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## EPWS: an example of an umbrella network and of cooperation between women scientists across Europe

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European Platform of Women Scientists

### **EPWS: AN EXAMPLE OF AN UMBRELLA NETWORK AND OF COOPERATION BETWEEN WOMEN SCIENTISTS ACROSS EUROPE**

#### **ABSTRAKT**

Niniejszy artykuł jest głosem przedstawicielki EPWS (Europejskiej Platformy Kobiet w Nauce) w dyskusji dotyczącej sytuacji kobiet naukowców w Europie, polityki Unii Europejskiej w tym zakresie oraz podejmowanych oddolnie działań.

EPWS jest platformą zrzeszającą tak organizacje i instytucje, jak i indywidualne przedstawicielki świata nauki (ponad 12.000 osób), pełni rolę orzeczniczą oraz pośredniczą w kontaktach określonych środowisk a przedstawicielami instytucji europejskich. W tekście przedstawione zostały najważniejsze dokonania EPWS w zakresie współpracy międzynarodowej i rola tej instytucji w promowaniu kobiet naukowców.

**Słowa kluczowe:** nauka, kobieta, Unia Europejska, polityka w zakresie zwiększania udziału kobiet, gender

#### **ABSTRACT**

We wish to show in this contribution that equality is not yet reached between female and male scientists in Europe: thus improving the situation of women scientists in the European Member States requires the joint efforts both of the European Commission and the women scientists themselves, in particular through EPWS which federates their networks and associations.

After an historical overview of European Union (EU) policies in favour of women scientists during the last fifteen years, we list various initiatives taken by EU in this field. We then explain the missions and activities of the non-profit international association European Platform of Women Scientists (EPWS) and how it brings the voice of 12.000 women scientists in Europe to the level of European institutions in a complementary way.

**Keywords:** women, science, European Union, policy of increasing the number of women scientists in the EU

#### **The European Union (EU) and women scientists**

##### *Women scientists and EU policy*

The principle of "Equal Pay for Equal Work" for women and men has been stated since the beginning of the European construction in the Treaty of Rome in 1957. Equality between men and women is one of the main "pillars" in the Treaty of Amsterdam [European Union 1997]. We will focus here on the actions that have been pursued at the Directorate General Research of the European Commission since 1998. At that time, Edith Cresson, Commissioner for Research, decided that the Commission should promote specific activities to increase women's participation in science. This was the start of political declarations and practical actions in this field, which have been continued to date.

Later on in the years 2000s, in the framework of the Lisbon and Barcelona European Union (EU) objectives for 2010, the increase of women's participation in science was related to competitiveness considerations [European Commission 2009]: the goal then was for EU to become "the most competitive [with respect to United States and Japan] and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion".

In her 2008 report for the European Parliament, Britta Thomsen<sup>1</sup>, a Danish member of the Parliament, sought to address the low number of women in decision-making bodies, a lack of transparency in recruitment procedures and a persistence of stereotypes in Europe's teaching systems. "The subject of women and science is related to the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy. Positive actions are needed to quickly improve the situation", said the rapporteur [European Parliament 2008].

In the Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010-2015 [European Commission 2010] the link between the gender balance and competitiveness is again emphasized: "The prevailing gender imbalance in science and research is still a major obstacle to the European objective of increasing competitiveness and maximizing innovation potential".

Later on, 'excellence' has been an argument to include more women scientists in research and since 2012 gender equality has been one of the key priorities of "a Reinforced European Research Area Partnership for Excellence and Growth"[European Commission 2012].

#### *Dedicated structures*

The numerous activities of Women and Science in the European Commission started in 1999 with the creation of the dedicated 'Women and Science' sector at DG Research, soon transformed into a unit. Its first actions began in 1999. The service has changed its name - 'Women and Science' unit, 'Scientific Culture and Gender Issues' unit, 'Ethics and Gender' unit and is now the 'Gender' sector inside the B6 Unit of DG Research.

In addition to the unit (or the sector) at DG Research, a group of national civil servants on Women and Science, the so-called « Helsinki Group » was created at the end of 1999 with a task of lobbying on this issue at *institutional* level [European Commission 2013 a]. The role of the European Platform of Women Scientists (EPWS), established in 2005, is complementary to that of the Helsinki Group, i.e. lobbying for women scientists at *associations and networks* levels, as will be seen below.

#### *Activities*

The book "Stocktaking 10 years of 'Women in Science' policy by the European Commission 1999-2009" gives a complete overview of the actions and accomplishments [Marchetti and Raudna 2010].

#### Statistics

Every third year the European Commission publishes "She Figures", a book of gender-disaggregated statistics on women scientists in the European Member States and in the countries associated with the Framework programme [European Commission 2013 b]. The last issue of

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<sup>1</sup>The European Platform of Women Scientists (EPWS) (see below) was involved in the draft of this document.

“She Figures” was published in 2012. Figure 1 is an example of these very interesting comparative statistics on the situation of women in science.

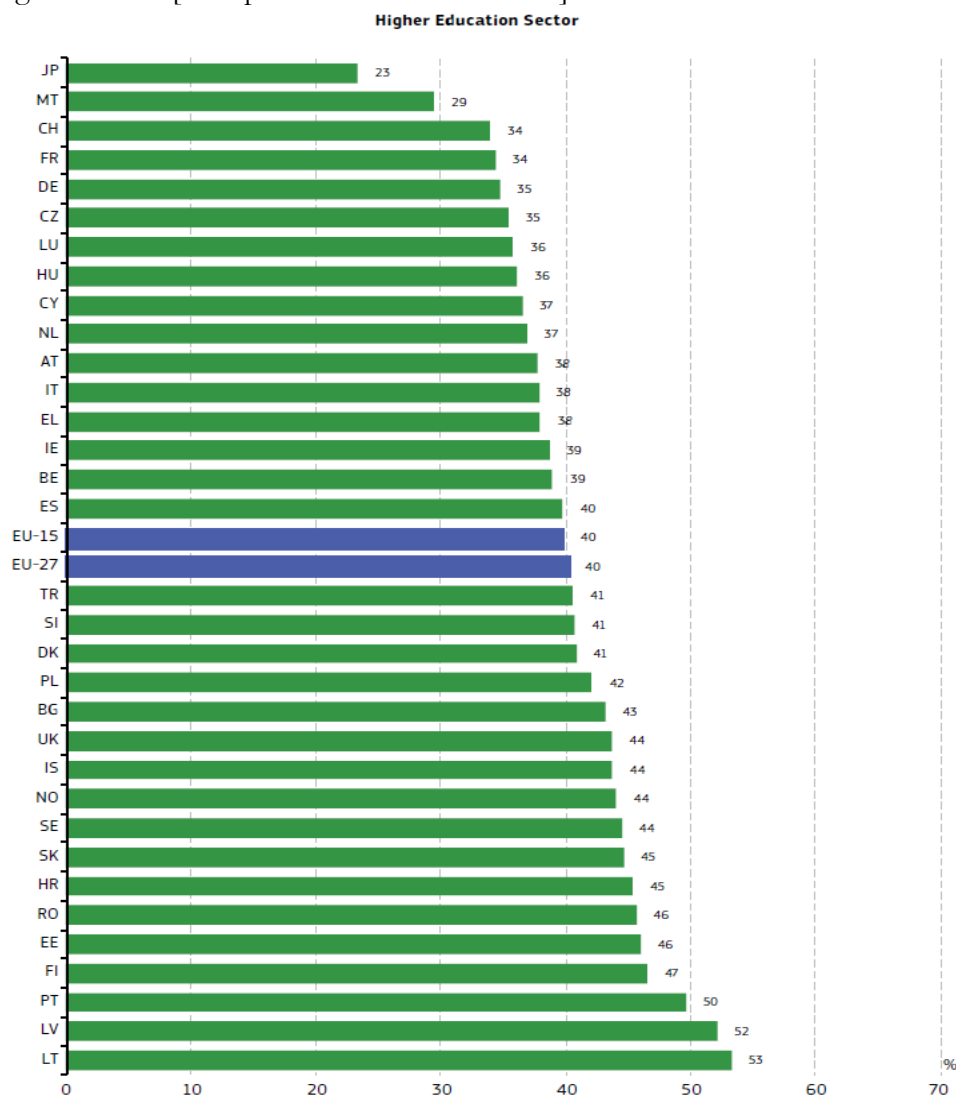
### Reports

Since 2000, many reports have covered various aspects of the Women and Science issue, in particular in Western Europe in academia – the so-called “ETAN” report - [European Commission 2000], in the private sector - “Women in Industrial Research” - , in Central and Eastern Europe -“ENWISE”-, on “Excellence and Gender in the Making” and various other situations.

### Projects

Gender-related EU projects have been supported by DG Research since the 5<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme. In Horizon 2020, the current framework programme, such projects are part of Science With and For Society [European Commission 2014].

Figure 1: Proportion of female researchers in the Higher Education sector in 2009 within different Member States and countries associated with the Framework programme. After “She Figures” 2012 [European Commission 2013 b]

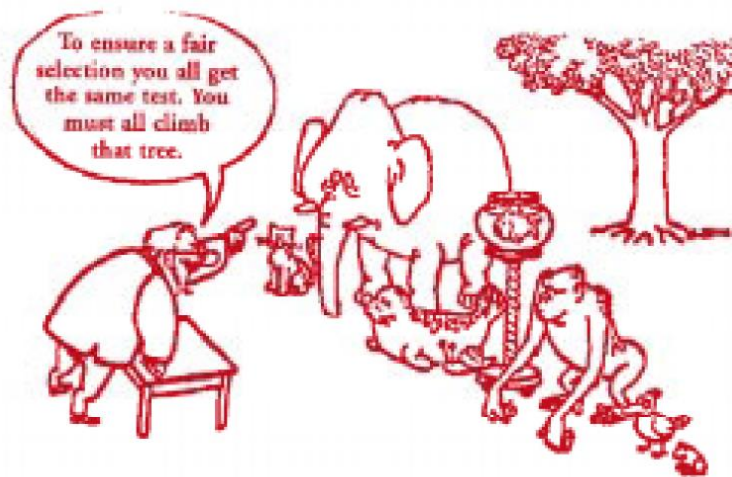


### Policies to achieve gender equality

Since all these studies evidenced that gender equality was not achieved in science, one question is immediately raised: which types of policies should be taken to improve the situation?

- *Equality of treatment between women and men* seems to be the minimum attitude, but this does not take into account possible handicaps, as can be understood from the cartoon (Fig.2)

Figure 2: From Science Policies in the European Union: Promoting excellence through mainstreaming gender equality. European Commission, Research Directorate-General, A report from the ETAN Expert Working group on Women and Science, p.23 [European Commission 2000].



- *Positive discrimination* (or affirmative action) was tried in some countries, like the Tham professorships in Sweden between 1995 and 2000 [European Commission 2000, p.26 and 93], but even in Sweden such actions, first legal, were suited and finally stopped;
- *Gender mainstreaming*, i.e. integrating gender in all actions, is the strategy that has been recommended by EU from the years 2000s.

In fact, in the period 1999-2014 the DG Research policy on ‘Women and/in Science’ changed. At the beginning, the objective was to sensitize the science community to women issues; then the aim was to ‘change the women’, so that they would adapt to the professional rules that were established by men. Since the end of the years 2000s the policy has turned to ‘changing the institutions’, the so called ‘Structural Changes’, [see European Commission 2011], so that more advantage would be taken of women’s talents.

Indeed, in Horizon 2020 - the current Framework Programme for Research and Innovation - gender is a cross-cutting issue [European Commission 2014]. The promotion of gender equality in research and innovation is a commitment of the European Commission, corresponding to the three following objectives:

- Gender balance in decision-making,
- Gender balance in research teams at all levels,
- Integrating the gender dimension in the content of Research and Innovation [European Commission 2013 c].

After this brief overview of the European institutional (top-down) actions in favour of women scientists, I will present the bottom-up approach of the European Platform of Women Scientists (EPWS).

### **The European Platform of Women Scientists (EPWS)**

EPWS is a non-profit international umbrella association under Belgian law. Its members are national or international associations and networks and also individual members. EPWS was created in 2005 after a European Commission call and was funded by Commission's grants until 2009 [Marchetti and Raudna 2010, p.105]. Since then its members have continued EPWS activities on a voluntary basis<sup>2</sup>. The French association Femmes & Sciences<sup>3</sup> is an EPWS full member and currently a member of the EPWS Board of administration.

#### *Missions*

EPWS missions are to represent the concerns, needs, ideas, aspirations and interests of European women scientists in all disciplines and at all stages of their career paths; to coordinate support activities for women scientists to facilitate their active role in the European Research Area as researchers, as well as participants in the research policy debate in Europe.

#### *Activities*

EPWS activities consist of: networking and regulating its membership; research policy; public relations and information including an electronic platform; private partnerships/fundraising.

Indeed, EPWS is giving a voice at the European Union level to 12,000 women scientists. In this capacity, each year it organizes a General Assembly and a conference. The next one, called "Ready for Dialogue, a Conference on the Gender Dimension in Science and Research", is taking place on November 5<sup>th</sup> 2015 in Berlin, where EPWS will celebrate its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. As for the most recent ones, the 2014 conference took place in Paris on "New Perspectives for Women Scientists Careers in Europe"; in Essen in 2013 the conference title was "Institutionalizing Gender and Diversity in University Structures"; Brussels hosted the 2012 conference and the General Assembly, Budapest the 2011 one.

Its Board members give around 50 EPWS presentations per year in various EU Member states and beyond.

#### *Research Policy*

To express women scientists' opinions, EPWS is using various tools:

- Writing position papers for the Commission, the European Parliament, for example during the conception and discussion of Horizon 2020 Framework Programme;
- Responding to consultations of the Directorate General Research of the European Commission;
- Preparing colloquia, like the one organized at the European Parliament in January 2012 called "Towards a Gender Balanced Science Culture to Foster Innovation" or the fringe

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<sup>2</sup><http://home.epws.org/filter/About/History-of-EPWS>The EPWS website was transformed and reopened on October 1<sup>st</sup>.

<sup>3</sup>[www.femmesetsciences.fr](http://www.femmesetsciences.fr) (verified 16/9/2015)

session entitled “Bridging the gender gap and accelerating innovative, sustainable growth” of the March 2014 Innovation Convention, organized with EPWS member EUWIIN (European Union Women Inventors and Innovators Network);

- Writing protest letters, for example against a ridiculous film, “Science, it’s a girl thing!” or about the too small number of women receiving the European Patents Office Awards;
- Lobbying for a sufficient gender inclusion in the final resolutions of EU presidency conferences in Vilnius [SAPGERIC, 2013] and Rome [“Science, Innovation and Society: achieving Responsible Research and Innovation”2014].

EPWS keeps stressing that excellent research and teaching require the inclusion of gender dimension in research in various disciplines.

In a recent paper [Antonucci 2014], the efficiency of EPWS as a lobbying structure at EU level was analyzed by comparing EPWS position papers and European Commission and European Parliament policy documents on Women in Science published somewhat later. For example, this author is emphasizing that the target of 40% of women participation first appears in the EPWS position paper on Horizon 2020 and later in the Commission Communication on Horizon 2020; Article 16 of Horizon 2020 Regulation<sup>4</sup> is devoted to gender equality and the gender dimension in science, fully in line with EPWS 2010 Position Paper.

We should modestly recognize that our point of view on gender equality in science is not the only one that influences the European structures. Anyway, we are faithfully carrying the voice of 12,000 women scientists in Europe at EU level and this is a rather powerful element to influence EU policy in this domain.

### ***Public relation and information activities***

EPWS aims to profile itself as key strategic actor in the policy debate, to enhance its own visibility and that of its members in particular through its Newsletters, and to promote the use of its electronic platform.

### *EPWS expertise*

The expertise of EPWS is widely recognised:

- The EPWS President is a member of the management committee of gender STE, a policy-driven targeted network on gender, technology and environment<sup>5</sup> funded by COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology);
- Several members of the EPWS Board of Administration are participants or experts in gender-related EU projects such as Genis Lab<sup>6</sup>, SAPGERIC<sup>7</sup>, SHERA<sup>8</sup>;
- Every year EPWS produces a benchmarking report for the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research. The last titles were in 2014 “National Measures for the Attractiveness of Science for Girls in Different Member States of the European Union

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<sup>4</sup>Regulation of the European Parliament and the Council n.1291 of December 2013 establishing Horizon 2020 Research programme.

<sup>5</sup>genderste.eu (verified 16/9/2015)

<sup>6</sup><http://www.genislab-fp7.eu/> (verified 16/9/2015)

<sup>7</sup><http://www.sapgeric.eu2013.vu.lt/> (verified 16/9/2015)

<sup>8</sup><http://shemera.eu/> (verified 16/9/2015)

and Beyond”<sup>9</sup>; in 2013 “Study on Improving European Projects Content in Horizon 2020 Framework Programme by Integration of the Gender Dimension – Hints and Tools”.<sup>10</sup>

To conclude, I leave the floor to EPWS President, Dr. Brigitte Muehlenbruch who, in her talk at the EPWS lunch debate ‘Towards a Gender Balanced Science Culture to Foster Innovation’ [European Parliament, 30/1/2012], gave examples of which gender aspects a Science Culture should include <sup>11</sup>:

“-an enhanced security and predictability of scientific careers,  
 -an increased transparency in recruitment processes,  
 -a proactive acknowledgement of the social dimension of scientific recognition and achievement,  
 -equal opportunities with respect to training, enhancement of skills and experiences,  
 -a work-life balance-sensitive mobility  
 -a gender-sensitive evaluation of scientific quality and excellence.”

Clearly, including gender in science culture will be beneficial for Science in general and for women and men scientists in particular. EPWS is working to help in this matter and to allow women scientists to find their right place in the European Research Area and in all the Member States.

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<sup>9</sup><http://home.epws.org/filter/updates/EPWS-2014-report-to-the-French-Ministry-of-Higher-Education> The EPWS website was transformed and reopened on October 1<sup>st</sup>.

<sup>10</sup><http://home.epws.org/filter/updates/EPWS-2013-report-to-the-French-Ministry-of-Higher-Education> The EPWS website was transformed and reopened on October 1<sup>st</sup>.

<sup>11</sup><http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/data.epws.org/DOCUMENTS/Science+Culture,+Gender+and+Innovation.pdf> (verified 16/9/2015)



[http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/document\\_library/pdf\\_06/structural-changes-final-report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/document_library/pdf_06/structural-changes-final-report_en.pdf)(verified 16/9/2015)

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