

ALLOCUTION
Mme Viviane REDING

The European Union is on the eve of welcoming ten new member states. This is a chance for cultural diversity but also a challenge for our institutions and our politics. These countries, some of which were or still are great sporting nations, will have to join the Europe of Sport that I have contributed to building up over the last five years with the constant support of the French Authorities and the CNOSF.

This increase of member states takes place at a time when discussions are still on-going regarding the new Constitution of the European Union which will include the recognition of the importance of sport in all its dimensions: educational, social, cultural and civic awareness. Sport will become a new competency of the European Union and will complement that of each of the member states.

As you know, 2004 is the year of Education through Sport and my first objective is that these two worlds, Education and Sport, do not turn their backs on each other but on the contrary develop new means to fight against common problems and contribute to a more balanced society. Violence, drugs and discrimination are common to both worlds and it would be beneficial to move towards greater cooperation between them both.

Europeans, through a recent survey "Euro-Barometer", have shown that they regard sport as a precious aid to multicultural communication and as a means to fight discrimination and this raises the question "have we been capable of exploring all the possibilities that sport offers?" I believe that we still have a long way to go and even though some negative aspects of sport have recently seen the light, I am counting on sport, once the new constitution is in place, to help institute a stronger European sense of identity and civic awareness. This awareness should also work towards equal opportunity and women's rights; both of which can be helped by sport in the same way as education. In this respect, I regret that Sport Authority is still fairly closed to women and I call for all the organisations, while respecting their autonomy, to be more in line with the reality of the world around them.

The European Parliament has contributed to a study on Women and Sport resulting in the report of Mrs Genevieve Fraisse. This report on the theme of Women and Sport was presented to the Women's Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and was adopted by the European Parliament in a plenary session in June 2003.

I have read this report with much attention and interest as it is a high quality document that is complete, ambitious and determined:

- Complete because it covers all the aspects of female sport activities,
- Ambitious because it analyses female sport and its development within the Member States and the Union,
- Determined because the recommendations address all the actors in the sport world.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I believe that the time has come to open discussions with all the concerned parties and meetings such as this one here in Paris will help to better understand what we aspire to and to identify good ideas and best practise. I am convinced that Education and Sport will play a key role in this new Europe which wants, more than ever, to be a place of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.