

STATUTORY FORUM

Fighting sexist violence against women in politics at local and regional level

Resolution 459 (2020)¹

1. Women are increasingly present in political life at all levels of governance, due in part to the adoption of electoral gender quotas or parity systems. But despite considerable progress made on this path, women remain under-represented in political decision-making bodies. A key obstacle for women to achieve higher representation in political bodies is sexist attitudes and violence against women.

2. The UN report on violence against women in politics defines the phenomenon as “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.” The Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 on “Preventing and Combating Sexism” links sexism to violence against women and girls, whereby acts of “everyday” sexism are part of a continuum of violence creating a climate of intimidation, fear, discrimination, exclusion and insecurity which limits opportunities and freedom.

3. The perception of women’s role in society, sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination in all its forms, including violence against women are repeated challenges that women face when they aspire to exercise their right to political participation. Local and regional authorities are, in many countries, the levels of governance where many women begin their political careers. Therefore, they are particularly concerned because policies and measures at these levels can be determinant in changing the prevailing political culture.

4. The proliferation of communication platforms and social media has given rise to an escalation of the number of reports concerning attacks and harassment against women politicians, both candidates for elections and elected representatives. Various testimonies of women politicians who joined the #MeToo movement in 2017 provided a worrisome picture of the issue and of its magnitude.

5. Sexist violence against women in politics violates women’s right to fully and equally participate in political and public life. By extension, the foundations of democracy and the exercise of democratic institutions are compromised as well. Thus, all efforts to fight it contribute to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) and 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions).

6. In 2011, the Council of Europe adopted the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (CETS No. 210), also known as the Istanbul Convention. Even though the Convention does not explicitly mention violence against women in politics, its legal framework is wide enough to cover it as gender-based violence. The Council of Europe also adopted its Gender Equality Strategy (2018-2023) which recognises local and regional authorities as natural partners and the Congress as a key actor in implementing the Strategy and contributing to its achievement.

¹ Debated and adopted by the Statutory Forum on 7 December 2020 (see Document [CG-FORUM\(2020\)02-04](#), explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: Jelena DRENJANIN, Sweden (L, EPP/CCE).

7. In 2018, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union jointly conducted a study on “Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe”. Following its disconcerting results, in November 2018, PACE launched the initiative #NotInMyParliament in order to end sexist behaviours in national parliaments and adopted a report on “Promoting parliaments free of sexism and sexual harassment” in 2019. The report acknowledges that despite its far-reaching consequences, violence against women in politics is often dismissed. In this regard, it recommended to raise awareness, strengthen measures, revise codes of conduct, and monitor progress by collecting data regularly.

8. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (hereinafter “the Congress”) has several texts concerning women in the political arena and violence exercised against women, most notably Resolution 404 and Recommendation 390(2016) on women’s political participation and Resolution 303 and Recommendation 288(2010) on gender equality in politics.

9. In light of the above, and with a view to preventing and combating sexist violence against women in politics at local and regional levels, the Congress invites local and regional authorities of the member States of the Council of Europe and their national associations to:

a. take a strong stand as political leaders against sexist attacks targeting women, and use all communication platforms including municipal and regional government websites and social media to defend these positions, sharing and disseminating good practices shown to be effective, and encourage political parties to do the same;

b. take appropriate action to fight sexism and prejudice on sexist gender roles, including their informal norms, practices and attitudes, and fight against the atmosphere of immunity among perpetrators as well as the normalisation of sexual harassment and violence against women, developing concrete tools and guidelines for political parties, candidates for elections and for elected councillors, including mentoring programmes for newcomers;

c. introduce or revise codes of conduct explicitly prohibiting sexist speech and sexual harassment in local and regional councils and assemblies, and organise compulsory civil training for elected representatives and local government staff, highlighting the power of by-stander interventions, and ensuring that women and men alike are involved in the efforts to fight gender-based violence;

d. introduce or revise complaint mechanisms that cover all the staff of local and regional authorities, which must be safe and confidential, and ensure that complaints are dealt with professionally;

e. establish effective sanction mechanisms, reviewing (when applicable) immunity rules that can afford council members immunity from prosecution for sexual harassment and violence against women;

f. introduce confidential counselling mechanisms for victims of sexism, sexual harassment and violence against women and misconduct;

g. introduce gender-sensitive security units that can protect women politicians from physical and psychological attacks, including those perpetrated in social media;

h. be vigilant during election periods regarding sexist language and hate speech and monitor candidate nomination procedures for inequalities, considering that violence commonly intensifies around elections carrying elevated risks for women candidates, and that candidate nomination periods provide an important focus for discerning inequalities and intimidation against female candidates;

i. conduct periodical surveys and studies on the issue of violence against women in politics, including attacks perpetrated in the private sphere, with a view to achieving a better understanding of the phenomenon, monitor its development and adapt complaint and sanction mechanisms to the surveys and studies mentioned above;

j. strive for transparency regarding how gender bias is dealt with within political parties and assemblies in order to ensure accountability for sexist behaviour;

k. co-operate with civil society organisations, academia and the private sector, in order to come up with innovative solutions to prevent and combat violence against women in politics;

l. hold public debates regularly to raise awareness among elected representatives and local government staff and undertake educational outreach programmes aimed at citizens illustrating the

negative impact of sexist descriptions, language and attacks against women politicians on the exercise of democratic rights;

m. co-operate with other levels of governance in the organisation of initiatives, from the planning phase to implementation and evaluation;

n. take note of the Congress guide “Preventing and combatting sexism at local level in Ukraine” as a practical tool to address sexism in local government and adapt the guide for use in their particular context.

10. The Congress asks its secretariat to further develop toolkits, guidelines and campaigns to raise awareness and support women local elected representatives and candidates to stand up against sexism and other forms of gender-based discrimination and violence, as well as to counteract sexist behaviour and violence from other politicians and the media. The development and use of toolkits, guidelines and campaigns, coupled with the measures suggested above, will provide a systematic approach to fighting sexism against women in politics at local and regional levels.