Equal opportunities between men and women: 4th action programme 1996-2000

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The Council held a policy debate on the proposal for a decision on a Fourth Programme on equal opportunities for men and women. It covered the following points in particular: - the objectives of the programme; - the incorporation of the principle of equality between men and women in all policies and programmes (mainstreaming); - the respective roles of the Community and the Member States. The delegations spoke favourably of the principle underlying the programme. Many felt, however, that important aspects of it should be made more specific. At that stage one delegation maintained a reservation on the legal basis proposed by the Commission, namely Article 235 of the Treaty. The same delegation also doubted that certain actions proposed would be compatible with the principle of subsidiarity. On the conclusion of the debate the President noted that: - the delegations felt that this sort of programme would give new momentum to action in this area; - the objectives, among which ‘mainstreaming’ was considered essential, were adequate although they should be made more specific; - the legal difficulty that had emerged must be examined in greater depth. The Presidency confirmed its intention of having the Fourth Programme approved at the Council’s December meeting on Labour and Social Affairs in order to ensure continuity of action in this field.