

Online Workshop on Preventing and Combatting Sexism at Local Level in Georgia

Speech by Andreas KIEFER, Secretary General of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe

Check against delivery - Seul le prononcé fait foi

Tbilisi, 13 September 2021 (10.00 – 13.00 GMT+4)

Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to open this important workshop that we are organising jointly with NALAG, the National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia as part of the Council of Europe new project “Strengthening participatory democracy and human rights at local level in Georgia”.

I would like to thank our Congress members, notably Jelena Drenjanin, our friends from NALAG and the Congress teams in Strasbourg and Tbilisi for setting up the project and today’s event and our donors, ADA, for making it possible. Thanks to colleagues from the Office of the Public Defender, who we met in Tbilisi and Strasbourg several time and who are instrumental for this initiative.

With this project we aim at strengthening institutional frameworks to enhance the quality of local democracy, and supporting local authorities and their national association in their efforts to protect and promote human rights at local level.

Gender equality represents an important area of work for the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe as the equal participation of women and men in public life and in decision-making is essential to more prosperous, resilient and inclusive societies. We strongly believe that achieving equality in political representation between men and women is a prerequisite for full democratic participation. We implement political and training activities in several member states and the feedback is very encouraging – from both women and men, who strive for an inclusive approach of politics and shaping the common area we live in. .

In line with the UN Sustainable Development Goal 5 and with its own mandate and priorities the Congress will continue working to build cohesive societies and promoting the respect of fundamental rights at local level, and in particular gender equality, women's empowerment and the fight against discrimination in order to foster women's participation in political life at all levels of governance.

Local politics is a particularly significant area for ensuring equal participation as it is often an entry point for women into politics and a stepping-stone for a public office career at national or international level. Local and regional elected assemblies do empower women and men, since they are arenas for developing vision, shaping the local environment and delivering services.

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear colleagues,

Various factors play a role in restricting women's political participation such as electoral system, party systems, negative attitudes and stereotypes that affect women at social and institutional levels. Efforts must be made by governments, political parties and local and regional authorities to make younger generations and the public more aware of the importance of gender equality and of balanced representation to ensure the future of our democratic societies.

The Council of Europe is well aware of the negative impact of sexism in achieving equality between women and men, and has made preventing and combatting gender stereotypes and sexism its first strategic objective in its current Gender Equality Strategy.

The Congress has adopted various resolutions and recommendations on women's political participation and gender equality in politics in the past. The Congress with its 324 members – of which more than 40% are women – aims to encourage local and regional authorities to take appropriate measures in their institutions and administrations so that women can find their place in public office on an equal footing with men.

Sexism against female candidates and local office holders is an important challenge and often an obstruction to women's participation, the advancement of their political careers, and the representation of their point of view in policies and solutions adopted locally.

It is in this context that the guide on "Preventing and combatting sexism at the local level in Georgia" was produced. This guide aims to equip local politicians, local administrations and local stakeholders with the knowledge necessary to recognise and address sexism in their institutions. We believe that ultimately, it should help strengthening women's political participation and representation at local level. The online version of the Guide will be released after this workshop and will feed into further joint activities with NALAG following the constitution of the new local bodies.

We at the Congress, are particularly pleased to have the possibility to discuss the issue of preventing and combating sexism against female candidates and local office holders at such a pivotal time for Georgia, as almost three weeks are left before the local elections. During the electoral period it is of crucial importance to be vigilant regarding sexist attitudes and hate speech and to effectively respond to cases of violence to eliminate inequalities and support women in entering political careers on equal footing with men.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Preventing and combatting sexism requires a concerted effort from politicians at all levels of governance, law enforcement bodies, and civil society during and after the election period. Effective structures, mechanisms and policies need to be put in place to promote equality within public institutions.

Supporting women in political decision-making is an investment for the future; let's pave the way together.

Thank you.