

The Gender of European Community Personnel

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ABSTRACT

The process of European construction that began in the 1950s has accompanied the social evolutions of the twentieth century. Highly advanced policies for gender equality were defined and implemented in the context of the European Community (EC) and later the European Union (EU). These policies have sometimes been presented as models for gender mainstreaming, although one may legitimately wonder whether European institutions applied within their own administration the principles they were promoting abroad.



Marcelle Devaud (1908-2008), the pro-European French female politician who worked her whole life for women's rights, observed that the Treaty of Rome was "first and foremost trade-related, although it did not neglect a certain number of social problems, and notably for women it was the first to mention gender parity [article 119]." In 1958, the European Commission, whose members were all men, recruited female civil servants. In the same year, Jacqueline Nonon left her managerial position for Brussels, where she was assigned a role as a typist. She wanted to leave, but was then given the responsibility of creating a documentation service within the General Directorate for Social Affairs. She was later assigned to the Directorate General for Employment, where the topic of employment for people facing difficulty in the labour market fell to her. In the late 1960s, she created an ad hoc group for gender equality which would contribute to the development of the first major European directive on professional equality during the International Woman's Year in 1975. Nonon then became deeply involved in many other tasks, and shared her knowledge of the inner workings of European governance.

Fausta Deshormes La Valle (1927-2013) joined the European Commission in 1961, after an early career as a journalist in Italy, where in 1954 she created the magazine *Giovane Europa*, published by the European Youth Campaign, an organization created by the European Movement International to raise awareness among and mobilize Western European youth in favour of European integration. She joined the Press and Information Service, which had little personnel at the time, and very few women, all with insecure job status. Deshormes La Valle was made a permanent employee only in 1973, after twenty one successive temporary expert contracts. She has explained how women were little regarded at the time; for example, when she complained about her insecure job status as an expert, she was given the response: "But Madame Deshormes, you have a more or less appropriate salary. And your husband is a personality. What are you complaining about?" When she passed the competitive exam and was finally recruited, the administration refused to recognize her seniority in connection with her right to a pension. She took the matter to the European Court of Justice, which ruled in her favour: the "Deshormes judgment 17/78" established a new precedent. In 1976, Commissioner Carlo Scarascia-Mugnozza opened a Women's Information Service within the Directorate General for Information, which he entrusted to La Valle. She recalls, however, that the means available were not nearly sufficient: "I only had a secretary in my organizational chart, and an ever-growing volume of work and requests. So I paid a typist on my activities budget, she was a secret employee, I called her my submarine. How else were we supposed to work?" The Press and Information Service welcomed many young women, both interns and temporary contract holders. Jacqueline Lastenouse joined it as an intern in 1962, and completed a series of expert contracts before subsequently pursuing a brilliant career at the European Commission, until her retirement in 2011.

The 1973 enlargement of the European Communities to include the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Denmark was favourable to policies in favour of women, and to their recognition within the Community's personnel. According to Nonon, "the English already had their law on equal opportunity, and were thus very proud to show that they were ahead, [...] and we were truly able to work very judiciously." Similarly, beginning in 1979, the arrival of 16% of women in a European Parliament henceforth elected by universal suffrage had an impact on the gender of Community personnel. Women were featured in many countries during the electoral campaign of 1979, which would henceforth be the case every five years. The president, Simone Veil, had to begin by convincing the Parliament's administration, which was reluctant to have a woman who wanted to change established things: "For that matter, I was very poorly welcomed by the Bureau, whose members thought the president would be a longtime member; they had already organized everything in order to preserve the levers of power. They weren't pleased that a woman was elected, and some wanted a kind of collective presidency, and wanted to form my cabinet..." She could count on committed representatives to help advance the cause of women, notably within the ad hoc Women's Rights Committee presided over by Yvette Roudy. A first major debate was organized in June 1980 in connection with the Dutchwoman Suzanne Dekker's report on women's position in the labour market. However, the Parliament administration during the 1980s was still small, and it was within the services of the Commission that the question of Community personnel gender was raised with the most intensity.

In an assessment conducted in 1986 by external consultants at the request of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, the conclusions regarding the situation of women in the Commission's personnel were severe: "strong sexual segregation in the different categories and General Directorates, and the existence of indirect discrimination." The report denounced, among others things, recruiting procedures that could create biases in the competitive exam's non-verbal eliminatory test, as well as other selection methods deemed to be "aggressive." It emphasized the existence of a career system based on seniority and the ability to master a network of personalized relations—which was hence more favourable to men—in addition to the low level of importance granted to vocational training. It observed that although the Commission intended to play a driving role in the promotion of opportunity equality in its external activities, it did not appear to garner internal consensus regarding equality and affirmative action. The consultants highlighted the slow advancement of women's careers. In addition to instituting a program for affirmative action, the report proposed adapting the procedures and practices used to manage personnel in order to make them sexually "neutral." A first program was launched in 1988, followed by three more up until 2008. The number of women in senior and mid-level managerial positions grew rapidly beginning in the late 1980s: 9.5% of category A posts in 1986, rising to 14% in 1995 and 23.5% in 2004. The evolution was more pronounced for executive positions, those with the greatest visibility (2% in 1986, 2.6% in 1995 and 17.4% in 2004). The initial impulse seems to have been strengthened by a firmer political will after the enlargement to include Austria, Finland, and Sweden (1995).

Today the European Commission employs more than 33,000 people, of whom nearly 55% are women, although in the three highest grades for administrators (AD 14, 15 and 16), they represent only 25%. Within the European Parliament, a high level group was created in the 2000s, tasked notably with ensuring compliance with gender equality among its 8,000 employees. Due to the greater politicization of nominations, as well as the dispersion among three geographical centers that hardly simplifies the compatibility of work with family obligations—which still very often fall more on women than men—the Parliament has made slower "progress toward parity in its workforce at the higher levels.

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