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GENDER EQUALITY COMMISSION
(GEC)

Comments on Recommendation 390 (2016)

“Women’s political participation and representation at local and regional levels”

adopted by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe

(20 October 2016)

1. The Gender Equality Commission (GEC) welcomes the adoption of Recommendation 390(2016) by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities on “Women’s political participation and representation at local and regional levels”. Achieving the balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making is one of the five priorities of the Council of Europe Strategy for Gender Equality 2014-2017. The GEC regularly monitors the implementation by member States of the main standard on this topic: Committee of Ministers’ Recommendation Rec(2003)3 on the balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making.
2. The GEC underlines that the promotion of the balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making relies on a holistic approach to achieve real equality between women and men in all areas of life. The GEC notes that, while there has been progress in advancing women into decision-making roles, much work remains to be done at all levels to achieve the target of a minimum of 40% representation of women in leadership roles set by Recommendation Rec(2003)3.
3. The GEC recalls Goal 5 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. One of the targets of Goal 5 is “to ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life”. Furthermore, in line with the United Nations “Planet 50-50 by 2030: Step It Up for Gender Equality” the GEC encourages governments to take action and remove obstacles that prevent women and girls from full participation in the society.
4. The GEC recalls Resolution 2111 (2016) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe “Assessing the impact of measures to improve women’s political representation” (adopted on 21 April 2016) whereby the Assembly expresses its support for the principle of gender parity as the ultimate goal in political representation. The GEC emphasises that Recommendation Rec(2003)3 also calls on member States to consider adopting legislative reforms to introduce parity thresholds for candidates in elections at local, regional, national and supra-national levels.
5. The GEC underlines that member states are always encouraged to apply supportive measures, as included in Recommendation (2003)3. Such measures include the role played by political parties and the media, as well as the need for education, awareness raising and training of different stakeholders. Promoting the participation of women who are *de facto* kept away from decision-making (e.g. migrant women, women from marginalised groups, young women, single mothers) is also an element that should be supported, especially at the local and regional level.
6. The GEC encourages the governments of member States to continue implementing Recommendation Rec(2003)3 and recalls that gender-disaggregated data about the composition of elected assemblies at local, regional and national level, as well as national, regional and local governments, will be available in the analytical report of the third monitoring round of the implementation of the Committee of Ministers Rec(2003)3, to be published in 2017.

APPENDIX I

Recommendation 390(2016)¹

“Women’s political participation and representation at local and regional levels”

1. Achieving equality in political representation between men and women - who represent 50% of the world’s population - is vital for the functioning and quality of representative democracy and a prerequisite of fair and equitable political participation.
2. All Council of Europe member States guarantee legal equality between women and men, including the right to stand for election and to be elected. In practice, however, there are numerous factors that hamper women’s opportunities to take responsibility in public life and hold elected office. Women in Europe are often discriminated against and face negative attitudes which disempower them in public and political life.
3. The Council of Europe’s pioneering work in the field of human rights and gender equality has resulted in a solid legal and policy framework which can considerably advance women’s rights and bring member States closer to real gender equality.
4. In 2003 the Committee of Ministers defined balanced participation in its Recommendation (2003)3 as the minimum representation of 40% of both sexes in all decision-making bodies in political or public life. This requirement has been reaffirmed in the Council of Europe Equality Strategy 2014-2017.²
5. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (“the Congress”) has based its policies on gender equality on the Committee of Ministers’ Recommendation (2003)3 and the Council of Europe Equality Strategy 2014-2017 (which set the requirement of a minimum representation of 40% of both sexes in all decision-making bodies in political or public life) and Resolution 1706 (2010) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe which recommended that Member States to associate measures pertaining to electoral systems and gender quotas with gender-sensitive civic education and action geared to the elimination of gender stereotypes.
6. In its Recommendation 273 (2009) on equal access to local and regional elections, the Congress advocated the adoption of an electoral system at local and regional level in its member States, ensuring that men and women alternate on lists, with financial penalties in the event of non-compliance, and to enable the under-represented sex to attain positions of responsibility within the executive bodies of municipalities and regions.

¹ Debated and adopted by the Congress on 20 October 2016, 2nd sitting (see Document CG31 (2016)09final, rapporteur: Inger LINGE, Sweden (L, EPP/CCE)).

² <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=2229> and https://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/equality/02_GenderEqualityProgramme/Council%20of%20Europe%20Gender%20Equality%20Strategy%202014-2017.pdf

7. By revising its Charter in 2007, the Congress undertook to respect the principle of equality between women and men within its own institution and committed to include 30 per cent of the under-represented sex in its delegations since 2008. In practice, the participation of a minimum of 30% of women has been achieved since 2011.

8. In light of the above, notably Committee of Ministers Recommendation (2003)3, with a view to improving women's political participation and representation, the Congress invites the Committee of Ministers to encourage the governments of member States to:

- a. implement the Committee of Ministers' Recommendation (2003)3, taking stock of the changes and developments that have occurred since 2003 and discuss the results in the respective steering committees;
- b. support local and regional authorities in the promotion and implementation of specific measures with a view to enhancing women's political participation in order to comply with the 40% threshold stipulated in Committee of Ministers Recommendation (2003)3 for a minimum representation of both sexes in all decision-making bodies in political or public life;
- c. consider establishing gender-disaggregated official electoral statistics and tools in order to monitor the elections and nominations at local, regional and national level, based on good practice existing already in several member States, and support the local and regional authorities in this process;
- d. encourage and support the establishment, within all levels of government, of gender equality committees networking with NGOs and women's groups that advocate women's political participation and support women candidates;
- e. consider adopting legislative reforms in order to implement quotas for candidates in elections, with financial penalties in case of non-compliance, and where proportional systems exist, to consider the introduction of zipper systems;
- f. consider the revision and adjustment of their electoral systems if these systems have a negative impact on women's political participation and representation.

9. The Congress also invites the Committee of Ministers to enter into a political dialogue with the Congress, in the appropriate format, to follow-up on this recommendation and the attached explanatory memorandum.