor its progress on a regular basis.

Our Committee, which now comprises 40 full Members, has followed up the implementation of crucial Community recommendations such as the representation of women at all stages of decision-making with a view to achieving a better balance between women and men in all spheres of political and professional life. We also continue to be very interested in the issue of equal pay for work of equal value between women and men. An astounding request, I would say, at the beginning of this 21st century, if we consider that women are still paid less than men are for the same jobs or for jobs of equal value, in spite of the existing European legislation and case law. In order to change this situation, we asked that the causes of the problem be studied and that better statistics be put together by taking account of atypical work, which is more widespread among women than men. We also supported the European Commission's plan to carry out a campaign for equal pay. This issue became a priority on the agenda of the Belgian Presidency of the European Union at the end of last year.

During the last few months, the Committee members saw to the adoption of four new Reports on issues of paramount importance to women in particular and to the better,

harmonious development of EU relations with its neighbours in general :

Last February a Greek Member of our Committee focused on the situation of women around the Mediterranean. The Report subsequently adopted by the Parliament calls for a greater emphasis on the role of women in the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, along with the respect for the principles of political, social and economic equality between the sexes. We believe that the Euro-Mediterranean co-operation policies must enable the situation of women to be addressed in a way that is not conditioned by gender or religious stereotypes, by analysing and studying the presence and role of women in the world today.

In the same spirit, a Report on women and fundamentalism presented by one of your compatriots (Ms.Izquierdo) gave rise to long and interesting debates. It was finally adopted by the Plenary and it put a foot in the door for new initiatives to be taken for the defense of fundamental rights.

Not later than the last session, two other Reports of our Committee were adopted : one on mainstreaming gender equality in development and cooperation and one on the Community Annual Report on gender equality, our "common tool" for measuring progress and pointing to areas of persistent inequalities.

This overview would not be complete without my mentioning the successful completion of our first truly "legislative" intervention: negotiations between the Parliament and the Council to update a 26 year old directive on Equal Treatment for Women and Men as regards access to employment, vocational training and promotion. A compromise has been eventually reached two weeks ago with the Council having to accept some of the most significant

amendments proposed by the Parliament such as preventive measures against harassment, protection of persons supporting the victims of harassment, precision of definitions of direct and indirect discrimination, harassment and sexual harassment, no prior exclusion or restriction of access of representatives of one sex to a profession, safeguards to prevent discrimination against parents using their maternity and paternity rights etc – if I am to mention just a few of them.

This new directive which should enter into force by 2003 gives a wider scope to fight discrimination in all aspects of women's professional life.

This naturally leads me to the next important piece of legislation for women in the European Union : the draft Directive on Article 13 of the Amsterdam Treaty which should for the first time lay down the legal basis to fight discrimination in all aspects of life (not only at work). The timetable for the adoption of this directive is within the coming year. I wish to specifically draw your attention on this crucial piece of legislation as the EP has only a consultative role in this field of Community action (third pillar). The real hard negotiations will take place amongst the governments of the Member States...under the close scrutiny of their Parliaments and of the women in their Parliaments – we hope.

Let me finish now by underlining to what degree the situation of women in Afghanistan has highlighted some of the shortcomings of our external relation policy at European Union level. It blatantly revealed that this developing field of European Union action (ie external relations extended to security and defense policy) needs to be seriously "gender mainstreamed". Firstly we should have a sufficient number of women in decision making positions, women who are

attentive to the situation of women, so that the Taliban regime may not happen again, anywhere in the world. Secondly, the fundamental rights of women should become a higher priority on the agenda of the Union.

I would like to finish by drawing your attention to the need of uniting our forces in order to make sure that the type of European Union as currently prepared by the Convention and which will be formalised in 2004 by the Intergovernmental Conference, will duly take gender equality a step forward. Our Committee is assisting the European Parliament's Delegation in the Convention to introduce a gender perspective in the debates. Our next meeting on 22 May will take up this issue for the first time. My intention is to find mechanisms to allow women Parliamentarians from Member States to exchange views and ideas with us as well as with their national delegations on a continuous basis. We will achieve great progress together. Thank you for your attention.