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

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PURPOSE: presentation of the Commission's interim report on the implementation of the medium-term Community action programme on equal opportunities for men and women (1996-2000). CONTETN: the medium-term Community action programme on equal opportunities for women and men (1996-2000) was adopted by Council in December 1995 (decision 95/593/CE, see procedure entry CNS95206). It was designed to build on the experience of the preceding Community programmes on equal opportunities, aiming not just to consolidate previous activities but also to react to new ideas, demands and challenges. The present interim report fulfils the Commission obligation, as laid down in the Council decision, to present a mid-term review on the implementation of the programme. The programme has 6 policy aims: achieving gender mainstreaming, mobilising all actors to achieve equality, promoting equality in a changing economy, reconciling work and family life, promoting a gender balance in decision-making and creating optimum conditions for the exercise of equality rights. The report presents the findings of the programme in relation to these 6 policy aims. According to the report, gender mainstreaming, which is the overriding principle of the programme, is proving to be a complex, long-term approach. However, the Commission considers that this complexity and long-term perspective are precisely what makes the activities of the programme in this respect so important. Since the start of the programme, the importance of gender mainstreaming has been confirmed by the declaration of the European Council in Cardiff in June 1998 and further emphasised by the integration of this principle into the employment guidelines and a specific declaration by the heads of State and governments at Cardiff. Another important principle of the programme has been to ensure complementarity between the programme and the national actions or plans on equal opportunities. This has been done in cooperation with the management committee, which is made up of representatives of the Member State equal opportunities authorities. Thanks to this cooperation, a positive synergy has been created between the programme and Member States equality bodies. In conclusion, the report stresses the need for the development of a common framework for coordinated actions at European level. In this respect, important concepts such as gender mainstreaming and gender balance in decision-making are now beeing developed in a European setting and are more and more linked with European policies, due to the platform for analysis and discussion offered by the programme. At the same time the programme is creating a common agenda for gender equality in Europe. This emerging convergence between the Member States is among the most positive side effects of the activities undertaken within the programme.