



Mirella Visser

When Neelie Kroes was appointed European competition commissioner in 2004, concerns were expressed about her business connections. Her compatriot Mirella Visser was also worried: what were the chances of women being appointed to the numerous company boards where Kroes's resignation had left a vacancy? At the time only 7% board positions in The Netherlands were filled by women, so she was not optimistic.

It was in 2004 that Visser became vice-president of the European Professional Women's Network (EPWN), taking over as president in 2007. In these roles she has been at the forefront of efforts to promote women in business, both in the Netherlands and across Europe.

The EPWN aims to help women advance in all phases of their business careers, "from potential through the pipeline to power", with mentoring programmes, training events and networking. It lobbies for diversity on corporate boards, producing a monitoring report every two years, and in 2006 it published *Alice in Businessland*, guidance on how companies can establish diversity programmes. In 2007 it turned its attention to best practice in mentoring.

January saw the launch of an online think-tank, whose first topics include how to manage the first 100 days in a new job and how to accelerate a career in middle age. Currently with more than 3,000 members, the network's ambition is to establish an online community of 5,000 professional women across Europe, interconnecting the generations and sharing experience. "Our success is testimony to the fact that women are taking the lead and companies and societies are noticing the difference," Visser says.