that will allow the implementation of rights and action against breaches in separate legislation, will ensure that equal status for women will be respected in reality and not only on paper. The draft Bill’s proposals include guidelines on equal rights for men and women as defined in the recommendations and resolutions of the Council of Europe.

I fully support your report, Mrs Err.

The PRESIDENT (Translation).—Thank you, Mr Szymański. I now call Lady Gould.

Baroness GOULD of Potternetown (United Kingdom).—I listened with great interest to the debate. As someone who has been fighting for women’s rights over the past 40 years I am encouraged by the response to this extremely important report. The report, prepared by Mrs Err, is significant because of its content and because we are discussing it just before the fourth United Nations World Conference on Women, which will be held in Peking in September. Acceptance of the report and the proposal for an additional protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights will be an important addition to the deliberations of the world conference, when the priorities and goals of equality will be determined for the next 10 years.

The protocol should call for women and men to enjoy equal rights and to be protected against discrimination. For that objective to be achieved, the report identifies two key elements on which I wish to concentrate. The concepts are parity democracy and the need for governments to introduce concrete legislation.

The challenge of parity democracy calls for a double strategy. This involves ending the under-representation of women on decision-making bodies and, at the same time, strengthening democracy on an equitable basis. It is to be hoped that that will result in a genuine partnership and a new social contract between the sexes. How that parity is achieved is clearly a matter for consideration within each member country.

We have had a brief discussion about quotas. I know that in my country there has been considerable opposition to the argument advanced by Mr Banks about establishing quotas so as to have more women Labour members of parliament. We have only to reflect on the success of the Nordic countries to recognise that such a system works. In those countries quotas are no longer relevant because they have passed that stage.

Parity can be achieved only if there is a genuine will and a belief in equality and the removal of discrimination. If we accept that that will is there, it must be recognised that equality is the goal and that parity is the means to achieve it.

My colleague Mr Banks, as have others, emphasised that women are largely absent from senior positions in our major institutions. That prevents them from developing their intellectual and creative abilities and leads to crucial economic and social decisions being distorted. That is the outcome if women are not involved in the decision-making process.

In all our parties, and in government, women and men should be equitably represented in policy-making at all levels. That will guarantee—at least it will be far more likely to do so than the
present situation - that there will be a fairer distribution of opportunity, income and power. I use the word "power" advisedly.

An equal chance for women brings with it an agenda that touches on all areas of policy. Consequently, there must be effective national machinery across government that is commissioned to further equality and to ensure that legislation does not diminish the position of women. It must be in place to monitor the activities of industry and other organisations.

For example, in the United Kingdom women will soon comprise 50% of the work force, but they are still economically disadvantaged. That situation should be set against a background of positive developments in women's legal and practical equality. We have a minister, albeit a man, who has responsibility for the constitutional position of women.

If we are wishing seriously to alleviate the position of women that I have outlined, legislation alone is not enough. Governments must initiate advisory and development work with individuals, employers' unions and the public sector. There must be a heightening of public awareness of the nature of discrimination and of the link between good quality child care, flexible working arrangements and equality of opportunity.

In all our member states women have had to struggle for the right to be educated, to vote and to enter the professions and the political sphere. There has been some progress, which has been variable from country to country, but overall the process of change is still far from complete.

The fear is always expressed that we are attempting to put men down as women advance towards equality. It is interesting that whenever we have a debate on women, it is either a heated debate or one that takes place in an almost empty chamber, which is the situation now. I regret that. It is a complete misunderstanding to assume that social progress will disadvantage men. That is not so.

We must approach a new millennium with a new settlement to ensure that major differences of opportunities that flow from gender are overcome. It is when women and men work together as equals that we obtain higher quality decision-making, more people-centred politics and a political agenda that reflects the interests and needs of the people as a whole.

The Council of Europe has played a pioneering role in women's development in life, in reducing discrimination and in furthering equality. Acceptance of the report will be another step in the right direction.

The PRESIDENT (Translation). - Thank you Lady Gould. I must tell the Assembly that Lord Pinsberg has apologised for not being present. He has been chairing a committee.

That concludes the list of speakers.

Does the Rapporteur for the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, Mrs Err, wish to reply?

Mrs ERR (Luxembourg) (Rapporteur of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights) thanked all those who had taken part in the