

As the Millennium approaches it is tempting to observe some of the parallels with other fin de siècle periods. At the end of the 19th Century there was concern about the moral state of society. Temperance movements flourished, as did moral reform organisations dedicated especially to the eradication of vice and trafficking in women. One solution promoted very vigorously to these problems was to recruit women into the police force. Pressure groups were formed with this aim and this

# Equally European?

Frances Heidensohn ponders the gender issue in European policing.



David Kidd-Hewitt

Norwegian police officers

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became an international trend. Although some of the strongest links were between promoters of female police in Britain, the USA and Australia, all of which established positions for women officers in the early 20th Century, there were also ties with and between some European pioneers. One of the key speakers at an early rally in London to promote the cause of women’s entry was the first female officer from Germany, from Stuttgart.

One very early research study of women working in the police in German speaking cities (then including Danzig and Königsberg) showed a common pattern of specialist activity with juveniles, female victims and offenders and preventative work. This trend was shared with the English speaking nations, although in the latter women were more likely to be recruited into uniform branches than was the case in Europe. Countries such as Sweden did not recruit uniformed female officers until after the Second World War and the former Federal Republic did not do so until 1982.

## Convergence and diversity

It is striking, however, that there is in this area now as with many aspects of the new Europe, considerable convergence, although diversity still persists. As the figures show, women officers now join virtually all main police forces in Europe, usually on the same or similarly appropriate terms to their male colleagues. Women in the RUC, for example, won the right to continue in that force and to be armed as a result of a judgement of the European Court of Justice in 1986. Britain now has two female Chief Constables, a woman heads the Brigade Criminelle in France and

Sweden has women in several key positions as well as being the ‘lead’ European nation in the proportion of women in policing.

## A European issue?

In all the developments which have followed the signing of the Treaty of European Union (the Maastricht Treaty) and especially the ‘Third Pillar’ with its implications for criminal justice and law enforcement, such as the setting up of Europol, there is silence on the subject of gender. However, in a post feminist world such a situation is not acceptable and indeed the Dutch government had already sponsored a conference at Noordwijkerhout in March 1989 aimed at focusing on women’s role in policing in Europe and in policing Europe. At this conference the European Network of Policewomen was formed. It is now a flourishing organisation with board members and contacts from 27 countries and a well established programme of conferences and seminars and a regular newsletter. National networks have been set up in many European countries and in some there are officially-sponsored programmes to train networkers.

## Not yet equal in Europe

Why should it still be necessary at the very end of the 20th Century to found and maintain such an organisation for female officers in Europe? Why do governments support it (two of its major international conferences have been held in Britain with considerable official subsidy)? The answers lie in the persistence of inequality policing despite the presence for almost all of this century of women in some European forces. Numbers are still low in some countries

**OVERVIEW OF THE DIFFERENCES IN  
PERCENTAGES OF WOMEN WORKING WITHIN EUROPEAN POLICE FORCES**

	1989	1990	1994	1996
Austria	2.2%	2.8%	4.6%	-
Belgium	-	1.6%	4.9%	-
Bulgaria	-	-	-	9.8%
Cyprus	-	2.6%	5.5%	8.4%
Denmark	-	5.0%	5.0%	-
Estonia	-	-	15.0%	20.0%
Finland	-	5.0%	5.6%	5.9%
France	4.0%	-	5.5%	-
Germany				
Baden-Württemberg	-	-	5.9%	9.4%
Bavaria	-	-	6.3%	7.0%
Hamburg	-	-	7.9%	-
Hessen	-	-	4.5%	-
NRW	-	7.7%	8.4%	8.8%
Rhineland-Palatinate	-	6.0%	-	-
Saxony	-	7.6%	-	-
Thuringia	-	-	8.9%	-
Greece	-	6.0%	-	15%
Hungary	-	8.0%	8.5%	-
Iceland	4.2%	3.3%	3.2%	4.2%
Ireland	-	3.9%	5.9%	7.7%
Italy	8.3%	-	-	-
Latvia	-	13.1%	-	-
Liechtenstein	-	-	-	16%
Lithuania	-	-	-	8.0%
Luxembourg	-	5.6%	5.9%	6.0%
Moldova	-	-	-	2.0%
The Netherlands	6.3%	11.4%	12.2%	-
Norway	6.1%	7.0%	7.0%	-
Poland	-	-	-	9.0%
Portugal	4.5%	6.5%	6.1%	-
Romania	-	8.9%	8.3%	-
Slovenia	-	-	3.0%	-
Spain	-	-	1.9%	-
Sweden	11%	11.1%	11.1%	16%
Switzerland				
Tessin	-	-	11.5%	-
Zurich	-	-	3.7%	-
Turkey	-	-	3.8%	3.0%
United Kingdom	-	11.8%	13%	14%

*Source: European Network of Policewomen 1996.*

and cross-Europe comparisons show what similar nations can achieve. Deployment and promotion are also still far from equitable, as research by Jenny Brown has shown in Britain. Harassment remains an issue in many forces.

Another set of pressures comes from the altered agenda of modern policing. The future of

policing lies everywhere in more professional and skilled work in understanding social diversity and complexity. Sensitive topics such as child abuse and domestic violence have become higher priorities. Most developments in European law enforcement have neglected these issues. They will not go away, however, and as recent events in Belgium and

France as well as Britain demonstrate, they can generate major public concerns for the police.

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