

The Hague, November 5, 2004

**ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE NETWORK OF PARLIAMENTARY
COMMITTEES FOR EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES OF WOMEN AND MEN OF THE
PARLIAMENTS OF THE EU MEMBER STATES AND CANDIDATE COUNTRIES
AND OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT (NCEO)**

Presidency Conclusions

Preliminary remarks

1. The annual Conference of the delegates of the Network of Parliamentary Committees for equal opportunities of the parliament of the EU Member States and the European Parliament took place in the Plenary Hall of the House of Representatives of the States-General in The Hague on the 5th of November 2004. Delegates of the National Parliaments of the Member States and Candidate Countries and of the European Parliament participated in the Conference. The Conference was alternatively presided over by Mrs. Tineke Lodders and Mrs. Andrée van Es. In her welcoming speech, the President of the Dutch Senate, Mrs. Yvonne E.M.A. Timmerman-Buck, pointed out that with respect to the subject of Women's Economic Independence some issues seemed to be somewhat outdated, but that in fact these issues still required attention. She pointed out the issue of the gender pay gap in the European Union. She went on to state that new challenges have arisen such as the bringing back of women in the workforce. Mrs. Timmerman-Buck concluded that the ultimate goal we should try to achieve is making sure that the economic independence of all women is nothing more than a personal choice.
2. From the outset two specific topics were placed on the agenda: women's economic independence in general and economic independence and the position of women from immigrant groups and ethnic minorities in particular. HRH Princess Máxima held an opening address in the Conference in which she stated that diversity is something you have to take account of when you talk about emancipation and participation. Emancipation and participation are two sides of the same coin.
3. Speaking on the subject of women's economic independence, Mrs. Janneke Plantenga, Associate professor at the Utrecht School of Economics and professor at the University of Groningen, presented data on several indicators which together gave a good perspective on the socio-economic position of women (and men) in the EU Member States. As economic independence is essentially dependent on an equal distribution of both paid and unpaid labour, she also presented some data on what has been referred to in the Dutch debate as 'care independence'.
Mrs. Lydia la Rivière-Zijdel, President of the European Women's Lobby, stressed that the feminisation of poverty continues to be a reality across Europe. EU Member States should give more visibility to women's participation in the social and solidarity-based economy by gathering and disseminating qualitative and quantitative information on this issue. The added value of women's participation to the paid employment market has been proven in various studies.

4. In her presentation on the subject of women's economic independence and the position of women from immigrant groups and ethnic minorities, The director of the Netherlands Family Council, Mrs. Erna Hooghiemstra, briefly sketched the history of the migration of Dutch women with different ethnic backgrounds. She gave a broad overview of the Dutch politics concerned with the emancipation and integration of women with a foreign background. She paid special attention to two very important transitions during the course of women's lives: starting a family and its effects on the participation in society by women with different migrant backgrounds.

Mrs. Philomena Essed, senior researcher at the Amsterdam Institute for Metropolitan and International Development Studies at the University of Amsterdam and visiting professor of Women's Studies of the University of California, argued that more attention should be paid to the gender specific implications of assimilation and integration and to the hampering effects of multiple discriminations. Focus first on what (ethnic minority) women can and want to offer, how this can be accomplished, and what kind of institutional and legal support is needed to realize their ambitions.

Procedural remarks

The representatives of the National Parliaments of the Member States and Candidate Countries and of the European Parliament attending the 9th Conference of the Network of Parliamentary Committees for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, in The Hague,

1. Agree to report in their respective Assemblies on the progress achieved at this meeting and to place the important issue of economic independence of women and the measures required to enable it as soon as possible on the parliamentary agenda.
2. Desire that this meeting be followed by a report in each country on the implementation of national policies targeting economic independence for women from the perspective of the Lisbon objectives.
3. Propose a new methodology for the next conference: to define a specific theme four months in advance of this conference, so that each country may submit a written contribution on the chosen topic to be presented during the plenary meeting of the network.
4. Ask the President of this Conference to forward these Presidency conclusions to Presidents of the National Parliaments and the European Parliament, the Presidents of the European Commission and the Council of Ministers.

Women's economic independence

The representatives of the National Parliaments of the Member States and Candidate Countries and of the European Parliament attending the 9th Conference of the Network of Parliamentary Committees for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, in The Hague,

5. Underline the fact that economic inequality forms the basis for a broader inequality between men and women.
6. Take note of the target of 60% female employment which was set during the Lisbon agenda of the European Union.
7. Take note of the targets with regard to childcare set during the Barcelona agenda of 2002 i.e. 33% of childcare places for children under three and 90% for children from the age of three until mandatory school age.

8. Are aware of the full diversity of women's situations and conditions and recognize that many women face particular barriers to their empowerment.
9. Believe that gender should not always be seen in isolation but should be interwoven with other structural factors such as ethnicity and age.
10. State that women's economic independence contributes to labour participation as a whole.
11. Call on the governments of all Member states to develop a global policy for promoting economic independence of women, within four important policy lines:
 - employment policy
 - wage policy
 - reconciliation of work and family
 - Equal sharing of unpaid work
12. Welcome the European Council Conclusions of the Spring Summit 2004 that call for the development of strategies to enlarge the net participation of women and older employees, the encouragement of a gender mainstreaming approach to realize the general Lisbon objectives and to handle the differences in pay and the creation of more family friendly jobs to get more women to join the workforce.
13. Call on the national governments and other relevant stakeholders to take concrete steps to implement these conclusions.
14. Call on the governments of all Member States to continue to develop new strategies to enlarge the net participation of women in society.
15. Advise governments to develop and implement measures that encourage self-employment and (social) entrepreneurship as an effective way to achieve women's economic independence
16. Welcome the idea of recognizing women's unpaid employment within and in relation to the domestic sphere within the GDP in order to elevate women's economic independence.
17. Propose the development and implementation of specific vocational training programmes for women who are victims of gender violence, so as to enable them to access the labour market, since economic independence forms a handicap for those who wish to escape from these violent situations
18. Express the wish that more attention is paid to the fact that improvements are only feasible if the emancipation of partners is taken into account and if suitable solutions are found for the combination of work and care.
19. Express the wish that more attention would be paid to equal sharing of unpaid work by setting for example targets for the taking up of parental leave by men.
20. Are aware of the fact that one of the groups with the lowest participation rate in society consists of migrant women and believe that it is very important to invest in these women, not only because for the sake of their own emancipation process, but also for the sake of the next generation of women and men these women are raising.
21. Are aware of the fact there is a large group of migrant women who are doing well, who are fulfilling an important role in society as role models but who still have a problem in the employment market.
22. Call on the governments of all Member states to take appropriate measures in the field of social policy and education in order to offer often socially-excluded migrant women and women from ethnic minorities the opportunity to acquire the necessary language skills and vocational training so they can participate and be integrated in the labour market
23. Welcome the idea of establishing a European Gender Institute and call on the European Commission to put forward a detailed proposal.