

# Women and men in decision-making 2007

## Analysis of the situation and trends

### Executive summary

As we leave behind 2007, the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of gender equality policy, the European Commission is pleased to present the report *Women and men in decision-making 2007; analysis of the situation and trends*.

In 2006, the *Roadmap for equality between men and women*<sup>1</sup> identified six priority areas<sup>2</sup> for EU action on gender equality over a five year period through to 2010. Alongside active policy measures, one of the actions identified for the Commission was to support activities to raise awareness of equality issues in the decision-making process and promote research based on comparable European data.

This report represents a contribution towards that action and presents an assessment of the current situation of men and women in decision-making across Europe and developments over recent years. There is a particular focus on indicators introduced by the Council of the European Union in 1999 and 2003 as a follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, which was adopted by 189 states and is considered as a milestone for the enforcement of women's rights across the world.

The majority of data used in the report are taken from the Commission's database on women and men in decision-making<sup>3</sup>, which covers senior positions within the EU institutions, the 27 EU Member States, EEA countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) and two candidate countries (Turkey and Croatia). It is an important source of information for policy makers, researchers, students and all those interested in knowing the state of play in decision-making.

The report presents facts and figures covering decision-making in three main areas: politics, economy and public service. The 2007 data were collected during the fourth quarter of the year but may not always reflect the very latest changes in personnel. Some of the headline figures are:

### National parliaments

- At the time the Beijing Platform for Action was launched in 1995, women accounted for only just over 10% of members of parliament worldwide. Since that time, there has been a steady, if slow, improvement so that by July 2007 women accounted for over 17% of members of national parliaments globally.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/gender\\_equality/gender\\_mainstreaming/roadmap\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/gender_equality/gender_mainstreaming/roadmap_en.html)

<sup>2</sup> The six priority areas for EU action on gender equality set out in the Roadmap are: equal economic independence for women and men; reconciling professional life with private and family life; equal participation in decision-making; eradication of all forms of gender-based violence and trafficking; elimination of gender stereotypes; promotion of gender equality in external and development policies.

<sup>3</sup> The database is hosted on the website of DG-Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities and can be consulted free at [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/women\\_men\\_stats/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/women_men_stats/index_en.htm)

- The European Union performs better than average with the proportion of women members of parliament (single/lower house) rising from 16% in 1997 to 24% in 2007, though this is still well below the so-called *critical mass* of 30%, deemed to be the minimum necessary for women to exert meaningful influence on politics.
- Of the 20 countries worldwide that have achieved the critical mass of 30%, eight are from within the EU – Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands, Denmark, Spain, Belgium, Germany, and Austria. The European Parliament (31% women) would also just make it into this select group.
- On the other hand, there remains a further seven EU countries where women account for less than 15% of members of parliament – the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Ireland, Slovenia, Hungary, Romania and Malta.
- Belgium showed the greatest improvement in the parliamentary gender balance over the last ten years (from 12% to 35% women) – a direct result of positive intervention by the government through legislation enforcing parity amongst candidates and equal visibility on ballot papers. International IDEA<sup>4</sup> notes that most of the countries that have achieved the critical mass have an electoral system based on proportional representation and some form of quota system to proactively reduce the obstacles to women entering politics at national level.

### Regional assemblies

- At regional level, women have a stronger political voice than at national level, with an average of 30% representation in regional assemblies. There is, however, significant variation between countries, from 48% women in both Sweden and France to below 15% in Slovakia, Hungary and Italy.

### National governments

- On average, men outnumber women in the cabinets of EU governments by around three to one (24% women, 76% men).
- Although a commitment to balanced representation is evident in some countries – Spain (41% women), Sweden (46%), Norway (53%) and Finland (60%) – the cabinets of Slovakia, Greece and Turkey include just one woman each and that of Romania has no women members at all.
- Only eight of the current twenty-seven EU Member States have ever had a woman prime minister (or equivalent position) – the United Kingdom, Portugal, Lithuania (twice), France, Poland, Bulgaria, Finland and Germany (current).

### Central Banks

- The central banks of all twenty-seven EU Member States are led by a male governor.
- On average, the highest decision-making bodies of EU central banks include five men for every woman. Sweden and Norway lead the way, but they are the only two European central banks with more than one in three women in such senior positions. In seven EU Member States (Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Italy, Cyprus, Portugal, and Slovenia) and in Turkey, the highest decision-making body of the central bank is comprised solely of men.

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<sup>4</sup> Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance

- It is a similar picture at European level where all three of the financial institutions (European Central Bank, European Investment Bank and European Investment Fund) are led by men and there is an average of just below 16% women in positions of influence.

### **Business leaders**

- Across Europe, women account for just over 44% of all workers but they are more likely to be employed in junior positions such that they comprise only 32% of those considered as heads of businesses (chief executives, directors and managers of small businesses).
- The under-representation of women at the top level is heightened in big business where men account for nearly 90% of the board members of leading companies (constituents of the blue-chip index in each country) and there has been very little improvement over recent years.
- A noteworthy exception is Norway, where the government has taken positive action to redress the imbalance by imposing gender parity on the board membership of both public and private companies (minimum 40% women). With sanctions possible in case of non-compliance, the legislation has already resulted in the level of female representation in the boardroom rising to 34%, which is 10 percentage points ahead of any other European country.

### **Public administrations**

- There has been significant progress in promoting women within the central administrations of EU member states where they currently fill nearly 33% of positions in the top two levels of the hierarchy compared to around 17% in 1999<sup>5</sup>. The proportion of women in similar positions within the European institutions has also improved from 14% to just under 20% over the same period but there remains much room for improvement.

### **The judiciary**

- Across Europe, the groups of judges presiding over each of the national supreme courts comprise an average of 70% men and 30% women but this balance is significantly influenced by high numbers of women in the courts of some of the countries that joined the EU in the last two accessions – in particular Bulgaria (76% women) and Romania (74%). In the EU-15 countries only 18% of judges are female – only a slight improvement from 15% in 1999.

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<sup>5</sup> Note that the values are not fully comparable due to different coverage of countries and possible differences in the positions counted. Nevertheless, the trend is considered representative.