In spite of the speeches or the commitments of our leaders in support of real developments for women and true equality between men and women, acts are not forthcoming and matters are moving along even more slowly.

In Europe women are rather better off than in other parts of the world. The European continent, without being perfect, is where the place of women in society is the best. But there is still a great deal to do before equality of treatment on all levels will be really guaranteed.

Amongst the governments Greece and Portugal distinguished themselves in 2009 by appointing many women after their elections in the autumn. From the 22nd position that the two countries occupied equally at the end of 2008 they progressed to lie in 8th equal place at the end of 2009. However the ministerial reshuffle in France in June 2009 dealt a fatal blow to women and France which occupied 5th place in the ranking just one year ago dropped to 16th position!

In the European institutions, it is the European Parliament, which after the elections in June 2009 has progressed since it now includes 257 women, i.e. nearly 35% (in comparison with 31% before). And this has been achieved in spite of the reduction in the number of MEPs (732 instead of 785 previously). However we cannot say the same for the European Commission. The Barroso Commission I included only 10 women in May 2009; the Barroso Commission II only includes 9. This is a regression.

Do we have to point out that women represent more than half of the European population? If the European leaders want the European institutions to be close to their citizens then they will have to be representative of society and respect the principle of equality between men and women, which has been included in the European treaties since the beginning.

The European Institute for Gender Equality opened its doors in Vilnius on 16th December 2009. This agency was created to provide support to the Member States and the European institutions in their work to promote equality between men and women, to counter
discrimination based on gender and to raise awareness with regard to equality. It should therefore encourage them to take resolute steps to define a true European model of parity.

And this is because gradually Europe is becoming a model for other continents where the position of women is still precarious, not forgetting the great number of countries in which women’s rights are completely ignored. Promoting women’s rights is one of the effective means to taking civilisation forwards and to strengthening democracy. Finally the first Human Right is that of women.

**Women in Economic Life**

Gradually women are conquering all professional sectors: in the European Union on average 59.1% of women work. However 31.1% of women work part time, i.e. a percentage that is four times higher than amongst men. Likewise we should note that the employment rate of women with children falls by 11.5 points whilst that of men increases simultaneously by 6.8 points. This reflects the unequal sharing of parental responsibilities and the inadequacy of childcare infrastructures. More must be done to facilitate greater reconciliation between private and professional life. In addition to this women who are equally qualified are far too often paid less than men (an average difference of 17.6% in the Union) which constitutes real discrimination.

Women are as qualified as men; they graduated with 59% of all university diplomas in the European Union last year. Although they are highly qualified and still greater in number on the labour market they still comprise a minority in posts of responsibility in companies and political organisations, notably at the highest level. Less than 30% of women occupy post of responsibility on average.

In the biggest companies on the stock exchange 10% of women on average (27% in Sweden and 24% in Finland) sit on their boards or are a part of the monitoring structure of European companies and only 3% are CEO’s (15% in Bulgaria). Only Norway totals more than 42% thanks to a law adopted in 2004. France is looking into a similar measure.

All of the Central Banks of the 27 Member States are managed by men. On average the highest decision making bodies include 18% of women (41% in Sweden). In five Member States (Germany, Austria, Cyprus, Luxembourg and Slovenia), the highest decision making bodies of each bank comprise men only.

The three financial institutions of Europe (European Central Bank, European Investment Bank and the European Investment Fund) are all managed by men and only 11% of women occupy an influential position.

In the central administrations of the 27 Member States women occupy 25% of level 1 jobs (52% in Slovenia) and 33% of the level 2 jobs (74% in Slovakia). In European administrations women represent 17% of level 1 jobs (directors general) and 25% of level 2 jobs (directors, advisors). Out of the 22 European agencies, 5 are chaired by women and 6 are led by women. Five women chair the Auditors’ Court in their country (Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Sweden). The European Auditors’ Court comprises four women.

In the legal sector women represent on average 27% of the members of the European courts. None is chaired by a woman. The European Court of Justice includes four women judges. 31% are present in the Supreme Courts of the Member States (100% in Luxembourg).

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