Equal opportunities for women and men in the Union. 5th annual report 2000

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PURPOSE : to present the Commission's annual report on equal opportunities for women and men in the European Union 2000. CONTENT : this Commission annual report to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions concerns equal opportunities for women and men in the European Union 2000. In June 2000, the Commission adopted the first comprehensive Framework Strategy on Gender Equality covering all aspects of the question. In line with the integrated approach, the Strategy makes use of all existing tools and structures, while supporting the development of new ones: monitoring, indicators and benchmarking. The Strategy is accompanied by a Programme, which will provide EUR 50 Million over the next 5 years for promoting gender equality. With regard to gender mainstreaming, this commits the EU to incorporating the goal of gender equality into the full range of its activities, not just those aimed directly at promoting it. It is a central element to the Commission's new Framework Strategy. With regard to gender equality in employment, there is still a large gender pay gap and the female employment rate is still 18 points below the male rate. In response, the Lisbon European Council in March set ambitious new targets for women: most importantly, measures should br taken to increase the female employment rate to 60% by 2010 from today's 53%. The Employment strategy should play an important part in achieving that target. With regard to a gender perspective in EU human rights policies, in 2000 the Commission put forward a proposal to amend the 1976 Directive on equal treatment. In addition to other initiatives, the Commission also announced its intention to propose a new gender-equality Directive in 2002, based on Article 13 of the EC Treaty. With regard to equality in the enlargement process, under the Commission's strategy paper on enlargement, endorsed at the Nice European Council, provisional completion for negotiations on employment and social policy are scheduled for the first half of 2001 for most countries. Hungary, the Czech Republic and Lithuania appear to be the front runners in passing Community legislation on gender equality into national law. However, on the whole, the institutional capacity is not up to the task of enforcing gender legislation. While the figure on labour-market inequalities appear to paint a more optimistic picture, the political participation of women is low and significantly below the EU average. Finally, with regard to promoting a gender balance in decision-making, women are still under-represented in the EU too. Work will continue under the Strategy for gender equality. At national level, a wide variety of measures have been tried to raise female representation, with varying degrees of success. The issue of women in business is only just starting to be addressed in a systematic way. Good statistics are needed to make the glass ceiling and other obstacles more visible. A recent Commission studyfound that only 23% of businesses in the EU are owned by women.