Equal opportunities for women and men in the European Union. 6th annual report 2001

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PURPOSE : to present the sixth Annual Report on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in the European Union. CONTENT : this Annual Report, the sixth on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in the European Union, presents an overview of the main developments and achievements at European and national level in 2001 and outlines perspectives for the year 2002. As regards the the Community Framework Strategy to Gender equality (2001-2005), the report states that 2001 was the first year of the implementation of the Framework Strategy on Gender Equality. There was some noticeable progress in the year 2001 both with regard to substance and methodology for the integration of gender issues in policies and also with regard to the gender balance in the Commissions committees and expert groups. This progress confirms the efficiency of the structured approach chosen in the Framework Strategy which is based on forward planing, setting specific objectives and monitoring the activities and results at the end of each year. In 2001 interesting new activities were selected for an integration of a gender equality perspective, for instance: - World trade and globalisation (Directorate General for Trade), - The integrated product policy, in particular waste management (Directorate General Environment), - Asylum and refugee policy (Directorate General Justice and Home Affairs) and - An interpretative communication on the incorporation of social aspects in public procurement, including equality of treatment and opportunity between men and women, was adopted (DG Internal Market in co-operation with DG Employment). As regards the action plan, a new Action Programme for which a priority theme is selected each year accompanies the Framework Strategy. The priority theme in 2001 was the gender pay gap. Equal pay for women and men in the European Union is now part of the process launched at the Lisbon Summit in 2000 to make the European Union the most knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010 with more and better jobs and social cohesion. Each year, the Commission assesses progress towards the Lisbon objectives on the base of structural indicators, which now includes an indicator on gender pay differentials. In practice, the majority of the 27 projects selected in 2001 under the Action Programme, deal with equal pay issues. The total funding for them is approximately 8 million Euro. The results are expected for 2003. As far as equality in the enlargement process is concerned, the report highlights that a basic condition of membership of the European Union is acceptance and transposition of the "acquis communitaire". In the field of equal opportunities, candidate countries are required to have transposed the nine Directives at the time of entry. The work of transposition is on going with some of the candidate countries achieving good success in 2001. However, legislation of itself is not enough. Experience has shown that supporting mechanisms are essential for effective equality. In this context, structures such as equality bodies, ombudspersons for equality and independent advice are key. In 2002 the spotlight will be on reconciling work and family life. Several initiatives will be taken at European level, such as improving the visibility of the issue in the main political processes, funding of transnational projects, improving statistics and indicators and producing a report on theimplementation of the Directive on parental leave. The year 2002 will be a year of reinforcing gender equality legislation as well. The Commission will bring forward a proposal for a Directive on sex discrimination. The new Directive will intervene in areas beyond employment and social security, which is the present extent of Community equality law. The issues of combating trafficking in women and violence as well as of improving the gender dimension in the external policies of the European Union and in the Structural Funds will continue to be high on the political agenda in 2002. Moreover, following the on going assessment of women's participation at the decision-making level, and in advance of the elections to the European Parliament in 2004, the Commission envisages concentrating its 2003 activities on the promotion of gender balance in decision making. It should also be noted that on 18 April 2002 the Council and the Parliament reached political agreement on the amendment to Directive 76/207/EC on equal treatment in employment.