Fourth United Nations International Conference on Women (September 1995, Beijing)

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The Conference concluded with the adoption of a Platform of Action and a statement intended as a political message on the essential points of that Platform. The Council concentrated on the follow--up measures to fulfil the Platform of Action planned in the Member States and on those to be implemented at European Union level; it also considered the incorporation of the principle of equality between men and women in the Member States' policies and programmes (mainstreaming). In the course of the debate the Ministers and Commissioner FLYNN welcomed the results of the Beijing Conference. The following were among the points made in connection with the implementation of the results: - the major role played by the non--governmental organisations; - the need to apply existing Community legislation effectively throughout the European Union; - the need to achieve greater equality between men and women in all areas affecting employment; - greater involvement of women in decision--taking, both in politics and business. Several Ministers and the Commission felt that the adoption of the 'Fourth Programme on Equal Opportunities for Men and Women' would be an essential contribution to the implementation of the Beijing programme at Community level. The conclusions that the Presidency submitted on the close of the debate were as follows. 'The European Council noted that, together with combating unemployment, equal opportunities for women and men represents the prime task within the European Union. The Beijing Conference, organised by the United Nations, concluded with a Platform of Action establishing the rights of women and the girl child and laying down specific provisions with the aim of achieving the objective of equality between women and men. The Platform of Action is a document which will have positive effects for all, women and men, implementation of which will benefit society as a whole. The Beijing Conference has shown that empowerment of women and equality are preconditions for the development of peoples. We shall therefore be stepping up equal opportunities policies, particularly in the field of economic, political and social participation by women. The European Union attaches fundamental importance to policies on vocational training, labour market equality, combating wage discrimination and job segregation, promotion of entrepreneurship by women, balanced participation in decision--making, and the combining of working life with family life for women and men - in the final analysis, to improving the socio-economic status of women. Building the equal opportunities factor into the design of action in all social, economic, political and cultural fields is the only way to address effectively the full participation of women in public life. We shall therefore be bolstering national arrangements for equal opportunities and working to make policy on equality a leading plank in the programmes of our governments and political parties and in action by the social partners. We, the Member States of the European Union, are resolved to condemn and eradicate any form of violence against women, which must be regarded as a violation of their basic rights and freedoms, both domestic violence and violence in other areas of society. We shall have to step up development cooperation efforts, particularly for women in countries with economies undergoing transition, and give priority to programmes which include among their objectives equal opportunities for women and men. The Beijing Conference acknowledged the role of non-governmental organisations, which need to cooperate with governments in implementing the measures in the Platform of Action. At national level, all Member States have set in train measures to fulfil the Platform of Action: action programmes, declarations, follow-up measures and machinery for dialogue with non--governmental organisations to determine future action strategies. All Member States are firmly committed to equal opportunities. The European Union will continue to act as a driving force, as it did at the Beijing Conference. The fifteen Member States were able to speak with a single voice, which lent us considerable strength and political weight. The fourth medium-term Community action programme on equal opportunities for women and men will provide a chance to put our commitments into practice within the European Union. One of the key aspects will be monitoring and evaluation of the application of the measures adopted and of those to be adopted in future by the European Union as a result of implementing

the Platform of Action. Given the importance of putting into practice the Beijing Platform of Action, both in the European Union and in each of the Member States, the need is apparent for the Labour and Social Affairs Council to monitor and evaluate such application on a regular basis, with the inclusion of the matter on its agenda at least once a year.'