

EWLA

Statement

on

2007 - European Year of Equal Opportunities for All

and

the Period of Reflection on the Future of Europe

28 January 2007

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I. The European Year of Equal Opportunities for All

➤ EWLA welcomes

- the Commission initiative and the EP & Council Decision to launch a European Year of Equal Opportunities for All;
- the First Equality Summit, in Berlin, on 30-31 January 2007, and the Conference that will open the European Year;
- the political will of EU institutions to implement effectively the fundamental principles of non-discrimination and gender equality in all areas, and to assist Member States in achieving this implementation;
- the objectives of the European Year: Rights – Representation – Recognition – Respect.

➤ EWLA is glad that the Preamble to the EP & Council Decision establishing the European Year:

- recalls that the elimination of gender inequalities and the promotion of gender equality is imposed by the Treaty as an essential task and a horizontal aim of the Community;
- stresses the need to address multiple discrimination – a problem that affects mostly women.

➤ EWLA is surprised that this Decision defines "*gender mainstreaming*" as a mere requirement to "*take into account the different ways in which women and men experience discrimination*" on grounds other than gender.

➤ Therefore, EWLA demands that the European Year:

- should implement "*gender mainstreaming*", in accordance with Article 3(2) EC Treaty, i.e. as an imperative to actively promote gender equality in all areas – not in the restrictive way mentioned in the Decision;
- should take into account that women are neither a group nor a minority, but one of the two forms of the human being and more than half of the European population – viz. half of the European voters;
- should strengthen the protection of maternity and the reconciling of family and work by men and women – as means to achieve real gender equality, to fulfil the Lisbon social and economic goals and to address the acute demographic problems – in particular by promoting the monitoring of relevant EC law, the updating of Directives 92/85 and 96/34 and the adoption of effective horizontal measures benefiting to men and women¹.

II. The Period of Reflection on the Future of Europe

The European Year is situated within the "Period of Reflection" and the ongoing Debate on the Future of Europe.

Continuing its active participation in this Debate²

➤ EWLA welcomes:

- the statements of the Spring 2006 European Council that
 - *the Period of Reflection, viz. the dialogue with citizens, must continue before decisions on the future of the Constitutional Treaty can be taken;*
 - *"sustainable development is based on democracy, gender equality, solidarity, the rule of law and respect for fundamental rights";*
- the intention of the German Presidency to examine the possible solutions to the constitutional problem;
- the planned adoption, in March, in Berlin, of "*a Political Declaration by EU leaders, setting out Europe's values and ambitions and confirming their shared commitment to deliver them, commemorating 50 years of the Rome Treaties*".

➤ EWLA recalls that:

- at this crucial moment for the Union, the safeguard of the whole *acquis* in fundamental rights, including social rights – the Union's cornerstone and an essential feature of European identity – is more important than ever; this is the most effective way to draw citizens nearer to the Union;
- this *acquis* includes the rights defined in Article 6(2) TEU and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, as well as rights deriving from primary and secondary EC/EU law and ECJ case law;
- the Charter, as proclaimed in Nice in December 2000, without the amendments made to it by the Convention and the IGC, is the only existing Charter, as the ECJ held; moreover, to the extent that it reflects the *acquis*, it constitutes an irreducible part of it;
- the Constitutional Treaty omitted some fundamental horizontal objectives proclaimed in the TEC and the Lisbon strategy, such as the improvement of the quality of life and the quality of work.

¹ See EWLA's statement on the Commission's Roadmap Towards Gender Equality, and General Assembly Resolution of 20 May 2006, on the reconciling of employment & family life and gender equality: www.ewla.org

² See EWLA's 12 contributions to the Convention, 4 appeals to the IGC, First Position on the Reflection Period, and General Assembly Resolution of 20 May 2006, on the Future of Europe and Fundamental Rights: www.ewla.org