

Example of a statement of views made by the European Women's Lobby


Caption: Statement of views by the European Women's Lobby on the Commission proposal concerning the DAPHNE programme.

Source: European Women's Lobby, [s.l.].

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The Commission's proposal for a Council Decision on a medium-term Community action programme on measures providing a Community-wide support to Member States' action relating to violence against children, young persons and women (The Daphne programme — 2000 to 2004)

1. The European Women's Lobby (EWL) welcomes the Commission's initiative for a medium-term action programme over a period of five years for measures to combat violence against children, young persons and women. The proposal is an important step forward in tackling the global issue of violence against children, young persons and women by recognising it as a question of human rights for which Member States have firmly stated their full commitment.

2. The EWL agrees with the Commission when it states that Member States are already engaged in actions to combat violence at national level. The commitment to tackle the issue of violence against women as a global issue has been stated on many occasions in recent years. This is witnessed in the commitments made by individual Member States and the European Union at the Fourth World Conference on Women held in China in 1995 ⁽¹⁾. A follow-up analysis carried out by the EWL one year after Beijing ⁽²⁾ revealed that of all the commitments made by governments, measures to combat violence against women was a priority issue for the majority of Member States. Most recently at the 42nd session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women ⁽³⁾, in March 1998, Member States further confirmed their commitment to eliminate violence against women and agreed to undertake action in a number of areas, notably: *provision of resources; co-operation at different levels (local, regional, national and transnational), between different partners particularly NGOs, and on specific forms of violence; development of legal and social measures; promotion of research and gender disaggregated data collection; work to change attitudes.*

Therefore, a medium-term Community action programme of the type proposed by the Commission is a logical step forward in the implementation of these commitments made over the past three years. Such a programme will subsequently add value and strengthen actions taken by national governments and at European level.

3. While there is a general consensus that violence against women transcends all national boundaries without distinction of class, culture and/or age, there is, however, no structured mechanism which allows for a clear picture of the extent of violence against women in the European Union (EU). Indeed, systematic recording of acts of violence against women has just recently been developed in some countries while in other countries no structured form of recording takes place. Therefore, the added value of developing a European perspective on the issue through the proposed medium-term action programme will without a doubt benefit policy makers at all levels and subsequently will inform policy and practice in the field. The EU and the applicant countries will be in a position to demonstrate that not only is violence intolerable but that the actions, measures and policies developed in the context of a medium-term programme can be considered a model for other regions of the world for which the EU can take a leadership role.

4. It is an indisputable fact that NGOs have been the main service providers for decades providing protection and care for women and children in situations of violence of all kinds, in particular domestic violence. It is a sad reality that for many women and children, the family home is the most dangerous place to be where their well being — both bodily and emotional — is severely at risk. NGOs in most Member States are highly regarded by policy makers for the extraordinary work carried out day-in-day-out over a period of many, many years. It should be noted that in many instances governments transfer responsibility to NGOs for the provision of services for women in situations of violence. While this form of practice is gradually evolving to include other agents such as the police force, the judicial system and other institutions, NGOs continue to be the main service providers and continue, therefore, to be at the forefront of many actions to combat violence. This means that NGOs have developed invaluable expertise. This type of resource should be valued as its non-utilisation is wasteful. This added value the NGO community can bring in the context of the medium-term action programme should not be underestimated. Governments recognise that NGOs are vital partners; the medium-term programme will further strengthen the development of partnerships between NGOs and policy makers — a process which begun in the run up to and during the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995.

5. The proposed medium-term action programme underlines the importance of national initiatives and recognises that mechanisms need to be strengthened at European level to tackle violence against women as an issue of European concern. The Daphne programme was instrumental in paving the way by creating opportunities for NGOs to engage in actions across boundaries. The number of applicants for the Daphne programme is an indicator in itself of the vast interest and the need for more long-term measures and resources. The EWL has also been instrumental in bringing women's organisations into partnership with European policy makers on violence related issues by creating the first NGO *European Policy Action Centre on Violence Against Women* in 1997. The Centre was set up to serve as a channel between women's NGOs on the one hand and European policy makers on the other hand. An extensive database of organisations providing services for women was developed along with a European Observatory on violence against women. Fifteen experts, one from each Member State, identified areas in which persistent gaps hinder the long-term development of policies to adequately confront violence against women in the EU. One such gap concerns the lack of data which impedes upon the possibility of developing indicators to reveal the true extent of violence against women in the EU. In turn, the lack of such vital data impacts on the development of long-term measures and policies.

6. The persistence of violence against women and children is an indicator that society has failed to protect all of its citizens and carries with it an underlying message that the perpetrators of violence are not held responsible for their actions. There is complicity at every level and costs to society as a whole. An attempt to estimate the costs of domestic violence in the Netherlands revealed that approximately 150 million ecu of taxpayers money is spent annually dealing with the consequences of violence against women and children. The lack of response at the European political level is in breach of the EU's commitment to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and is contrary to one of the fundamental objectives which relates to the improvement in the quality of life of all citizens of the EU.

7. The medium-term action programme proposed for a period of five years will enable the strategic development of measures over a long-term period. Currently, such programmes are set within unrealistic time frames (usually one year) which make it difficult to assess the true impact of these programmes. Violence against women requires in-depth transformations for which NGOs have a vital role to play; a five-year medium-term action programme is the first step forward. The EWL strongly urges the European Council of Ministers to unanimously approve the Commission's proposal. There are safeguards built in to this proposal which allow for direct input and evaluation from and by Member States, i.e. the proposed Advisory Committee. The EWL strongly calls for the inclusion of NGO representation in this Committee. The EWL, through its *European Policy Action Centre on Violence Against Women* is willing to be a partner in this structure.

(1) In 1995, the European Union agreed at the Fourth World Conference on Women *inter alia* "to formulate and implement at all appropriate levels, plans of action to eliminate violence against women." (paragraph 124j of the Beijing Platform for Action)

(2) "Post-Beijing — One Year On", special edition of the EWL newsletter, Brussels, September 1996

(3) United Nations, Commission on the Status of Women 42nd session (2-13 March 1998), conclusions relating to agenda item 3 © "Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women: Implementation of strategic objective and action in the critical area of concern: Violence against women."