



R É P U B L I Q U E F R A N Ç A I S E

DELEGATIONS FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS
AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEN AND WOMEN



**Network of Parliamentary Committees for
Equal Opportunities for Women and Men
in the European Union (NCEO)**

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MINUTES



TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Pages
– Welcome message by Mr Christian Poncelet, President of the Senate.....	3
– Intervention by Ms Valérie Létard, Minister of State, responsible for Solidarity, attached to Mr Xavier Bertrand, Minister for Labour, Labour Relations, the Family and Solidarity	5
– Intervention by Mr Nikolaus van der Pas, Director-General of DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities of the European Commission.....	7

FIRST SESSION**SUBJECT: PROFESSIONAL EQUALITY BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN**

Chair: Ms Gisèle Gautier, President of the Senate Delegation for Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women

– Introduction by Ms Gisèle Gautier, President of the Senate Delegation for Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women	13
– Intervention by Ms Gisèle Halimi, former deputy, lawyer, president of the association « Choose the women's cause ».....	15
– Intervention by Ms Mercedes Erra, Co-chair of Euro RSCG Worldwide and Chair of Euro RSCG France	17
– Intervention by Ms Catherine Ferrant, Vice-President, Diversity and Accountability, TOTAL	17
DEBATE	19

SECOND SESSION**SUBJECT: WOMEN'S ACCESS TO POSITIONS OF RESPONSIBILITY**

Chair: Ms Marie-Jo Zimmermann, President of the National Assembly Delegation for Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women

– Introduction by Ms Marie-Jo Zimmermann, President of the National Assembly Delegation for Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women.....	29
– Intervention by Ms Anna Záborská, President of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality of the European Parliament	31
– Intervention by Ms Françoise Vilain, President of the Economic and Social Council's Delegation for Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women.....	32
DEBATE	33
CLOSING OF THE CONFERENCE by Ms Marie-Jo Zimmermann and Ms Gisèle Gautier, Presidents respectively of the National Assembly and the Senate Delegations for Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women	41

Welcome message by Mr Christian Poncelet, President of the Senate

Ms Gisèle Gautier, President of the Senate Delegation for Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women, first read a welcome message from Mr Christian Poncelet, the President of the Senate, who could not attend.

In this message, Mr Poncelet first expressed his regret at being prevented from attending the Network of Parliamentary Committees for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in the European Union (NCEO) meeting, focusing on '*professional equality between women and men*' and '*women's access to positions of responsibility*', both of which themes illustrate the campaign for '*wanting to live together*', which in turn rests on Republican values headed by equal opportunities, and their corollary, the rejection of discrimination.

He believed that if Europe was to go on to progress, it should, according to the German Chancellor Ms Angela Merkel, encourage a fair representation of women at leadership levels in both the political and the economic areas.

He also said it was no longer possible to settle for a situation in which women continued to play '*second fiddle*', or even worse, act as the '*stooges*' of political or corporate leaders who want to salve their consciences on the cheap; he also said that all women should become "*fully-fledged citizens instead of being held at a remove*".

Mr Poncelet went on to say that pay disparities were still a fact of life, even though women accounted for just under half the economically active population; furthermore, the higher one went up the management ladder, the fewer women there were to be found. He emphasized that professional equality between men and women was an issue in four parts:

- a universal issue linked to fundamental human rights;
- then a democratic issue because, as Mr Jacques Chirac, then President of the Republic, pointed out so appositely, '*the degree to which a society is civilised is measured first of all by the roles played within it by women*';
- also an economic issue because professional equality is a factor of growth and modernity;
- and lastly a social issue that bases modernity on the genuine sharing of responsibilities, and on the establishment of a new dynamic between men and women in managing society around the values of respect, dignity and responsibility.

Intervention by Ms Valérie Létard, Minister of State, responsible for Solidarity, attached to Mr Xavier Bertrand, Minister for Labour, Labour Relations, the Family and Solidarity

Ms Létard first welcomed the European Parliament initiative that had given rise to this meeting “*which offered so much hope*”. She said that equality between men and women was a fundamental principle firmly anchored in the history of European integration, and was one of the French government’s political priorities. She then announced the next meeting, which would take place in November 2008 during the French Presidency of the European Union: a ministerial-level conference on professional equality between women and men.

With regard to the ‘*strategic issue*’ of equality between men and women at the workplace, she stressed how relevant this meeting was in order to make good use of the statements and concrete experiences, to value good practice, and to move forward in respect of professional and pay equality between women and men.

Ms Létard then provided statistics on the situation of women in the workplace in the 27 countries of the European Union:

- firstly, the female participation rate has risen each year, the European average now standing at 57 % (70% in Sweden and nearly 74% in Denmark, compared with 46% in Greece and 35% in Malta), while the gap between men’s and women’s participation rates has declined (from 17 points in 2000 to 14.4 points in 2006);

- in 2007, over three quarters of part-time workers were women (76.5%), that is to say one in three women compared with one in ten men (percentages of part-time working range from 30% in France to 75% in the Netherlands);

- although women’s unemployment reached its lowest level for ten years in 2007 (9%), the gap between men and women is half as great in the United Kingdom and Austria as it is in France, where it is as high as 10.9% (i.e. above the average for the European Union);

- lastly, pay disparities have only fallen by 1 point since 2000, and have remained stable at 15% on average (pay disparity stands at 25% in Estonia, almost 20% in France, and 3% in Malta).

Ms Létard also referred to two points of convergence between the 27 countries of the European Union: firstly, a positive outcome – the standard of women’s education has caught up with, and even exceeded, that of men everywhere; secondly, a negative outcome – there are persistent inequalities in all countries with regard to women’s access to positions of responsibility.

She went on to say that there had been an increase in women’s involvement in decision-making, a development illustrated by the examples of women working as CEOs and Ministers and the fact that the women’s 10%

threshold had been crossed on the Boards of CAC 40 companies. However, women were still largely excluded from certain fields like research, science, high technology and construction, and were concentrated in some traditional sectors and in middle management. Only 30% of CEOs in France are women, compared with 50% in the United States.

Women's labour market participation, their vocational integration, recognition of their skills and the valuing of their potential were essential for efficiency and economic competitiveness, and Ms Létard explained that, as part of the work she was carrying out with Mr Xavier Bertrand, Minister for Labour, Labour Relations, the Family and Solidarity, the Government had organised a national tripartite conference on salary and professional equality on 26 November 2007. The conference had determined the courses of action of the Government and the social partners.

She said that the reduction in professional inequality between women and men made use of a measuring tool for diagnosing existing pay disparities, the comparative report (*rapport de situation comparée*), and announced that a practical on-line guide on the Ministry of Labour website, including a model report, had been produced in mid-July to help companies produce one.

Ms Létard went on to say that a bill would be placed before Parliament in early 2009 providing for a financial penalty to be served on companies that did not set up pay disparity reduction plans by 31 December 2009. This penalty, which could be expressed as a percentage of salary mass, will have to be sufficiently large to act as a deterrent and persuade companies to act before the deadline. It will also aim to be redistributive by pouring in state resources earmarked for companies that adopt measures in favour of professional equality and job desegregation.

She also stated that the government was taking steps to encourage the spread of branch and enterprise-level collective negotiation (800 agreements addressed the issue of professional equality in 2007 compared with 400 in 2006 and 289 in 2005).

Ms Létard added that the Government also wanted to campaign against involuntary and fragmented part-time work by organising a round table next autumn with the employment sectors most concerned, such as mass retail and cleaning, and by looking into appropriate responses such as training, multi-jobs, the distribution of working hours, the move from part-time to full-time, and the reconciliation of work and private life.

She looked forward to a re-balancing between fathers and mothers in relation to parental leave, and referred to the launch of a "*Parenthood Charter*" (*Charte de la parentalité*) which had been signed that very day by some 30 companies contributing actively to the creation of an environment that favours working parents.

Ms Létard then talked about the "*Equality label*" (*label égalité*) awarded to some 40 companies that had adopted a measure in support of

professional equality. She announced that actions undertaken by the Government in favour of professional equality had been cascaded at regional level by Regional Prefects, and that a fresh meeting with the social partners would be organised next autumn.

She also welcomed the recent adoption of an amendment to Article 1 of the Constitution “*promoting equal access for women and men to positions of professional and social responsibility*”. This amendment will make it possible to adopt legislation designed to ensure a more balanced representation of women and men in jurisdictions and voting structures, and in decision-making bodies in the workplace, and will complete the Constitutional review adopted on 28 June 1999 establishing the principle of equal access for women and men to electoral mandates and elected public office.

By way of conclusion, Ms Létard stressed that although equality had been achieved in law, it had not been completely translated into fact.

She said that she found all forms of violence and attacks perpetrated against the integrity of women unacceptable, and urged those attending the NCEO conference to visit the Council of Europe’s “*Break the silence on domestic violence*” exhibition. The exhibition had been mounted on the initiative of Mr Jean-Guy Branger, a Senator, and a member of the Delegation for Women’s Rights of the Senate, and of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

Intervention by Mr Nikolaus van der Pas, Director-General, DG “Employment, Social Affairs, Equal Opportunities” of the European Commission

Mr van der Pas, Director-General, DG “Employment, Social Affairs, Equal Opportunities” of the European Commission, first presented apologies on behalf of Vladimir Špidla, the European Commissioner responsible for equal opportunities, who had been prevented from attending by a presentation to the European Parliament of a new social agenda adopted the previous day by the European Commission. He welcomed the French Presidency, considering it offered hope for progress towards social Europe, of which the issue of equality was an important component. He also mentioned the next informal meeting of Ministers on this matter due to take place in Paris on 10-11 July.

He stressed that action in this field was taking place at all levels – national, regional and local – and he believed that Europe had a role to play in mobilising to prioritise social questions, and in initiating convergences between national policies.

Mr van der Pas then spoke of the importance of the social dimension in Europe, and said that the social agenda approved by the European Commission aimed to find the best possible position for supporting the development of member states on a social level.

He emphasised that equality was one of the fundamental values of the European Union, and that it guaranteed the dignity of the whole of society.

In a reference to what the British call a “*business case*”, Mr van der Pas drew attention to the economic interest for companies to promote this fundamental value of equality, in a context of globalisation and demographic change that calls for the mobilisation of all talents in our society and of all factors of production and productivity.

He said that if women were not fully integrated into this mobilisation, in spite of representing a majority in the population at large and also among university graduates, it would be an appalling waste. So we should do our utmost to ensure equality between men and women by extending by the way this equality work to equal integration of the elderly, of people with disabilities, and also, for example, of certain marginalised groups.

Mr van der Pas then referred to the fact that the European Union had adopted substantial legislation promoting equality: Community Directives that are transposed into national legislations ensure that there is no discrimination, including discrimination between men and women, in the workplace; one Directive that had also been transposed by the member states outlawed discrimination between men and women in access to goods and services.

In addition to this legislation, there was an action plan that had been adopted by the European Commission and called the “*Roadmap for equality between women and men*”. This included a large number of measures and initiatives for taking the matter forward, together with across-the-board strategies, that the member states have signed up to: these included the Lisbon Treaty, of which the vocational insertion of women on the labour market is a very important element, and structural funds in Europe supporting member states to co-fund projects aimed at promoting equality between men and women.

He also mentioned an important Directive dealing with parental leave, which ensures that this form of leave is recognised in national legislations, and a number of political commitments by the member states such as the Barcelona action dealing with women’s access to appropriate childcare arrangements.

Mr van der Pas acknowledged that there was still plenty to be done, but offered some statistics to describe the progress made so far: of the 12 million jobs created since 2000 (i.e. since the Lisbon strategy was first put into effect in Europe), over half, that is to say 7.5 million, have been taken by women.

He recognised that attitudes were generally changing, but he drew attention to persistent imbalances: the “*glass ceiling*”, the predominance of women in part-time and fixed-term employment, the compartmentalisation of the labour market, and the concentration of women in low-paid sectors – hence a significant pay disparity averaging 15% in Europe. He also alluded to the spread of stereotypes and educational segregation in Europe, and the fact that most of the people threatened by poverty are women.

With regard to the reconciliation of working and family life, Mr van der Pas said that the job of looking after both children and the elderly fell mainly to women. This had triggered a fall of almost 15% in the participation rate of women aged 20-48 with at least one child; meanwhile, the participation rate for men in the same age-band had actually risen.

Although progress had been made, he again stressed that much remained to be done at national level, in companies, among the social partners and within civil society as a whole.

Mr van der Pas went on to say that the Commission was following the implementation of the “*Roadmap*” very closely, and was also active on the legislative front. In particular, he said that there had been a consultation exercise with the social partners to improve the Directive on parental leave. This work had culminated in a Communication setting out new ideas on different forms for leave open to men (e.g. paternal leave, leave for looking after elderly relatives and adoption leave) that will reduce the load of work weighing on women, and will enable them to access the labour market in such a way that they no longer have to choose between “*family first*” and “*career first*”.

He argued that the situation in several European countries showed that reconciliation of this type was perfectly possible, and said that this initiative, which had been incorporated into the social agenda, should be the focus of a proposal for a Directive in the autumn. He also mentioned other initiatives, including some that seek to improve the welfare of the wives of self-employed workers.

In addition to these legislative initiatives, Mr van der Pas referred to a series of important Communications through which the Commission aimed to focus attention in Europe on the issue, in the broadest sense, of the reconciliation between family life and working life. This was essential in demographic terms. The Communications included one on pay disparity, and another on the progress, or lack of progress, made in setting up childcare arrangements.

Mr van der Pas finally referred to the European Commission’s initiative to establish a “*European Network of Women in Decision-making in Politics and the Economy*”, thanked Ms Gisèle Gautier for taking part in the network, and emphasised the priority that also needed to be given at European level to the struggle against violence and human trafficking.

FIRST SESSION
SUBJECT: PROFESSIONAL EQUALITY
BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN

Introduction by Ms Gisèle Gautier, President of the Senate Delegation for Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women

Ms Gautier introduced the first session on the theme of professional equality. This was the first European inter-parliamentary meeting of the French Presidency, and she expressed her delight at welcoming to the Senate in Paris some 60 foreign Parliamentarians, both women and men, representing 20 member countries of the European Union, together with representatives from the European Parliament, and from the Council of Europe, which has observer status.

She hoped that this Conference would lead to a better understanding of the legislation adopted, and good practice established, by various partners and European friends, and that it might be possible to draw inspiration from it with a view to improving the situation of women in all European countries through projects backed up with concrete actions.

Ms Gautier then thanked Mr Vladimir Špidla, the European Commissioner responsible for equal opportunities, who had been at the dinner given by the National Assembly the previous evening, for his personal commitment to effective equality between women and men, and welcomed Ms Valérie Létard, Minister of State responsible for solidarity, and Labour Minister Xavier Bertrand, both of whom had also been at the dinner. Ms Gautier said that professional equality was essential if we were to achieve true equality between women and men, and represented the core of the policies implemented by the European Commission in the framework of the "*Roadmap for equality between men and women 2006-2010*".

She said that there were many similarities between the professional situation of women in the various countries of the European Union: more and more women are going out to work, and women are on average better academically qualified when they present themselves on the labour market, but paradoxically, the success they had in their studies does not reflect in their career accordingly. In practice, women are pigeonholed in certain sectors where they carry out a narrow range of unskilled and low-paid jobs.

She pointed out that 84% of women's employment throughout the European Union was in services, with women heavily represented in health and social welfare, education, retail and public administration, and poorly represented in industry and construction.

Ms Gautier argued that it would be necessary to reallocate a quarter of all employment to achieve a satisfactory rebalancing between women and men, as long as this "*horizontal segregation*" went hand in hand with "*vertical segregation*". In jobs where women are employed, there are very few in position of responsibility: to give just one example, there is one woman for every ten men on the Boards of the 50 largest European companies.

She felt that another name for the well-known phenomenon of the “*glass ceiling*” might be “*glue floor*” because of the way that women are not able to break free despite their excellent academic results, and find themselves stuck in second-class jobs.

She also pointed out that women in the European Union were generally more likely to be in part-time or precarious employment or unemployed: one in three women worked part-time as compared with one man in ten.

Ms Gautier took the view that women did not actually chose part-time work: most of the time, it was forced on them by family constraints or insufficient childcare arrangements. In this context, she drew attention to the particularly disturbing phenomenon of the growing number of lone-parent families experiencing increasingly precarious conditions.

She then focused on the hugely damaging consequences of this situation in terms of salary inequalities and pensions: according to European Commission figures, average pay disparity has settled at about 15%. She said that this situation was simply unacceptable, particularly as the principle of equality between the sexes featured in all European legislation.

She said that a reduction in professional and salary inequalities was now a social justice objective. It was also a key issue in terms of economic efficiency: it is forecast that an increase in job desegregation will be essential in the medium term if we are to cope with workforce requirements in sectors experiencing difficulties.

Moving on to the situation in France, Ms Gautier pointed out that the country had managed to ally growth in women’s employment to a high birth rate notwithstanding the widely acknowledged shortage of crèche places; however, there were still considerable pay disparities of 15-20% between women and men despite formidable and well developed legislation providing, in particular, for an obligation on companies of more than 50 employees to produce comparative reports, and to negotiate on professional equality objectives.

She regretted that there had been only scant implementation of this particularly ambitious legislation so far, with only 30% of companies publishing the report provided for in the law and, worse still, only 3% of them entering into negotiations.

Taking up Ms Létard’s reference to the Government’s intention to table a new bill imposing financial penalties on companies that did not establish plans for reducing pay disparity by 2010, Ms Gautier said that she had been in favour of the introduction of financial penalties for several years, and wondered whether it might be necessary to pursue the same policy in other European Union countries.

She concluded by reiterating the importance of a re-balancing between women and men in all types of employment, and the need to fight the

spread of stereotypes and to correct poor career guidance procedures. She then handed over to Ms Gisèle Halimi, who, with her association “*Choisir la cause des femmes*” (“*Choose the women’s cause*”), had given the initiative to a very interesting piece of work entitled “*The clause of the most favoured European woman*” (“*La clause de l’européenne la plus favorisée*”).

Intervention by Ms Gisèle Halimi, former Deputy, Lawyer, and President of the “*Choisir la cause des femmes*” (“*Choose the women’s cause*”) association

Ms Halimi first praised the action taken by Presidents of delegations for women’s rights in the two houses, Gisèle Gautier and Marie-Jo Zimmermann.

She then, within the context of the French Presidency of the European Union, talked about a “*dual hope*” with regard to Europe and the women’s cause.

She explained that she had been turning the idea of a “*clause of the most favoured European woman*” over in her mind since 1980 following the first election to the European Parliament with universal suffrage, and considering the persistence of unequal treatment between women citizens of the European Union.

She described how a multidisciplinary team of volunteers from “*Choose the women’s cause*” had been working without interruption for more than two years on a comparison of the situation of women in the various countries of the European Union.

The team had reviewed legislation in all European countries, and had noted that the laws in some countries were in some ways more advanced than those in France.

This approach had resulted in the production of a “*legislation package*” setting out the best European ideas for women, and drawn from a selection of 10 countries and 14 national laws: for example, Lithuania was chosen for legislation relating to harassment, Estonia for its laws on parental authority, and Spain for its “*extraordinary framework law*” on violence perpetrated against women.

Ms Halimi went on to say that the work had led to the publication of a book with a preface by Vladimír Špidla, and which set out a draft “*The clause of the most favoured European woman*”. She read out the following excerpts:

“Each member state shall apply to its women citizens a legislation package made up of the most advanced and existing laws in any of the 27 countries of the Union.

These laws shall regulate the specific rights of women in fields such as maternity choices, women's working lives, the fight against violence and political parity.”

The book deals one by one with all legislation relating to the different issues that concern the women's cause, for example:

- “*choose to give birth*” (sex education, contraception and abortion);
- the family (unions and break-ups, parental leave and parental authority);
- violence (conjugal violence, rape, prostitution and trafficking, and harassment);
- work (education, salary and other pay, unemployment, pensions and part-time working);
- politics (the role of women in political structures, and measures taken to achieve parity).

The book also includes two interviews for each country, one with someone carrying out official functions (e.g. a Minister or Secretary of State) and one with a feminist well known in her country.

Ms Halimi went on to say that intensive “*lobbying*” towards European institutions had attracted support from many people, including Mr Vladimír Špidla, the European Commissioner responsible for equal opportunities, who believed that the approach adopted by “*Choose the women's cause*” was moving in the same direction as his “*Roadmap*”, Mr Franco Frattini, then Vice-President of the European Commission, and many members of the European Parliament and the Council of Europe.

She also referred to support given by the President of the Republic and the various French Government Ministers she had met; these included Mr Bernard Kouchner, Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Mr Jean-Pierre Jouyet, Minister of State to the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, with responsibility for European Affairs, Mr Xavier Bertrand, Minister for Labour, Labour Relations, the Family and Solidarity, Ms Roselyne Bachelot-Narquin, Minister for Health, Youth, Sport and the Voluntary Sector, Ms Rama Yade, Minister of State to the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, with responsibility for Foreign Affairs and Human Rights, and Ms Rachida Dati, Keeper of the Seals, Minister of Justice.

Ms Halimi then announced a major European symposium of representatives of the 27 member states of the European Union: it would take place in Paris, and would discuss proposals set out in the book by “*Choose the women's cause*” in a series of round tables.

She emphasised that this work focused on giving good example, and involved “*taking what is best for women in each country*”.

She did not want to avoid the issue of viability, given the uncertainties relating to the future of the Lisbon Treaty, and pointed out this work could be implemented within the framework of current institutions, for example by adopting a Directive that left member countries free to adopt the measures they liked in order to achieve the fixed objectives.

Ms Halimi concluded by saying that she did not think feminism was a marginal activity because “*when women move forward, the whole of society moves forward.*” As Stendhal said, “*a country’s level of civilisation is measured by the rights and freedoms granted to women*”.

Intervention by Ms Mercedes Erra, Co-chair of Euro RSCG Worldwide and Chair of Euro RSCG France

Ms Erra believed that things were moving forward very slowly; an example was the way that women who came out of management schools encountered many difficulties even though they had degrees.

Apart from the problem of pay disparity, she thought that the most important question was that of the image that women have of themselves, and she drew particular attention to the heavy responsibility they carried for the family and for children.

She said that parenthood still largely conditioned women’s relationship to employment in France: 79% of women with no children are in a full-time work, but only 68% with one child and 39% with several children. She regretted the fact that children were “*delegated to the mother*”, and that because women had to combine two jobs, they worked on average three hours a day more than men.

For this problem to be solved, she stressed the importance of communicating the image of women, and suggested that this communication should focus more on working women.

Ms Erra said she was in favour of voluntary measures, including the introduction of quotas, and acknowledged the importance of the “*equality label*” which rewarded companies that took measures that fostered professional equality.

She also emphasised the need to encourage guidance for women to opt for scientific careers, and deplored the fact that the burden of stereotypes prevented them from attending preparatory science classes even though they had achieved better marks in the scientific Baccalauréats.

She ended by saying that, as women made up half of humankind, the issue of the representation of women could not be assimilated into the issue of diversity.

Intervention by Ms Catherine Ferrant, Vice-President, Diversity and Accountability, Total

Ms Ferrant stressed the importance of management diversification in a company like Total in the context of a “*war of talents*” where it was necessary to look for talent everywhere, and that included among women.

She explained that in her company, the issues of internationalisation and feminisation ran in parallel, with a gradual ‘*loss*’ of international workers and of women as one went up the management chain and as the level of responsibility rose.

As far as women were concerned, Total tried to recruit them at least in the same proportion as the share they represent among the graduates, and in such a way that recruitment mirrored the academic subjects that women chose: for example, if women accounted for 20% of those with a degree from an engineering school, they would have to account for 20% of the holders of such a degree that Total recruited.

Given that the company “*invested*” in recruits in principle for the whole of their working lives, she believed there was an economic basis for promoting women in order to avoid “*losing*” them.

To achieve this aim, Total had established a battery of quantitative and qualitative indicators and objectives that were reviewed annually by the Diversity Council.

On the subject of maternity, she stressed the issue of recognising its importance for society and for the company, and at the same time of delimiting its consequences. She referred to a “*key measure*” introduced by Total whereby a woman on maternity leave is entitled to an individual pay rise that is at least equal to her average pay rise over the previous three years.

However, Ms Ferrant wanted the parenting to be “*defeminised*” as soon as the woman returned to work after her maternity leave, and men to be encouraged to participate more in managing the parenting, in a reference to the initiative of the Observatoire sur la Responsabilité Sociétale des Entreprises (ORSE, *Study Center for Corporate Societal Responsibility*), which has produced a guide for involving men in measures promoting professional equality.

She stressed that this work should be developed with men, and not against them, and pointed out that men in positions of responsibility in the company sometimes had “*conflicts of loyalty*” concerning female managers in relation to a wife choosing to stay at home and look after the children while the fathers of young women who move into employment preen themselves as “*champions of feminisation*”.

Focusing on the need for a change in attitudes, Ms Ferrant said that young fathers who wanted to look after their children often found that the first obstacle took the form of older managers who had not themselves adopted this behaviour.

In conclusion, she explained that Total had not decided to go for the “*equality label*” because they were afraid of disappointing people, given the practical ability of an oil company to deliver this challenging commitment on the ground. They were afraid of “*over-promising*”.



D E B A T E

A wide-ranging debate followed the interventions by the above speakers. Many participants at the Conference took part.

– Ms Edite Estrela, Vice-Chair of the Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality of the European Parliament

Ms Estrela highlighted the advances made by the Lisbon Treaty, and said she had been a Rapporteur within the Committee for the future of the Lisbon strategy and its impact on gender.

She called for concrete measures to be taken in support of the women’s cause: in Europe, despite progress in women’s employment and education, the pay disparity between men and women had fallen by only one point since 2000, and women accounted for only 33% of CEOs, 23% of representatives in national parliaments and 33% of MEPs.

She was surprised that women accounted for only 18% of members of the French National Assembly notwithstanding a law on parity in politics, and said that Portugal had a parity law that imposed financial penalties on parties that did not comply.

At this point, the Chair, Ms Gisèle Gautier, pointed out that there were also financial penalties in France, but that they did not act as a deterrent for the main parties.

– Ms Christiana Muscardini, member of the Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality of the European Parliament

Ms Muscardini said she supported the measure initiated by Ms Gisèle Halimi, which involved taking “*what is best for women*” in each European country.

She hoped that the French Presidency would stimulate a new dynamic. She also wanted Europe to be studied in primary schools, civil and criminal legislation to be harmonised, and a European citizens “*charter of duties*” to be drawn up to facilitate more respect for women in society.

Lastly, she referred to the particular problem of the practice of genital mutilation of immigrant women, and looked to European cooperation to find legislative solutions to the problem.

The Chair, Ms Gisèle Gautier, gave her support to these ideas, adding that France had the will and the duty to give Europe a new dynamic.

Ms Marie-Jo Zimmermann felt that parliamentarians had responsibility for making citizens understand the importance and benefits of European integration.

– Ms Dina Akkelidou, Chair of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Men and Women of the Cypriot House of Representatives

Ms Akkelidou said that Cyprus had a 15% disparity between the unemployment rates of men and women, and that women were “*stuck*” in lower-grade jobs despite often having superior qualifications.

She thought that it was the duty of parliamentarians to monitor the effective implementation of gender equality laws, to inform women of their rights and society as a whole about gender equality, and to work together with governments and civil society to achieve more effective equality.

In reply to a question from the Chair, Ms Gisèle Gautier, Ms Akkelidou said that legislation in Cyprus had been harmonised with European gender equality legislation, but that a real gap existed between the texts and the practice, and there were no effective measures for promoting reconciliation between family and working lives.

– Ms Julie Rademacher, Member of the Danish Folketing

Ms Rademacher highlighted the progress that Denmark had made in relation to gender equality over the last 30 years.

She said that there were now more women, including young women, in the Parliament, but there were very few in local assemblies (only seven women mayors out of a total of 98). This contrasted with the general situation in Europe, where there were usually more women in politics at local level than at national level.

Ms Rademacher went on to say that discussion was currently taking place on the appropriateness of introducing quotas in order to increase the representation of women in municipalities and on the Boards of companies. She stated that the Danish Social Democratic Party, of which she was a member, was in favour of quotas, and pointed out that a recently passed law in Norway had introduced a 40% quota of women on the Boards of companies.

The Chair, Ms Gisèle Gautier, referred to the progress made in France thanks to parity in politics, and more specifically stated out that the new January 2007 law on mandatory parity on local Councils would produce a “*pool*” of women who might later on become parliamentarians.

In answer to a question from the Chair, Ms Gisèle Gautier, on the reasons for the paradox arising out of the higher proportion of women in the Parliament than in local assemblies, Ms Rademacher said that being politically

active at local level held out little attraction for women because of the difficulty in combining poorly paid representative duties and a professional and family life. The work of a parliamentarian was a full-time “*job*” in which young women were highly regarded and very popular.

– Ms Kerstin Griese, Chair of the Committee on Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth of the German Bundestag

Ms Griese said that political parties in Germany had introduced quotas in favour of women (40% of SPD Members are women), and that an evaluation of the “*voluntary contracts*” signed by the Government and large private-sector companies had highlighted the small number of women in decision-making roles.

Given the difficulty that women have in maintaining their positions in the economy as soon as they become mothers, she felt that laws were needed to improve the situation in the private sector.

She referred to the inadequacy of childcare arrangements and the spread of very traditional attitudes relating to the division of tasks between the two sexes.

However, Ms Griese pointed out that the adoption of law on parental leave, an idea taken from Scandinavian countries, had achieved some progress, and some men were now taking parental leave.

– Ms Thalia Dragona, Member of the Committee on Gender Equality and Human Rights of the Greek Parliament

Ms Dragona stated that some improvements had been made in the situation of women in Greece, and particularly in the reduction in pay differentials (it is now only 10%) and an increase in the proportion of women in positions of responsibility. However, women were still under-represented in universities and science, and particularly in “*hard sciences*”.

She said that legislative measures had been taken to introduce women’s participation quotas, but felt that there was also a need to promote more profound social changes, mainly through greater awareness in the education system.

– Mr Arto Satonen, Chair of the Employment and Equality Commission of the Finnish Parliament

Mr Satonen explained that Finland had a tradition of women’s participation in political life, and that currently 55% of parliamentarians and 42% of local councillors were women; this was largely due to the introduction of quotas at local level. However, the proportion of women in positions of responsibility in the economic sector was much lower.

As far as the pay gap between men and women was concerned, he said that a committee established in 2007 and chaired by the Prime Minister had reached an agreement on salary increases for women in the public sector enabling them to enjoy the same pay rates as men.

As for parental leave, Mr Satonen referred to the Icelandic three-part “*model*”: one for the mother, one for the father, and the third to be decided by the family. This had led to a rise in the Icelandic birthrate.

– Ms Olga Zrihen, Member of the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Men and Women in the Belgian Senate

Ms Stevens said that the proportion of women in the Belgian Parliament had risen from 12% to 35% over the last ten years, thanks to legislation imposing parity in candidates’ lists and providing for one of the two candidates at the head of the list to be a man and for one to be a woman.

She also welcomed the “*gender mainstreaming*” work that had been carried out by the European Parliament, and added that she supported the approach adopted by Ms Gisèle Halimi; the Socialist Group on the Belgian Senate had already tabled a bill providing for this approach to be implemented.

She called for gender statistics to be produced across the board: it was “*the devil’s own job*” in some member countries of the European Union to get statistics on what women did.

Ms Stevens went on to say that the right to have, or not to have, children was not guaranteed in the same way throughout Europe; it was unacceptable that European women should not have the same rights on abortion, and are therefore obliged to go abroad. Matters were getting worse in some places.

Lastly, she focused on:

- the importance of being vaccinated against cervical cancer, a service that is available all over Belgium;

- the need to fight female sexual mutilation, a matter being addressed by a bill before the Belgian Senate;

- and the importance of promoting quality employment for women, particularly in view of the difficulties that mothers in lone-parent families encounter in bringing up a family on a single, often inadequate, salary.

– Ms Hillevi Engström, Chair of the Committee on the Labour Market of the Swedish Parliament

Ms Engström said that although Sweden was seen as an egalitarian country, a lot of work remained to be done, particularly as far as changing fundamental attitudes was concerned.

She felt that despite a political consensus on the importance of a balance between family and working lives, the increasing burden on women was leading to stress, overworking and sick leave; although men had the same parenthood rights, only 20% took paternity leave, mainly because they usually earn more and have “*more to lose*” by staying at home.

She explained that thought was currently being given in Sweden to developing incentives that would encourage men to stay at home and look after the children. In particular, a tax break of a maximum of 300 euros a month is to be introduced for fathers who take parental leave when they have the higher of the couple’s two salaries.

She also referred to the importance of supporting personal services that can help women return to work.

Generally speaking, she did not think that any progress could be made unless men shouldered more parental responsibilities; this, in her view, would reduce the divorce rate. She also highlighted the excellent example given by virtuous practices, adding out that men in skilled jobs take more parental leave than others.

– Ms Minodora Cliveti, Chair of the Committee for Equal Opportunities and the Family in the Romanian Chamber of Deputies

Ms Cliveti focused on a number of problems specific to Romania:

- the rate of unemployment of women is as low as 4% because many women leave Romania to work in other European countries;

- young women study on average more than men, but do not always land quality jobs;

- a law allowing both the father and the mother to take parental leave at 85% of salary for two years has enabled some fathers to stay at home and look after the children, but because a ceiling has recently been placed on the parental leave benefit, it is no longer appealing to men on the whole;

- women continue to be poorly represented in politics (11% in the Parliament and 10% of mayors) and, following the French example, a bill has been tabled that will ensure that men and women alternate on candidates’ lists at local elections.

In conclusion, she said she hoped the equal opportunities would be seen as an important issue during the French Presidency of the European Union.

– Ms Majda Potrata, Chair of the Commission for Petitions, Human Rights and Equal Opportunities of the Slovenian National Assembly

Ms Potrata said that the proportion of women on the labour market in Slovenia had always been high, and now stood at nearly 50%. Most women were in full-time jobs, but they were mainly in low-paid employment, and were usually less well paid and with a higher-than-average pay differential. They also had fewer career opportunities than men despite the fact that they were well educated.

She announced that an observatory for equality between men and women, and with the status of independent institution, had recently been set up, but it had so far received very few complaints of discrimination. This was because the observatory's powers were limited.

– Ms Gisela Wurm, Chair of the Equal Rights Commission of the Austrian Nationalrat

Ms Wurm said that women in Austria were better represented on the councils of large towns than on those of villages, where there were almost none at all.

She went on to say that the Austrian Parliament planned to adopt a law on parity in politics, and she was interested in the mechanisms applied in other countries involving financial penalties on political parties.

– Dr László Nagy, Chair of the Committee on Human Rights, Minorities and the Status of Women of the Slovak Parliament

Dr Nagy said he regretted the fact that Slovakia had not succeeded in improving women's participation in politics and decision-making in economic life. The situation was getting worse in some sectors including the national education system, social services and commerce, and pay disparity was increasing in senior jobs.

He reported that the Slovakian Parliament had repeatedly defeated a bill making parity of candidates mandatory on lists put forward by political parties.

Lastly, he hoped that a reform of the national education system currently under way would apply the principle of gender equality more effectively, and help to fight stereotyping.

– Ms Mies Westerveld, Member of the Social Affairs Commission of the Dutch Senate

Ms Westerveld said that she was not in favour of restrictive measures such as quotas, and recalled the trouble that had been caused by the Social Democratic Party's decision to ensure that 50% of candidates on candidates' lists were women. She thought it was important to respect representatives' sincerity and not to impose rules from on high.

By way of concluding the morning's business, the Chair, Ms Gisèle Gautier, pointed to a convergence of views on the main issues, but a wide range of approaches in different countries. She thought that this was something that would have to be harmonised one day.

SECOND SESSION
SUBJECT: WOMEN'S ACCESS TO
POSITIONS OF RESPONSIBILITY

Introduction by Ms Marie-Jo Zimmermann, President of the National Assembly Delegation for Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women

Ms Zimmermann began by introducing the two speakers who had been invited to address the conference during the afternoon session: Ms Anna Záborská, President of the European Parliament's Commission on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, and Ms Françoise Vilain, President of the Delegation on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities between Men and Women of the French Economic and Social Council.

She urged the parliamentarians present to commit themselves to implementation of the Commission's "*Roadmap for equality between women and men*" and to distribute it.

Following comments made by certain participants during the morning session, she gave some explanations on the representation of women in the French Parliament. The reason for the relatively low level of representation was the voting system currently in use, and particularly the uninominal majority system employed in legislative elections. She reminded participants that after the Constitutional review adopted in 1999, the Constitution stated that "*the law is to facilitate equal access for all women and men to electoral mandates and elected public office.*" Political parties and groups had a duty to help implement this principle.

Ms Zimmermann explained more specifically that under legislation passed at the end of the Constitutional review, joint lists of candidates had to have alternating names of men and women in all elections governed by proportional representation. These included municipal elections in constituencies with 3500 inhabitants and more, regional elections, Senate elections in Departments where at least four Senators are elected, and elections to the European Parliament; parity was not mandatory in legislative elections or elections to the Senate where fewer than four Senators are elected.

She believed that, as long as the parties had no real will to support parity, mainly men would be invested and women would therefore have to "*fight tooth and nail*".

Ms Zimmermann welcomed the young Danish parliamentarians who were attending, and hoped that they would work hard to get other women elected.

Lastly, she said she wanted work by men and women to be complementary, and looked forward to the adoption of legislation that would have a positive impact on both women and men.

Intervention by Ms Anna Záborská, President of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality in the European Parliament

Ms Záborská congratulated Ms Zimmerman and Ms Gautier on organising the meeting during the period of the French Presidency, and welcomed the Slovakian delegation.

She explained that the Committee that she chaired had been working for a long time on the question of the strategic placing of women in positions of responsibility.

She believed that '*new Europe*' was an opportunity to promote equality between women and men in all areas of society, and that the cultural experiences of both the old and the new member states were worth taking into consideration.

She then listed the various reports in which the Commission on women's rights had, using a range of approaches, addressed the issue of women's access to positions of responsibility:

- a report on women in international politics, which showed that women brought a know-how that was specific to diplomacy and conflict resolution, but that they found it difficult to reconcile their responsibilities as mothers and their professional ambitions;

- a report on women in science, which highlighted both the small number of women obtaining positions of responsibility in the sector and the need to raise awareness so that women can have positive success stories;

- a report on women in international trade, which focused on the need to promote micro-credit for women;

- a report on the situation of women in armed conflicts and their role in peace negotiations, which showed that women were particularly exposed to violence in these conflicts, but also played an important role in achieving peace;

- a report on the development of the Lisbon Strategy and its implications for equal opportunities between men and women;

- and a report on the reconciliation of university and family life for young women who are both students and mothers.

Generally speaking, Ms Záborská thought that the placing of women in positions of responsibility was a pragmatic question that involved not only the promotion of female skills, but also the establishment of a "*strategic partnership*" with men.

In a reference to a Sciences Po Paris conference entitled '*Femmes Passerelles d'Europe*' ('Women, Bridges of Europe') that she had attended the previous evening, she described an intervention in which a Danish participant had said that the reconciliation for fathers and mothers of their family and professional responsibilities was becoming a priority issue for companies and

administrations. She welcomed this new change of attitude in Denmark, and saw in it the emergence of a reference model for the whole of Europe.

In conclusion, she said she hoped that women who became elected representatives would inspire younger women to enter politics.

Intervention by Ms Françoise Vilain, president of the Economic and Social Council's Delegation for women's rights and equal opportunities for men and women

Ms Vilain first thanked Ms Gisèle Gautier and Ms Marie-Jo Zimmermann for organising this first inter-parliamentary meeting of the French Presidency of the European Union, and for involving the Economic and Social Council as a representative of civil society.

She was quite clear that laws were essential, although they could only be implemented if civil society was involved. She thought that the work carried out in France by the three Delegations for women's rights (in the National Assembly, the Senate and the Economic and Social Council) was exemplary.

Ms Vilain then explained that the Economic and Social Council brought together representatives of various components of civil society to develop a consensus on perspectives of reform.

On the subject of the huge differences between élites and citizens throughout Europe, she thought that there would be fewer problems if élites were more representative, more differentiated and more mixed. Indeed, a more mixed representation of élites had emerged as a condition for a match between the political world and people.

She then announced that the Economic and Social Council's Delegation for Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women had recently drawn up a report on the role of women in decision-making positions. However, she said she was not intellectually in favour of laws on parity in politics, although she acknowledged that these laws had increased the proportion of women in the Parliament.

As far as civil society was concerned, she thought it was very important for women to occupy positions of responsibility, and pointed out that American scientific research showed that a representative mix was a factor of high performance.

She criticised the situation in large firms that numbered many women among their customers, but which did not have any women on their Boards. She was even doubtful about the accuracy of the figure of 10% for women on the boards of CAC 40 companies; she pointed out, with the approval of the Chair, Ms Marie-Jo Zimmermann, that the figure was only 7% or 8% a year ago.

Ms Vilain then observed that although more and more women were getting degrees, 80% of university teaching jobs were taken by men, and that some selection panels for entry to the ‘grandes écoles’ did not include a single woman; furthermore, there were not enough women in certain scientific fields, and even in the fields where they were well represented, they never reached decision-making positions.

She had two proposals for remedying this situation.

Firstly, she wanted the “*equality label*” to become a European label in order to highlight the good example given by companies that supported the idea of men and women in management.

Secondly, she stressed the need to address the question of the reconciliation of men’s and women’s professional and family lives more effectively by offering high-quality childcare facilities everywhere, perhaps by setting up inter-company crèches. In practice, she was saying that, in order to be able to work properly, fathers and mothers needed to have childcare structures that helped them bring up their children.

For example, she described how she had persuaded a works council to cease financing staff trips and put the money towards the co-funding of home helps, and to establish a cleaning service. She proposed that works councils might be guided towards actions of this type together with professional organizations.

Ms Vilain wanted Europe to give good example in this field, and commented that Euro-Mediterranean women, for example, expected much from the example of, and support from, European women.

In conclusion, she wanted more women in decision-making positions and more mixed representation in daily life in order to achieve more democracy.



DEBATE

After the interventions were concluded, the Chair, Ms Marie-Jo Zimmermann, opened the debate on the theme that advancing the women's cause also benefited men, and that it would never be successful without them.

– Ms Stella Kyriakidou, Member of the Committee on Equal Opportunities between Men and Women of the Cyprus House of Representatives

Ms Kyriakidou announced that the Cyprus Parliament was preparing that very day to approve the Lisbon Treaty, and said that progress had been made in Cyprus on women's access to positions of responsibility even before her country had joined the European Union, but there was still much inequality with regard to access to the very highest responsibilities.

She outlined two recent advances:

- a specialist committee has been established in the Parliament to deal with matters relating to equality between men and women;
- a national action plan incorporates all actions favouring equality, but is very difficult to implement.

Lastly, she stressed, with the approval of Ms Françoise Vilain and the Chair, Ms Marie-Jo Zimmermann, the need to fight from a very young age stereotypes relating to the respective roles of men and women.

– Ms Thalia Dragona, Member of the Special Committee on Gender Equality and Human Rights of the Greek Parliament

Ms Dragona provided some figures on the situation in Greece:

- the number of female parliamentarians has doubled in the last ten years, but it is still low (around 16%);
- out of 19 Parliamentary Commissions, only three are chaired by women;
- currently 7.6% of positions of Secretary of State are occupied by women and one woman is Minister of Foreign Affairs, but women usually have ministerial portfolios that are scarcely '*visible*'.

Although she believed that positive discrimination measures, which have not always been well received, were fated to be transitional, she said that a bill had recently been adopted whereby one third of the representatives in the Parliament must be women. The opposition parties had proposed that this one

third represents each periphery of the country. Unfortunately this amendment was not adopted.

She also said that quotas had already been applied by the political parties for regional bodies and European elections; the Socialist Party (PS) had fixed its quotas at 40% and 50% respectively.

Ms Dragona thought that Greece was still a patriarchal country where it was hard to find a balance between professional and family life.

Lastly, she underlined the importance of networking for female parliamentarians, and the need to fight together with civil society against stereotyping that is often internalised by women themselves.

The Chair, Ms Marie-Jo Zimmermann, stressed the responsibility that women in decision-making positions had in relation to other women, and female parliamentarians in particular.

– Maria Fortuna Incostante, Member of the Italian Senate

Ms Incostante deplored the fact that despite the principle of equal opportunities and the policy of '*mainstreaming*', the reality consisted of numerous inequalities.

She referred to the experimental system in Italy of a tax break for companies that promoted a mixed workforce.

As far as the representation of women in politics was concerned, she drew a distinction between the approach taken by the Nordic countries where the issue is "*self-regulated*" by the political parties and that adopted by countries which introduce legislation setting out quotas, subsidies or financial sanctions.

Ms Incostante also pointed to the influence of electoral systems on the representation of women, and thought that much of the explanation for the small number of women in Italian political life lay in the methods of voting.

She believed it was important to increase the number of women in decision-making posts, and not only to encourage quality decisions that took account of women's points of view, but also symbolically.

Lastly, she said she hoped that the French Presidency would be an opportunity to promote the question of women's involvement in taking responsibilities.

– Ms Dominique Tilmans, Chair of the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Men and Women of the Belgian Senate

Ms Tilmans first focused on the symbolic nature of this first inter-parliamentary meeting of the French Presidency. She wanted to draw a distinction between the situation of managers with "*high potential*" and those

in more “*peripheral*” jobs, and pointed out that 90% of managers with ‘*high potential*’ were men, and that women themselves often chose to take up “*peripheral*” posts in sectors such as human resources, communications and public relations.

She said that the younger generation of women, who were often better qualified than men, were looking for jobs with responsibility, but they tended to suffer from self-doubt, and as soon as they found a husband, often retired if he had superior job.

She added that as soon as women became mothers, they began to feel guilty about being around so little; they then became less mobile, and finally, exhausted, and tended to put their professional careers to one side as their children entered adolescence, often a difficult time for the mother.

Ms Tilmans doubted that all women dared to pursue a “*woman-friendly*” policy, particularly when they were young. She felt there was a need to act on three fronts in order to change things:

- children’s education genuinely based on equality;
- a change in the attitudes of men and women in companies;
- and an increase in the provision of crèches and childcare facilities, while at the same time ensuring that parents continued to shoulder their educational responsibilities.

She said that women often chose their jobs more on the basis of the amount of time left to bring up their children than on the establishment of a real employment plan. This resulted in the feminisation of certain jobs like teaching and medicine, which in turn ran the risk of being devalued.

Ms Vilain was impressed by the quality of this intervention, and stressed the importance of sharing tasks: we had to stop giving women entire responsibility for bringing up children, without at the same time uncoupling the family from education.

She therefore hoped that there would be an expansion of local services such as crèches and personal services, and that people would stop thinking that long hours were synonymous with efficiency.

– Ms Julie Rademacher, Member of the Danish Folketing

Ms Rademacher did not think that education would be enough to solve the problem: the labour market did not provide many well-qualified women in Denmark with a situation and salary that matched their level of education.

She thought we should stop asking people to choose between family and career, and emphasised the importance of the Spanish “*model*”, and particularly the parity in the government.

– Ms Ilona Vigh, Member of the Equal Opportunities Commission of the Hungarian National Assembly

Ms Vigh said that most women in Hungary worked full-time (only 5.6% of women worked part-time), but when doing the same work, they were paid less than men and were concentrated in certain jobs such as teaching and health.

She also referred to discriminatory behaviour on the part of employers who did not want to recruit women with young children, and the difficulty that women had in combining their family, working and social lives; the indirect consequences were having children later, a fall in the birthrate, and the disintegration of the traditional family nucleus. This could cause society to destabilise.

As for women's representation in politics, Ms Vigh was sad that only 10% of Members of Parliament were women, and that a bill that would have included an objective of 50% by 2010 had been rejected by 80% of male parliamentarians.

– Ms Eva Möllring, Member of the Committee on Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth of the German Bundestag

Ms Möllring asked if the way companies were assessed took account of their commitment to a mixed workforce.

Ms Vilain replied that some assessment agencies now incorporated conditions relating to a mixed workforce in their evaluation criteria. These conditions could, for example, be taken into account for access to credit.

– Ms Doris Stump, Member of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE):

Ms Stump began by thanking the Senate for hosting the "*Break the silence on domestic violence*" exhibition, which had been mounted by the Council of Europe as part of its campaign against conjugal violence.

She then explained that the PACE brought together parliamentarians from 47 member states, and said that the promotion of women's access to positions of responsibility was a major Council of Europe focus.

Ms Stump went on to say that the PACE had often done work on this issue, and specifically had produced:

– a Recommendation adopted in 2003 on "*balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making*", which provided that

the representation of women (and men) in political and public life should not fall below 40%;

- a 2004 Recommendation on women’s participation in elections;
- a 2006 Recommendation on mechanisms to ensure women’s participation in decision-making;
- a 2008 Recommendation on promoting women to be autonomous in a modern, multicultural society;
- and a report in preparation on the impact of electoral systems on women’s representation in politics.

She believed that women’s access to decision-making posts had to be promoted both by companies and by public administrations, and by the media and the universities, with those women in post acting as an encouragement to other women. However, women needed to be pushed to take up decision-making positions in politics, and political parties had a particular role to play in this.

She also said that the PACE, on which women make up only 25% of the membership, had proposed a Code of Good Conduct providing for:

- the setting up of mechanisms enabling women to perform their elective duties through the establishment of quotas and other measures of positive discrimination in parliamentary elections or other elections both inside and outside political parties;
- the organisation of training schemes and incentives for women to participate in political life.

She also referred to an experiment in Switzerland involving a partnership between, on the one hand, a young woman and, on the other, a woman with political responsibilities and playing the role of mentor; she believed that some political parties were doing more than others to present women according to their electoral interests.

Ms Stump then talked about the role played by Mr Jean-Guy Branger, a French Senator, and Member of the Senate Delegation for Women’s Rights and of the PACE Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men; she said that the PACE Committee had decided to establish a “*Gender Equality Prize*” to reward specific projects carried out by one or more political parties to improve women’s participation in political assemblies. The prize will be awarded for the first time in 2009.

– Mr Jean-Guy Branger, Member of the Senate Delegation for Women’s Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women and of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)

Mr Branger said he had been working hard both on the PACE Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men and on the Senate Delegation for Women’s Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women with a view to progressing the role of women on decision-making bodies, and particularly in elected assemblies. He felt that a balance between men and women was essential if the right decisions were to be taken. In particular, he said that he had been the PACE Rapporteur on the Gender Equality Prize project.

He hoped that cooperation between national parliaments and the PACE would grow; he said that the work on societal problems carried out under the aegis of the Council of Europe took place long before work by national parliaments.

– Ms Maria Do Rosário Carneiro, President of the Sub-Committee on Equal Opportunities and Family of the Portuguese Assembly of the Republic

Ms Carneiro referred to a general agreement on the current situation, although different strategies have been employed in different countries.

She then made it clear that despite the advances made in education and in the reconciliation of working and family life, there were still pay disparities, and the difficulties that women have in securing posts of responsibility had not gone away.

However, she thought that the objectives of the ‘*Roadmap*’ would still be difficult to achieve if maternity and children’s education were not quantified in terms of economic efficiency.

– Ms Anna Záborská, President of the Commission on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality of the European Parliament

Ms Záborská said she wanted to draw a distinction between pay disparities separating men and women doing the same jobs and those between men and women doing different jobs. She thought the former were more serious than the latter.

She also said that there was a danger that the sharing of family responsibilities between men and women could lead to discrimination in the workplace against fathers and mothers, compared with single people and childless couples.

She took the view that society should value, and pay for, maternity and for services provided for the family. As far as she was concerned, it was the only way of achieving true equality between men and women.

Ms Záborská went on to say that under the aegis of the European Parliament, she was drawing up a report on gender-based discrimination and inter-generational solidarity. She observed that women participated in solidarity more than men, and that they were therefore discriminated compared with them.

Lastly, on the subject of women's participation in political life, she wished that women should be encouraged to involve themselves in political parties, and not just in non-governmental organisations, so that they could raise issues that concern women when party programmes are being drafted.



CLOSING OF THE CONFERENCE by Ms Marie-Jo Zimmermann and Ms Gisèle Gautier, Presidents respectively of the National Assembly Delegation for Women’s Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women, and of the Senate Delegation for Women’s Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women

Lastly, **Ms Zimmermann** thanked all the participants, and said she hoped that the day would be the beginning of a process of cooperation in the service of women, and would be pursued for the six months of the French Presidency.

She urged the parliamentarians present to commit themselves to supporting the priority actions of the “*Roadmap*” that had been adopted by the European Commission with encouragement from Mr Vladimír Špidla. She listed the key points, all of which had been addressed during the meeting:

- equal economic independence for women and men;
- the reconciliation of private and working life;
- equal representation in decision-making;
- the eradication of all forms of violence based on gender;
- the elimination of gender stereotypes;
- the promotion of equality between women and men in external and development policies.

She wanted the ‘*Roadmap*’ to be distributed to all parliamentarians in Europe with a view to promoting its implementation, and thereby ‘*help women to ensure that their choices are successful*’.

She referred to the principle of ‘*equal pay for equal work*’, and did not think there was any shame in voting for binding measures in order to ensure that the principle was put into practice.

She said she had not always been in favour of positive discrimination policy, but we had to have the courage to adopt binding measures to allow equality between men and women to become “*the norm*”.

Ms Zimmermann said that by choosing 3rd July for this meeting, the Delegations for Women’s Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women of both assemblies of the French Parliament had sought to underline their desire to move forward the cause of women symbolically by organising this first inter-parliamentary meeting of the French Presidency. She also hoped that the next meeting of the Conference of Parliamentary Committees for equal opportunities between men and women would be even more successful than the one that took place on 3rd July 2008.

By way of conclusion, **Ms Gautier** gave warm thanks to the participants who had attended throughout the day, and strongly reiterated the

need for them to sign up in support of the “*Roadmap*” – and to get others to do the same – so that they became ‘*ambassadors*’ in their respective countries and, given the numerous challenges that still have to be met, also broadened the movement.

The presentations and interventions had been immensely informative, and had shown that it was necessary to pursue, stage by stage, the significant advances that the European Union itself must encourage in each of the member states.

Thanks to Europe, a real dynamic had been created in the field of parity: as many as 250 million women were now affected by a social, egalitarian Europe marked by equal representation.

It was now, more than at any other time, essential to build ‘*networks of key activists and intersecting skills*’ together so that parity becomes a reality – and not tomorrow, but today.

It had to be a reality, she continued, that was not solely to be found in legislation, recommendations and other resolutions, but also in people’s minds and attitudes. These were changing too slowly.

She also wanted all the parliamentarians invited, whether they attended or not, to be sent a copy of the day’s minutes not only to provide them with information, but also to stimulate initiatives flowing from the best concrete examples carried out in the 27 member states, thereby identifying with the spirit of the priority actions defined by Commissioner Špidla.

Ms Gautier ended by quoting from Victor Hugo: ‘*The day will come when you... all nations of the continent, and without losing your distinct qualities and glorious individualities, will join closely together in a superior unit and form the European brotherhood.*’ She ended with a call: ‘*For women! For equal rights for women and men! For Europe!*’