

## **Welcoming Address by Commissioner Anna Diamantopoulou**

Equal treatment for men and women is integral to the European Community's social policy. It is crucial both to its economic and social cohesion. The importance of the principle has been underlined in the Treaty of Amsterdam. Equality between men and women is among the express objectives of the Community and has to be realised in all community activities.

The Commission lives up to this commitment: I shall in the near future present a modification of the equal treatment directive as well as a new framework programme which includes all community policies to achieve gender equality in the new century. Real equality can only be achieved if we, as a Community make equal opportunities everybody's priority - a priority within every field of policy, and at every level of activity, whether at European, national or local level. This mainstreaming principle is one, which has set the tone for implementing our Fourth Programme and one, which will be pursued by my colleagues in the Commission.

Our aim is to ensure that equal opportunities are built into all policies and become a common strand of Community action. This is why the Commission services are currently reviewing all of the policies and actions of the Commission in which equal opportunities do, or could, play a role. This work will form the basis for us to bring forward new ideas on how to integrate women's concerns into broader areas of policy. The responsibility for gender equality will be attributed to all policy areas - both politically and financially. This means in concrete terms - structural funds, funds for agriculture, funds spent on public procurement can be used for the promotion of gender equality!

In order to redress the democratic deficit of the unbalanced participation of women in decision-making the Commission is currently examining my proposal for gender balance in consultative committees. Decisions reflect the attitudes, values but also prejudices of their makers, it is therefore necessary that women, who are equally affected by decisions as men, can participate in the process of making those decisions. I do not have to mention to you that there is a sound structure of European equality law comprising 10 directives and more than 100 judgements of the European Court of Justice. The implementation of equality laws alone are not sufficient, they must be effective in practice. Too often, citizens are not aware of the rights conferred on them by Community law, or find it difficult to access the mechanisms, which enforce these rights.

It is with this in mind that a major priority of the Community's Action Programme on Equal Opportunities is to stimulate increased participation by all relevant legal practitioners in this area, to improve procedures for enforcement of Community law, and increase the quality and quantity of information on European law and social policies. I am therefore very happy

that the Deutscher Juristinnenbund, the Woman Lawyers Conference and the Austrian Association of women lawyers have taken the initiative to establish a European Woman Lawyers Association, and I am pleased that the Commission was able to support this congress through the Fourth Action Programme on equal opportunities for women and men.

The Woman Lawyers have taken the lead in the dissemination of European Law. Lawyers are important multipliers for informing and advising citizens of their rights, and in helping to enforce those rights. European law, in the central area of equal opportunities thus becomes visible. I hope that the associations of woman lawyers in other Member States and in the candidate countries will join this initiative and that their male colleagues will follow the good example given by women lawyers. I express my good wishes for a successful congress and a fruitful co-operation in the future.