

STATUTORY FORUM

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

Recommendation 449 (2020)¹

1. Women have made considerable progress in entering politics but remain under-represented in political decision-making bodies. Key obstacles for women to achieve higher representation in political bodies are sexist perceptions of women's role in society, sexual harassment, and violence. These repeated challenges create obstacles to 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 their 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 pre-conditions for an equal representation between women and men in politics. In fact, it 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 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 jointly conducted a study on "Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe". Following its disconcerting results, PACE 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.

6. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities ("Congress") has several texts concerning women in the political arena and violence exercised against women, most notably its Resolution 404 and

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).

Recommendation 390(2016) on women's political participation and Resolution 303 and Recommendation 288(2010) on gender equality in politics.

7. In light of the above and with a view to contributing to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) and 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions), and also building upon the PACE recommendations to member States on "Promoting parliaments free of sexism and sexual harassment", 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 Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023 of the Council of Europe 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, and encourage them to empower women candidates and elected officials, including women from marginalised groups, making best use of the Congress in the institutional framework of the CoE 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 on 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 sanctions 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 achieve a better understanding of the phenomenon, monitor its development and adapt complaint and sanction mechanisms to the surveys and studies mentioned above;

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 on 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, developing concrete tools and guidelines both for candidates for elections and for those holding elected posts.