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

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The committee adopted the report by María AVILES PEREA (EPP-ED, E) on the Commission's annual report for 2000 on equal opportunities for women and men in the EU. It felt that the report was an improvement on previous years, although it expressed disappointment that there was hardly any mention of Commission measures to ensure enforcement of existing legislation on equal treatment in the Member States. Commenting on the findings of the annual report, the committee noted with concern that too high a proportion of women were still concentrated in part-time, unstable and low-skilled jobs. Women were also still seriously under-represented in the IT sector and the Member States were therefore urged to facilitate women's access to education and training in the new technologies, as agreed at the December 2000 Nice Summit. In line with the Lisbon Council objective of raising the female employment rate to 60% by 2010, Member States were also urged to set specific objectives to desegregate the labour market and reduce the pay gap between men and women. The committee's report acknowledged that Member States had made progress with regard to the provision of childcare structures, as part of the policy of reconciling work and family life. It pointed out, however, that the issue was not confined to childcare alone and that little progress had been made as regards improving care for other dependents such as elderly, sick or disabled people. MEPs also highlighted the need to develop statistical methods, including in the candidate countries, in order to compile statistics broken down by sex, thereby making it possible to assess the impact on women and men of the various policies implemented. The Commission was urged to make full use of the funding possibilities offered by the new action programme on gender equality (2001-2005) in order to compile and update statistics. The committee also raised the possibility of drawing up an index of gender development in the EU. Other points taken up in the report included a call for the Commission to come up with proposals to encourage Member States to achieve a more balanced participation of men and women in decision-making. This issue should also be addressed in the context of the accession negotiations. On enlargement, MEPs stressed that respect for the "acquis communautaire" as regards equal treatment and opportunities for women was an absolute prerequisite for accession. Lastly, the committee called on the EU Member States and the applicant countries to take urgent measures, including appropriate criminal penalties, to tackle the problems of domestic violence and trafficking in women.