

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

# Speech by Jelena DRENJANIN (Sweden, EPP/CCE), Thematic Spokesperson on Gender Equality at 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,

I am addressing you as Thematic Spokesperson on Gender Equality of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, and rapporteur on “Fighting sexist violence against women in politics at local and regional level”.

As part of its efforts in promoting gender equality, women's rights and equal participation of women and men in political life, the Congress has prepared a recommendation on “Fighting sexism against women in politics at local and regional level”.

This recommendation is a logical follow up to our previous work on women's participation in politics. It is also inspired by both women's movements around the world breaking the silence around sexist violence and by the work done in many international bodies on this issue, including the United Nations and the Council of Europe, as part of its Gender Equality Strategy for 2018-2023.

Women are increasingly present in political decision-making bodies, and we are proud of the progress we are making in this respect. However, women politicians face a major obstacle to conduct their work safely and professionally due to sexism and violence. This is a global phenomenon that tries to keep women out of politics, and despite its far-reaching consequences, it often goes dismissed.

The UN defined violence against women in politics as, and I quote, “any act of gender-based violence, or threat of such acts, that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or

suffering and is directed against a woman in politics because she is a woman or affects women disproportionately.”

We know that sexism is rooted in the historically unequal power relations between women and men. It takes various forms, one of which is violence against women in politics.

Sexism reinforces gender stereotypes and patriarchal prejudices and attitudes. Among others, still today, they sustain many people’s belief that women do not belong in politics.

It must be noted that the rapid technological developments, mainly social media, have facilitated attacks and harassment against women in politics. As response, many women joined the #MeToo movement of 2017, sharing their testimonies and providing a worrisome picture of the violence they endure.

Most of the studies conducted on violence against women in politics examine the situation at the national level, showing that women parliamentarians in Europe are frequently subjected to sexism and violence, especially in election periods.

These studies are a big step forward, however an important number of women politicians begin their careers at the grassroots levels, so we need to draw attention to local and regional politics as well.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I said, specific events, on-line social media movements and campaigns, such as #MeToo, #StopSexism, #EverydaySexism, #TimesUp, etc., have raised awareness worldwide on sexism. They have shed light on the need to combat it, and triggered a series of actions and policy measures.

To take advantage of the momentum and join our efforts to this fight, the Congress recommendation invites member States of the Council of Europe to adopt a number of measures too.

They entail:

First of all, taking legislative action to

- Introduce codes of conduct explicitly prohibiting sexist speech and sexual harassment;
- Introduce complaint mechanisms that are safe and confidential;
- Establish effective sanction mechanisms and review immunity rules that can allow council members get away with sexual harassment and violence against women.

In this regard, we very much welcome the presence with us today of Ms TSILOSANI, Chairperson of the Gender Equality Council at the Parliament of Georgia.

Second, raising awareness amongst political leaders, administrative staff and local stakeholders; it is our responsibility to publicly and strongly condemn violence against women in politics, and develop concrete tools and guidelines to fight it.

Third, local authorities have a key role to play in collecting gender disaggregated data for the better understanding of the phenomenon and being vigilant during election periods, as the violence commonly intensifies.

And lastly, local authorities should co-operate with all stakeholders and all levels of governance to come up with innovative solutions to prevent and combat sexism; The role of civil society organizations is of utmost importance in this regard.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Overall, our recommendations aim at addressing sexism and violence against women in politics by introducing strong legislation against it and its perpetrators, supporting victims, raising awareness of its magnitude and consequences, changing sexist attitudes and prejudice, and collecting data to better understand the phenomenon.

Violence against women in politics violates women's right to fully and equally participate in political life. By extension, the foundations of democracy and the exercise of democratic institutions are compromised as well.

In this context, the guide on "Preventing and Combatting Sexism at Local Level in Georgia" that will be presented at this event, follows up the Congress recommendation with concrete measures for combatting sexism at local level and ensuring that women play an active and meaningful role in the decision-making process. It is intended for use by local authorities – women and men - as well as possible targets of sexist violence and gender-based discrimination, such as female candidates and local office holders. The Guide can indeed be very useful, particularly within the current local elections campaign in Georgia.

I look forward to working with you, as peers, in the prevention and fight against sexism in local politics and sharing the Congress standards on this topic, so that we all join efforts to combat sexism and contribute to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 ("Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls") and to Goal 16 ("Peace, justice and strong institutions").

Thank you.