



Portrait of a lady

Since 1 March 2012, the Belgian Federal Police has had a woman as General Commissioner. A sort of First Lady, if you will...

It is the first time in the history of the Belgian police that this highly-coveted position has been held by a woman.

Chief Superintendent Catherine De Bolle is 42 years old and a mother of three children. She started her career in 1994 in the Department of Litigation and Statutes of the Gendarmerie and worked there until the police reform.

She was therefore involved in the creation of the new 'integrated police, structured on two levels'.

She started her career as a civilian; however, she soon joined the Gendarmerie Officers School and was therefore able to continue performing her functions, but this time as a 'jurist-police officer' in the same department.

She has had a varied career and successively held several senior positions. So she became chief of the local police in Ninove (a town in East Flanders) in November 2001.

At the same time, she was also vice-chair of the Local Police Standing Committee and served on various monitoring committees. She has also written many books on the police status, thereby confirming her wide knowledge of the policeworld, whether technically or practically.

She is a member of Womenpol, the Belgian network of women police officers, in which she had a leading role for a long time.

Catherine De Bolle took up office on 1 March 2012. Her vision is for the Federal Police to provide a professional and effective service to society, while contributing to the safety and quality of life of people. Her keywords are professionalism, reliability, equity, transparency and accountability at all levels.

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BRUSSELS – On Tuesday 6 November 2012, the Belgian Network of Policewomen (Womens-pol) awarded its first Gender Police Prize in the Senate.

This prize was awarded to Minister of State Miet Smet by Mrs Joëlle Milquet, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior and of Equal Opportunities.

The Belgian Network of Policewomen was created in 1994. In that year, only three in a hundred police officers were women. Since then, the police have become significantly more diverse. The proportion of women in the police force has now reached 17 per cent.

If we look back, we realize that Mrs Miet Smet – a great lady – is one of the people who paved the way for this positive change. Indeed, she had a significant influence over the policy of equal opportunities for men and women in Belgium. She played a crucial role in the evolution of women's place and rights in society.

In the nineties, Miet Smet, who was at the time Minister of Labour and of Equal Opportunities, launched, among other things, a study on 'the position of women in the police force'. To this day, this is the only study that has been conducted on this topic. Mrs Smet also took various measures to enhance the integration of women in the police services. So, in 1992, she suggested the establishment of a quota of women in the Gendarmerie (640 'female gendarmes' by 31 December 1998). Furthermore she took the initiative of adapting the physical tests and reducing the minimum height requirement for female recruits from 1m68 to 1m63. This enabled the current General Commissioner to start a career in the police force.

In order to express its gratitude to those who played a considerable part in the improvement of women's position in the police force, the Belgian Network of Policewomen has decided to establish a 'Gender Police Prize' this year.

So we are delighted to inform you that the first Gender Police Prize was awarded to Minister of State Miet Smet.

Through this prize, we wish, on the one hand, to highlight the constant evolution of women's position in the police force and, on the other, to give a clear signal that it is necessary to continue working tirelessly in this regard. A task force was created at the initiative of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior and of Equal Opportunities, Mrs Joëlle Milquet, following discussions on 'Women and the police' held in the Senate on 7 March 2012. This task force has developed an action plan that will be implemented by the integrated police in the coming years.



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The Belgian integrated police : presentation



The federal police and the local police make up the integrated police, structured on two levels: a federal level and a local level, which is composed of local police corps in charge of their own districts called “police zones”. Although they are autonomous, both levels work in close cooperation and complement each other. No hierarchical link binds them.

The integrated police was created by the law of 7 December 1998 organizing an integrated police service structured on two levels.

The local police are made up of 196 police zones on the whole Belgian territory.

They carry out both judicial and administrative basic police missions on the territory of the police zones and perform the 7 basic police tasks, i.e. community policing, assistance, intervention, assistance to victims,

local investigations, maintenance of law and order and road traffic.

Integrity, impartiality and a sense of responsibility are the core values of the federal police.

The federal police carry out specialised judicial and administrative missions and deal with all crime phenomena beyond the local level. The federal police also perform operational, administrative or logistic support missions.

To this end, the federal police are composed of a variety of directorates, units and services, which are in charge of providing a wide range of support, be it operational or other, to the local police corps. Finally the federal police have authority to represent all the Belgian police services within the framework of international police cooperation.

The General Commissioner's Office

The General Commissioner is the head of the Federal police.

Since 1 March 2012, the function is fulfilled by Chief superintendent Catherine De Bolle.

The General Commissioner ensures specific missions, directs and coordinates the three general directorates.

She also has his own directorates and services within the General Commissioner's Office and is assisted by a Cell Management Support.

'Let us strive together for greater diversity in the police services!'

Here is the philosophy of Womenpol, the Belgian Network of Policewomen.

Womenpol was founded in 1994. It is an organised, professional network of policewomen wishing to get in contact with each other and exchange information and advice. The network compensates to some extent for the lack of women holding senior positions in police services. Its members can serve as examples for and provide support to a large group of female police officers.

Through its information and coordination function, our network aims to fulfil three objectives:

- *A higher proportion of women in the police*
- *An easier and faster integration*
- *Equal rights and opportunities for women during their career*

The key to achieving these goals lies in the exchange of knowledge and experiences among policewomen in the Belgian police services, but also with European policewomen.

With this in mind, the network has put up a website – www.womenpol.be – in order to organise conferences and meetings, stimulate the network, support scientific research on the status of female police officers, etc.

In addition to details on the activities of the network, our website provides basic information on the history of policewomen in Belgium, the number of policewomen in Belgium compared to that in other European countries, the results of surveys on the status of policewomen, the role and content of the network's work.

Those who are interested, especially students carrying out studies on this topic, will find all the necessary information on this website.

Our affiliate members will receive a login and a password in order to access to the 'members only' pages. There they will find, among other things, the minutes of the general meetings of the Belgian Network of Policewomen and of the European Network of Policewomen, a discussion forum, feedback on interesting working groups, thematic files as well as a CV database.

