

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

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 smooth functioning and quality of representative democracy and a prerequisite for 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 Rec(2003)3 to member States on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making as a 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 Gender 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 Rec(2003)3 and the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017 and on Resolution 1706 (2010) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on increasing women's representation in politics through the electoral system, which recommended that member States 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 that ensures that men and women alternate

on lists (the so-called "zipper system"), with financial penalties in the event of non-compliance, and that enables the under-represented sex to attain positions of responsibility within the executive bodies of municipalities and regions.

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 itself to including 30% of the under-represented sex in its delegations as of 2008. In practice, the participation of a minimum of 30% of women has been achieved since 2011.

8. In light of the above, notably the Committee of Ministers' Recommendation Rec(2003)3, and 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 Rec(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 aimed at enhancing women's political participation in order to comply with the 40% threshold stipulated in Committee of Ministers' Recommendation Rec(2003)3 for a minimum representation of both sexes in all decision-making bodies in political or public life;

c. consider establishing official gender-disaggregated electoral statistics and tools in order to monitor the elections and nominations at local, regional and national levels, based on good practice already existing in several member States, and supporting the local and regional authorities in this process;

d. encourage and support the establishment, at all levels of government, of gender equality committees, networks among 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 (CG31(2016)09final).

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 <http://www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality/gender-equality-strategy>