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## REPORT

on representation of women among the social partners of the European Union  
(2002/2026(INI))

Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities

Rapporteur: Miet Smet



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## PROCEDURAL PAGE

At the sitting of 14 March 2002 the President of Parliament announced that the Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities had been authorised to draw up an own-initiative report, pursuant to Rule 163 of the Rules of Procedure, on representation of women among the social partners of the European Union.

The Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities appointed Miet Smet rapporteur at its meeting of 27 March 2002.

The committee considered the draft report at its meetings of 28 August 2002 and 9 September 2002.

At the last meeting it adopted the motion for a resolution unanimously.

The following were present for the vote: Anna Karamanou chairperson; Olga Zrihen Zaari and Jillian Evans, vice-chairpersons; Miet Smet, rapporteur; Regina Bastos, Lone Dybkjær, Fiorella Ghilardotti, Lissy Gröner, María Izquierdo Rojo, Hans Karlsson, Rodi Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou, Thomas Mann, Maria Martens, Christa Prets, María Rodríguez Ramos, Miet Smet and Patsy Sörensen.

The report was tabled on 10 September 2002.

## MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

### European Parliament resolution on representation of women among the social partners of the European Union (2002/2026(INI))

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to its resolution on the Commission report on the implementation of Council Recommendation 96/694/EC of 2 December 1996 on the balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process<sup>1</sup>,
  - having regard to the Council Resolution of 27 March 1995 and to Council Recommendation 96/694/EC of 2 December 1996 on the balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process<sup>2</sup>,
  - having regard to Articles 2, 3(2), 13, 137(1) and 141(4) of the EC Treaty,
  - having regard to the Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing on 15 September 1995,
  - having regard to its resolution on the follow-up to the Beijing Action Platform (2000/2020(INI))<sup>3</sup>,
  - having regard to its resolution of 15 November 2000 on the proposal for a Council Decision on the Programme relating to the Community framework strategy on gender equality (2001-2005)<sup>4</sup>,
  - having regard to the work of the European Database ‘Women in Decision-making’,
  - having regard to the Third, Fourth and Fifth European Equal Opportunities Action Programmes (1991-2005),
  - having regard to the European Commission’s annual reports on equal opportunities,
  - having regard to the Commission Decision of 19 June 2000 relating to gender balance within the committees and expert groups established by it<sup>5</sup>,
  - having regard to Rule 163 of its Rules of Procedure,
  - having regard to the report of the Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities (A5-0279/2002),
- A. whereas, on several occasions in the past, in various action programmes, the European Commission has indicated that it will systematically compile data relating to women in the decision-making process in society and business, with particular regard to women in management, in industry and among the social partners, but whereas, to date, it has not

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C 262, 18.9.2001, p. 248.

<sup>2</sup> OJ C 168, 4.7.1995, p. 3 and OJ L 319, 10.12.1996, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> OJ C 59, 23.2.2001, p. 258.

<sup>4</sup> OJ C 337 E, 28.11.2000, p. 196.

<sup>5</sup> Decision of 19 June 2000, OJ L 154, 27.6.2000, p. 34.

fulfilled that commitment with regard to the social partners,

- B. whereas, at present and at all levels, too few statistics are kept up to date and are available about the representation of women among the social partners,
- C. whereas women account for some 40% of the membership of trade unions in the EU, but whereas there is no proper ratio between, on the one hand, the number of women members and, on the other, the number of women who serve on decision-making bodies or who hold executive posts in employees' organisations,
- D. whereas women constitute a minority in the upper echelons of employers' organisations, but whereas no specific data relating to this issue is available,
- E. whereas women constitute 42% of the total workforce in the EU, and whereas the needs and wants of those women should be appropriately represented,
- F. whereas women are underrepresented in the organs and structures in which the social partners consult each other about social policy,
- G. whereas strategies are required to increase the representation of women among the social partners,
- H. whereas affirmative action programmes are required if more balanced representation is to be achieved,
- I. whereas existence of independent women's structures established by employees' and employers' organisations must not isolate women from the decision-making process but, on the contrary, integrate them in that process and enable them to progress,
- J. whereas research has shown that mentoring and networking of women is very important in preparing them for executive duties,
- K. whereas non-binding declarations of intent are inadequate, and whereas real political will inside the organisations where the social partners meet is required in order to implement changes and achieve balanced representation,
- L. whereas, through collective bargaining, the social partners play an important role in the promotion of equal opportunities,
- M. whereas, with a view to achieving gender balance, collective bargaining would be more effective if more women negotiators took part and expressed women's points of view,
- N. whereas gender balance is a matter which involves men as well, and whereas awareness of equal opportunities is promoted whenever both men and women negotiators are educated and follow courses in gender-awareness,
- O. whereas the European Commission is intending to devote 2003 to women in decision-making, partly with a view to the European elections in 2004, in which connection it will be organising various activities and funding projects,
- 1. Calls on the European Commission to make a genuine start on the compilation of data and

the establishment of a database relating to the representation of women among the social partners and proposes that, on the basis of that data, indicators be established with a view to increasing the influence exercised by women in social and economic decision-making bodies;

2. Calls on the social partners themselves to compile detailed statistics relating to the ratio of men to women in their internal structures and in all consultative and advisory bodies in which they are represented;
3. Calls on the social partners to establish performance targets relating to the quantitative and qualitative representation of women both within their organisations and in collective bargaining and to publish regular reports on the progress made and on the impact of the measures implemented;
4. Calls on the social partners to incorporate the gender dimension into their policies and to promote equal opportunities as a subject for the agenda of negotiations;
5. Urges the social partners to go beyond mere declarations of intent and to develop affirmative action programmes, followed up by an assessment of the results achieved, which are designed to achieve an actual increase in the representation of women on decision-forming and decision-taking bodies;
6. Calls on the Commission, the Council and the European Parliament to draw up measures for a balanced representation of men and women on European Works Councils;
7. Calls on the social partners to review their representation mechanisms and selection procedures, to give centre stage to a balanced representation of women and men and to enshrine it in their constitutions;
8. Calls on the social partners to establish a post for an 'equal opportunities officer' within their organisations;
9. Demands that the social partners provide for education and gender-training for both male and female staff, especially for negotiators, with a view to increasing their awareness of equal pay and opportunities issues for women and men;
10. Urges the social partners to create networks among women negotiators and women administrators with a view to their exchanging experience and expertise;
11. Calls on the social partners to test their policies for gender-mainstreaming and, when taking decisions, to verify the potential impact thereof on men and women;
12. Urges the social partners, in their employment policy, to develop further the role allotted to them in the promotion of equal opportunities, and particularly in the promotion of equal representation of men and women, notably in the context of the 'Trilateral summit on growth and employment', and to record the progress made;
13. Calls on the European Commission to create a database, divided into various sectors, relating to the results of collective bargaining in the context of equal opportunities and to use it for the dissemination of best practice;

14. Calls on the European Commission to include in its report on employment a review of women's participation in collective bargaining when assessing what progress has been made in connection with equal opportunities;
15. Calls on the European Commission, under the Fifth Action Programme, to finance, in particular, projects and studies in the Member States which contribute to the achievement of a better gender balance in the social and economic decision-making process;
16. Calls on the Member States to establish national centres of excellence to be responsible for the dissemination of best practice and expertise and, hence, for improving the equal opportunities dimension of collective bargaining;
17. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the Member States.



## EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

### 1. Representation of women among the social partners in the EU

This report aims to describe the situation relating to the representation of women among the social partners in the EU. It concerns the representation of women within the organisations themselves and also within the structures and advisory bodies in which the social partners consult each other about social policy. It aims to give an overview of the strategies that have been implemented and which have resulted in more women being appointed to serve on representative bodies of the social partners. Finally, it will review the connection between the representation of women in bodies set up by the social partners and the attempts to attain the social policy objectives which are of importance to women in, *inter alia*, collective labour agreements.

#### Introduction

On many occasions in the past, in its various action programmes concerning equal opportunities, the European Community has emphasised that representation among the social partners must be more balanced and more proportionate. For example, the Fifth Action Programme (2001-2005) establishes balanced representation in the social and economic decision-making process as a priority. Furthermore, the Council Recommendation on the balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process, which was adopted in 1996, recommended the Member States to encourage the social partners to promote balanced participation of women and men in their activities<sup>1</sup>. Data compilation by the Member States must also be improved. Three years later, in October 1999, the social partners were manifestly forgotten when the Council laid down nine indicators by which to measure progress in the participation of women in executive structures<sup>2</sup>. Similarly, under the Treaty of Amsterdam, the Community is obliged to take a pro-active stance in its attempts to eliminate inequality between men and women and to promote equality between men and women in all Community activities<sup>3</sup>.

### 2. Participation of women: few figures but manifest underrepresentation

Although statistics about the number of women in all European national parliaments and most governments are, indeed, available on a regular basis, it is far more difficult to find statistics at European level about the number of women in the organisations set up by the social partners. For example, there is very little information available about the participation of women inside the organisational structures and internal decision-making bodies of the social partners, while even less information is available about the gender-specific composition of delegations of negotiators in the social dialogue. Finally, there are no statistics available about the advisory bodies in which social partners are represented. The major difficulties in data compilation and centralisation arise because data is supplied by national organisations either not at all or on a very irregular basis and in a raw state or because no data at all is recorded (for lack of time, for lack of attention, for lack of resolve).

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<sup>1</sup> Council Recommendation 96/694/EC of 2 December 1996 on the balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process, OJ L 319, 10.12.1996, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Conclusions of the 2208<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Council, Luxembourg, 22 October 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Article 3(2) of the EC Treaty.

## **2.1 Employees' organisations**

The European Trade Union Confederation and the European Industrial Relations Observatory have made an effort to compile statistics<sup>1</sup>. Those studies emphasise that, at national level:

- about 40% of the total number of trade union members are women
- less than one-quarter of those holding executive positions, such as chairman, vice-chairman or secretary-general, are women
- the number of women in internal decision-making structures is limited and just as disproportionate to the percentage of members, although an increase has actually been recorded (between 1993 and 1998, the percentage of women appointed as congress delegates increased from 23% to 28%, of those serving on executive committees from 15% to 20%, on steering committees or as members of executive bodies from 20% to 29% and of departmental heads from 23 % to 32 %).

At European level, the number of women members of European Trade Union Federations varies widely, averaging 27%, with the highest percentage in 1998 being the 54% in the European Federation of Public Service Unions. The average percentage of female participants at congresses of such federations was 21%, while 15% served on executive committees and 13% on steering committees. There was one female secretary-general, but no woman chairman.

The European Trade Union Confederation has two women out of a total of seven members serving in the secretariat (28.5%). Women account for 29% of the membership of the Steering Committee and for 19% of the Executive Committee. In 1999, 27% of Congress participants were women.

## **2.2 Employers' organisations**

Far fewer studies are available from the employers' side, so statistics are correspondingly thin on the ground. UNICE was able to supply the following information about some national employers' organisations. In Belgium, for example, 1.51% of the executives of the Federation of Belgian Enterprises are women, as are 10.8% of the membership of the Executive Committee. The corresponding figures for the Finnish Employers' Organisation are 19.2% and 7.7% respectively.

At European level, UNICE's Council of Presidents has one woman out of a total of 34 members (2.9%). No women at all serve on the Executive Committee, which has 34 members. Of the 34 Permanent Delegates, seven are women (20%).

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<sup>1</sup> ETUC, the 'Second Sex' of European Trade Unionism, 1993, 1998. The European Industrial Relations Observatory (EIRO) also supplies useful statistical material (<http://www.eiro.eurofound.ie>). See also research work carried out by C. Cockburn, European Commission, Social Europe, Suppl. 4/95, Strategies for gender democracy: Women and the European Social Dialogue.

## **2.3 Delegations of negotiators in the social dialogue**

At national level, women continue to constitute a minority in delegations responsible for collective bargaining. In 1998, the average percentage of women from employees' organisations taking part in nation-wide bargaining was 26%<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, information concerning participation in collective bargaining at plant or sectoral level was recorded in only a very few instances. In the Netherlands, five women sit on the Social and Economic Council, which has a total of 33 members. Not one woman represents the employers on that body either as a full or as a substitute member. Five women out of a total of 24 members sit on the Belgian National Labour Council, while women account for 10% of the membership of the joint committees.

On average, women accounted for one-third of the ETUC delegation which participated in the most recent Europe-wide collective bargaining on fixed-term contracts, temporary employment agency work and teleworking. Its delegation to the Social Dialogue Committee in 2000 included no more than 23% of women<sup>2</sup>. The expert committees of the European Commission which are active in the social dialogue sector have, on average, no more than 13.5% of women members, although the European Commission has set the target here at 40%<sup>3</sup>. In the scientific research sector, the percentage of women involved is significantly lower at 12% than in the employment sector (20.6%) or the internal market sector (24%). However, it is the delegating organisations which appoint their delegations at their own discretion. Figures relating to European Works Councils are extremely hard to come by, but, in the 'masculine' steel sector, only 16% of the delegates were women.

The information available shows clearly that an overwhelming proportion of the people involved are men and that women are underrepresented in the upper echelons of the organisations. The underrepresentation of women in internal decision-making structures goes hand-in-hand with a shortage of women when delegations to social consultation and advisory bodies are appointed. Accordingly, a number of strategies have been implemented with a view to remedying this underrepresentation. In the meantime, it should be recommended that a start be made at European level on the systematic compilation of data relating to the role played by women in the decision-making process. The database established, for example, by the European Database 'Women in Decision-making' would be ideal for that purpose.

## **3. Strategies to achieve a more balanced representation**

These strategies may be divided into three major categories:

1. measures which specifically encourage women to take part in the organisation's activities (such as flexible meeting times and special training programmes (Denmark))
2. women's structures set up inside an organisation with a view to giving women and their point of view more visibility, although they are frequently reduced to little more than an informal or isolated discussion forum

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<sup>1</sup> Calculated on the basis of the available data relating to national trade unions in the EU set out in the 1998 ETUC study.

<sup>2</sup> Figures supplied by the European Trade Union Institute.

<sup>3</sup> Figures supplied by the Equal Opportunities Service of the Directorate-General for Employment and Social Affairs, Commission Decision COM(2000/407/EC) of 19 June 2000, OJ L 154, 27.6.2000, p. 34.

3. measures designed to make access to positions of influence easier for women (affirmative actions and action programmes).

The last-named strategy, which has been the subject of discussion for many a long year, is gradually being implemented more and more. For example, the quota system, whereby the number of women involved may not fall below an agreed percentage, was introduced between 1993 and 1998 in the Belgian General Federation of Labour (ABVV), the Spanish General Workers' Union (UGT), the French Democratic Confederation of Labour (CFDT), the Italian Confederation of Workers' Unions (CISL) and the German White-Collar Workers' Unions (DAG). However, such quota systems are effective only when they are backed up by sanctions and verification of compliance. Research, further, shows that these quotas must also form part of a wider strategy. Another way in which to ensure that the participation of a specific percentage of women is guaranteed is the system of reserved seats, whereby a clearly established number of seats is earmarked for women. That strategy has been hailed as a success by the Italian Union of Workers (UIL) and by the British Trade Union Congress (TUC), and the number of women involved has increased. However, in such instances, we must avoid a situation where additional seats are simply created for women, without their being given equal status in the decision-making process.

In addition, 56% of the organisations affiliated to ETUC have provisions relating to gender balance in their constitutions. Furthermore, awareness-raising campaigns prior to trade union elections and the establishment of networks among women negotiators also constitute incentives for increasing the representation of women.

The results of the various strategies vary widely – there is no single recipe for success – because the influence of cultural, historical and structural factors is always tangible. The implementation and, hence, the efficacy of measures taken remains totally dependent on the political will inside the organisations.

Although, as a general rule, employers' organisation claim to support equal opportunities, the measures that they take are very limited, and they are more frequently opposed to affirmative action.

#### **4. Representation of women's interests**

Comparative research carried out by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions has shown that social partners are important for the promotion of equal opportunities. In those countries (such as Germany, Scandinavia, France, Belgium and the Netherlands) where trade union consultation plays an important regulatory role, equal opportunities issues form part of such consultation to the greatest extent<sup>1</sup>.

Does the inadequate number of women involved in the decision-making process therefore mean that too little attention is paid to women's interests? The research workers conclude that the involvement of women in decision-making bodies and in collective bargaining always has a tangible impact on the implementation of the equal opportunities policy.

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<sup>1</sup> European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Equal Opportunities and Collective Bargaining in the European Union, 1998.

In several instances, they play an important role in the fixing of the agenda and the establishment of priorities. Women frequently have more expertise in and knowledge of the real working conditions of women employees and of existing inequalities. As a result, they may be able to promote the inclusion of equal opportunities in the consultation process. For example, it is the women negotiators who are more prepared to tackle the issue of wage inequality between men and women and to call for more attention to be paid to the reconciliation of work and family life. In Germany, for example, a provision was enshrined in the collective agreement for the banking sector that, on every step of the career ladder, the option of part-time working must be made available. In certain sectors in France, the rules governing part-time working were geared to take account of school hours. In this way, the working environment and organisational culture was made more comfortable for women.

Nevertheless, we may not assume that action may be taken on and progress made in equal opportunities issues only if women negotiators are involved. All negotiators and decision-makers in social partner organisations must, from the outset, be aware of the need for more gender balance, and adequate expertise must be developed in order to identify existing inequalities and potential remedies.