

Equality between women and men in the European Union

2004/2159(INI) - 02/02/2006 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drawn up by Edite **ESTRELA** (PSE, PT) in response to the Commission's 2004 annual report on equality between women and men in the EU. It felt that the Commission's report was descriptive in nature and dealt with significant developments in the law in the Member States, but avoided mentioning shortcomings in transposition and the violations of Community law committed by the Member States and included no analysis or evaluation of the current situation. The report shows that the disparities between women and men have decreased in employment and education within the EU, but that the pay gap between the two sexes has remained virtually the same. It clearly demonstrated that there has been no real progress in the implementation of the principle of equal pay for work of equal value, which was introduced thirty years ago by Council Directive 75/117/EC. In the Union of 15 the gap remained stable at about 16%, whilst the estimated figure for the Union of 25, which takes account of pay differences in the new Member States, is, at 15%, slightly lower.

Parliament called on the Member States and the accession and candidate countries to provide statistics on the gender pay gap in all areas of work and to pursue more vigorous and extensive measures to implement Community legislation aimed at reducing the pay gap, and to eliminate the gender divide on the labour market in order to increase the percentage of women working in senior posts commensurate with their qualifications. Member States and the Commission must also make sure that pension schemes were not discriminatory against women and that they did not reinforce existing patterns that already place women at a disadvantage in terms of benefits and contributions. Parliament stressed the importance of avoiding gender segregation in the labour market and called on the Member States, in their educational systems, to encourage young women to pursue studies in non-traditional fields.

It went on to emphasise how important it is that the Commission monitor compliance by the Member States with the *acquis communautaire* in the area of equality between women and men in all Union policies, particularly employment but also access to and provision of goods and services. The Commission was asked to carry out a study into how Member States implement Community legislation and to take appropriate action in the event of non-transposition or violation in view of Member States' actual implementation of the *acquis* in the area of equality.

In addition, Member States were urged to take measures to support the reconciliation of work and private life for working women, e.g. by providing facilities for the care of children, the elderly and dependants and devising more flexible working conditions. Member States were reminded of their commitments, agreed at the Barcelona European Council in 2002, to eliminate obstacles to the equal participation of women and men in the labour market and to introduce by 2010 childcare for 90% of children between three years old and the mandatory school age, and for at least 33% of children under three years old. Parliament called on the Member States to put forward similar targets for facilities for care for the elderly and sick relatives.

Parliament took the view that legislation on equal treatment between women and men should cover social protection, including health care, and education. The Commission was also urged to use the structural funds to promote equality between women and men, by ensuring that that aspect is included in operational programmes. Attention was drawn to the need to support the social integration of immigrant women, who are often the victims of two-fold discrimination because of their gender and national or religious origin. Integration must be through facilitating their access to education, supporting their business activities and

incorporating them into European Social Fund programmes and the Equal programme aimed at improving the social position of migrants.

Parliament also recommended better coordination between the mainstreaming policy and the Lisbon, and the strengthening of the representation of women on decision-making bodies, which is an essential condition for the effective integration of the principle of gender equality into all policies.

Finally, it asked the Commission to include facts and statistics from acceding and candidate countries in future annual reports on equality between women and men.