

## THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

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### **Recommendation 449 (2020)<sup>1</sup> Fighting sexist violence against women in politics at local and regional levels**

1. Women have made considerable progress in entering politics but remain under-represented in political decision-making bodies. Major obstacles that prevent women achieving a higher level of representation in political bodies are sexist perceptions of women's role in society, sexual harassment and violence. These repeated challenges create obstacles for women when they aspire to exercise their right to political participation.

2. Recently, sexist attacks against women politicians, both candidates in elections and elected representatives, have become more visible. From gendered slurs to sexual harassment and sexist character assassinations, violence against women in politics is a widespread phenomenon in every country. This was clearly reflected by the various testimonies of women politicians who joined the #MeToo movement in 2017, providing a worrisome picture of the issue and its magnitude.

3. Because of this violence, which obstructs women's right to fully and equally participate in political and public life and, by extension, compromises the foundations of democracy and the exercise of democratic institutions, inequalities and bias are rooted in the preconditions for an equal representation between women and men in politics. In fact, sexist violence has relevant implications for public political discussion, democratic decision making, and people's willingness to stand for office. Women have admitted to self-censoring and to exiting the political arena as a result of this type of violence.

4. 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 part of gender-based violence. In March 2019, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 on preventing and combating sexism, which defines sexism as "any act, gesture, visual representation, spoken or written words, practice or behaviour based upon the idea that a person or a group of persons is inferior because of their sex, which occurs in the public or private sphere, whether online or offline" and 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.

5. In 2018, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) jointly conducted a study on "Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe". Following its disconcerting results, in 2019 PACE adopted a report on promoting parliaments free of sexism and sexual harassment, in which it is acknowledged that despite its far-reaching consequences, violence against women in politics is often dismissed. In this regard, PACE recommended raising awareness, strengthening measures, revising codes of conduct, and monitoring progress by collecting data regularly.

6. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe has adopted several texts concerning women in the political arena and violence exercised against women, most notably its Resolution 404 (2016) and Recommendation 390 (2016) on women's political participation and representation at local and regional levels, and Resolution 303 (2010) and Recommendation 288 (2010) on achieving sustainable gender equality in local and regional political life.

7. In light of the above, and with a view to contributing to Goal 5 (gender equality) and Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and also building upon PACE's recommendations in its aforementioned report, the Congress invites the member States of the Council of Europe, to:

*a.* provide support and resources to local and regional level authorities, in line with the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023, which recognises local and regional authorities as natural partners and the Congress as a key player in implementing the strategy and contributing to its achievement, and encourage them to empower women candidates and elected officials, including women from marginalised groups, to make better use of the Congress in the institutional framework of the Council of Europe and its intergovernmental bodies in promoting, implementing and evaluating the strategy;

*b.* assist local and regional authorities in raising awareness among elected representatives, council staff and citizens about violence against women in politics and its negative impact on the exercise of democratic rights;

*c.* introduce or revise codes of conduct in national assemblies, governmental bodies and institutions, explicitly prohibiting sexist speech and sexual harassment, introducing effective complaint and sanction mechanisms, and assist local and regional governments with the implementation of measures regarding sexist violence against women in politics;

*d.* support research, action, policy development and projects at national, regional and local levels of government with a view to achieving a better understanding of the phenomenon, monitoring its development and adapting complaint and sanction mechanisms to the surveys and studies mentioned above;

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).

*e.* encourage political parties and assemblies to aim for transparency regarding how they deal with gender bias in order to ensure accountability for sexist violence and behaviour;

*f.* conduct periodical surveys and studies and establish official statistics, at all levels of government, on the issue of violence against women in politics, including attacks perpetrated in the private sphere;

*g.* take appropriate action to fight prejudice regarding sexist gender roles, including 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, by developing concrete tools and guidelines both for candidates for elections and for those holding elected posts.