

## GENERAL PRESENTATION

### Creation

The Conference of the Parliamentary Committees responsible for the policy of Equal Opportunities between Women and Men in the Member States of the European Union and in the [European Parliament](#) (NCEO) met for the first time on 22 and 23 May 1997. This was an initiative of the "Comité d'avis" for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men of the [Senate of Belgium](#) supported by the [European Commission](#).

This "Network" of Parliamentary Committees was created in the light of the Intergovernmental Conference, which led to the [Treaty of Maastricht](#). Its objective was to reinforce the [right of women and of men to equality in the Treaties](#) of the European Union.

A [Recommendation](#), adopted unanimously by the committees represented at this first meeting of the NCEO, suggested:

- **the introduction of a new article of the Treaty affirming the right of women and men to equality with direct effect**
- **the creation of an EU gender equality policy to be enforced by means of positive actions by integrating gender equality in all the policies of the European Union (mainstreaming).**

The Treaty of Amsterdam took on board some of the recommendations (mainstreaming; Article 3 of the EC Treaty; strengthening of the provisions on professional equality; with positive actions - Article 141) but did not retain a directly effective article sanctioning the right to equality of women and of men in all fields. After a series of [annual meetings](#) which served to increase understanding on issues of common interest, the preparation of a draft Constitution by the [European Convention](#) offers an opportunity for the NCEO to pursue its initial objective of strengthening the equality provisions in the founding treaties of the European Union. The annual meeting, under the Danish presidency of November 2002, took up this fundamental issue again in a "[declaration](#)" sent to all Conventionals. The meeting between members of the parliamentary committees concerned with some members of the Praesidium of the Convention which had taken place on 2 October 2002 had prepared the ground. This was on the initiative of the Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities of the European Parliament.

### The network

This network establishes a structural co-operation between the committees responsible for the policy of equal opportunities of women and of men (NCEO) in the [national Parliaments of the Member States of the European Union](#) and in the [European Parliament](#) similar to the cooperation established between the parliamentary committees responsible for European Affairs (COSAC).

### Objectives

- Improve communication, exchange of information and ideas, and common understanding between the members of the parliamentary committees in charge of women's rights
- Intensify the debate between elected experts on gender equality in the European

Union

· Monitor European gender equality policy in parliamentary work.

### **Functioning**

The network of the NCEO, until now, has held annual [meetings](#) organised by the parliament of the country which holds the presidency of the Council in the second semester of each year. The creation of the NCEO and the preparation of several of its annual meetings have enjoyed the financial support of the five-year Community action programs for gender equality managed by the [European Commission - Directorate-General Employment and Social Affairs, Equal Opportunities Unit](#).

### **Rules of procedure**

The basic principles of the cooperation network were established at the meeting of the Presidents of the relevant parliamentary committees the day before the first NCEO.

The following Rules of procedure for the conference were adopted at the opening of the first meeting in Brussels on 22 May 1997 and supplemented at following meetings (the second meeting on 30 October 1998 in the Portuguese Parliament in Lisbon):

- a) The Conference will be held once a year
- b) The Presidency will be held, in turns, by the EU Member States' parliaments. The Conference Presidency will be carried, after the development phase, that finishes in 2001, by the EU Presidency.
- c) The Parliamentary Committee which holds the NCEO Presidency in the 2nd semester has to:
  - organise the yearly Conference;
  - organise a Bureau meeting, formed by the Presidency Troika and the European Parliament;
  - assure the publication of quarterly newsletters, update and put the NCEO Web Site fully operational.If the above mentioned EU Member State cannot hold the NCEO Presidency, the Presidency will be held by the EU Presidency of the 1st semester of the same year.
- d) The conclusions, published by the Presidency will be the result of the EU Member States consensus acknowledge by the Presidency in the plenary session of the Conference.
- e) The revision of this regulation will be object of a written proposal submitted by one or more competent Parliamentary committees, addressed to all the other competent Parliamentary committees of the Member States of the EU and to the EP. The proposal shall be put on the agenda of the first Conference following the submission of the proposal. Adoption of the revised proposal shall be conducted through consensus.