Incorporating equal opportunities for women and men into all Community policies and activities (mainstreaming)

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OBJECTIVE: The purpose of the communication is to give substance to the principle of 'mainstreaming' as regards equality of opportunity for men and women, i.e. the promotion of such equality in all Community policies and initiatives. What is called for in particular is a systematic definition and assessment of all the areas in which such equality is lacking and the implementation of strategies which will enable the principle of equality between men and women to be taken into consideration more effectively at all levels. SUBSTANCE: the purpose of the Commission's communication is not just to provide a list of policies and initiatives in which the male/female equality aspect should be taken into greater consideration. On the contrary, its purpose is to mobilize all of the Community's general policies and initiatives, both current and future, with a view to ensuring full equality. More specifically, the Commission intends to incorporate the 'equality' dimension actively and visibly in the actual process of drawing up Community policies and initiatives so that more account can be taken of the respective situations of men and women ('gender perspective'). As regards the acquis communautaire the Commission points out that the principle of equal pay has existed since the Community was set up. Since then a series of laws have come into being with particular regard to equal rights in terms of employment, vocational training and social protection. At the same time the Community has developed a series of positive actions in order to promote such equality at all levels. However, the Commission emphasizes the fact that it has very little scope for action in this area on account of the existing legal basis (Article 119 - equal pay), even though the most recent European Councils (Essen, Cannes and Madrid) have called for the principle of equality to be strengthened. This is why, in the second part of its communication, the Commission describes all the changes it would like to see made to certain policies and, in particular certain specific areas such as: - employment and the labour market, - the status of women entrepreneurs and assisting spouses in SMEs, - education and training, - rights of individuals, - external relations, - information/awareness. In addition to these six areas there is a section on the Commission's staff policy, by way of an example. At the same time the Commission describes the role of the Structural Funds, which constitute the main Community financial instrument and which are used in several of the above areas.