

31st SESSION

Women's political participation and representation at local and regional levels

Resolution 404(2016)¹

1. Achieving equality in political representation between men and women – who represent 50% of the world's population – is vital for the functioning of representative democracy and a prerequisite of political participation. 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.

2. Unequal access to education and/or employment, the political institutional system, party systems, the degree of party support and negative attitudes and stereotypes are amongst the most important factors that restrict women's political participation. Along with the fact that today women in Europe face difficulties in finding a balance between their private and professional lives; they are also often discriminated against and face negative attitudes which disempower them in public and political life and prevent them from becoming role models for younger generations of women to follow in their steps.

3. The effective implementation of gender quotas, associated with an electoral system favourable for women's representation in politics, is a factor of paramount importance which can lead to more balanced gender participation and thus to a fairer system of political and public decision-making, thereby improving the quality and credibility of the political process.

4. The electoral systems and gender quotas are not the only factors that influence women's representation. In order to increase effectively both the descriptive and substantial representation of women in politics, a much broader and more comprehensive approach that goes beyond a change in electoral legislation is necessary.

5. 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. In all Council of Europe bodies, there is the same demand for balanced participation, gender mainstreaming, specific action and monitoring of results.

6. 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

7. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), in its Resolution 1706 adopted in 2010, underlined that the equal participation of women and men in political life is one of the foundations of democracy and recommended that Member States associate measures pertaining to

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

electoral systems and gender quotas with gender-sensitive civic education and elimination of gender stereotypes.³

8. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (“the Congress”), when it carries out its electoral observation missions, refers as a baseline to the Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters (adopted by the “Venice Commission” of the Council of Europe in 2002) which leaves the choice of electoral systems to the discretion of the respective country as long as certain principles such as equal voting rights and equal voting power are respected. Nevertheless, the Venice Commission has also stipulated that “Legal rules requiring a minimum percentage of persons of each gender among candidates should not be considered as contrary to the principle of equal suffrage if they have a constitutional basis”.⁴

9. As regards quotas, 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 since 2008. In practice, the participation of a minimum of 30% of women has been ensured since 2011, and has proven to be a very successful initiative for women’s representation, not only as members of national delegations, but also as presidents and vice-presidents of Congress bodies. There is, however, room for improvement to ensure that representation of either women or men in any decision-making body in political or public life should reach the 40% threshold and to apply this to the rules concerning representation in leadership positions in the Congress.

10. In light of the above and with a view to improving women’s political participation and representation, the Congress invites local and regional authorities of the member States of the Council of Europe and their national associations to:

a. put into practice the Committee of Ministers Recommendation (2003)3 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making to ensure that the representation of either women or men in any decision-making body in political or public life should not fall below 40%”;

b. ensure, in line with Congress Resolution 393 (2015) on the conditions of office of elected representatives, that the way in which political business in local and regional authorities is conducted does not deter women from standing for election, for instance by implementing family-oriented meeting hours and providing support for childcare;

c. evaluate and report progress in achieving balanced participation in political and public life by developing gender-disaggregated statistics and tools for gender monitoring of nominations and elections analysing their evolution;

d. develop and implement specific actions with a view to enhance women’s political participation, such as capacity-building programmes, candidate training, recruitment programmes, systems for mentoring new members or public speaking training;

e. support the establishment of gender equality committees, networks among women’s groups and other NGOs that advocate women’s political participation and women candidates;

f. integrate and apply the concept of gender budgeting into their working processes, as an instrument of gender equality through the integration of gender as a category of analysis and control in the budget;

g. comply with quota regulations where they exist and introduce reliable monitoring mechanisms to ensure that women are included in the lists on an equal basis with men;

h. sign and implement the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life initiated by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR).

11. Recalling its Resolution 303 on achieving sustainable gender equality in local and regional political life, the Congress commits itself to:

a. working towards compliance with Committee of Ministers Recommendation 2003(3) so that the representation of either women or men in any decision-making body in political or public life does not fall below 40%;

³ <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=17809&lang=en>

⁴ <http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD%282002%29023rev-e>

- b.* monitoring the gender distribution within the Congress and continuing to publish the relevant data (covering full and substitute members, chairs of committees, political and working groups and rapporteurs) upon the renewal of delegations every four years;
- c.* integrating and applying the concept of gender budgeting into its work processes;
- d.* calling on political groups represented in the Congress to lobby with their respective political (national or regional as appropriate) parties to adopt specific action plans for the recruitment of women based on an analysis of the causes of their under-representation, given the vital role political parties play in the promotion of women in politics, by recruiting, selecting and nominating candidates.