



Strasbourg, 24 May 2019

GEC(2019)3 Final

GENDER EQUALITY COMMISSION (GEC)

Elements for a response to the Committee of Ministers

Recommendations of the Parliamentary Assembly

**Adopted by the GEC at its 15th plenary meeting
(Strasbourg, 22-24 May 2019)**

At its 1344th meeting (Strasbourg, 24 April 2019), the Committee of Ministers agreed to communicate

- [Recommendation 2152 \(2019\) – “Promoting parliaments free of sexism and sexual harassment”](#) (adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on 9 April 2019), and
- [Recommendation 2155 \(2019\) – “The situation of migrants and refugees on the Greek islands: more needs to be done”](#) (adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on 11 April 2019)

to the Gender Equality Commission (GEC) and other bodies, for information and possible comments by 5 June 2019. The following comments were adopted by the GEC at its 15th meeting (Strasbourg, 22-23 May 2019).

1. [Recommendation 2152 \(2019\) – “Promoting parliaments free of sexism and sexual harassment”](#)

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) recommended *inter alia*. that the Committee of Ministers ensure that the issue of sexism and violence against women in politics and/or in the context of elections is taken into account a) in relevant Council of Europe intergovernmental work, b) in the dialogue with other regional mechanisms to combat violence against women, and c) in electoral assistance and co-operation (items 5, 7 and 8 of Recommendation 2152 (2019)).

The current Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy (2018-2023) deals from different perspectives with the issue of sexism and violence against women in politics and in the context of elections: preventing and combating gender stereotypes and sexism (Strategic Objective 1), preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Strategic Objective 2), achieving balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making (Strategic Objective 4). Strategic Objective 2 explicitly refers to the development of activities to prevent and combat also political violence against women. This is a distinct form of violence which has an impact on a specific victim’s political rights and which generally undermines women’s participation in politics. Moreover, Strategic Objective 4 calls for the regular monitoring of Recommendation Rec(2003)3 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making (the [Third Round](#) was in 2016) and for a variety of support and other measures. It also refers to a multiplicity of factors including sexism, which ultimately impact negatively on the gender balance and equal opportunities for female politicians. Sexism dissuades women from engaging in politics (thus preventing representational parity) and it ultimately affects the quality of democratic processes and the credibility of gender equality reforms, which are the responsibility of the executive and legislative branches of power.

Recommendation Rec(2019)1 of the Committee of Ministers on preventing and combating sexism, adopted on 27 March, provides for a number of policy elements which are pertinent to prevent and combat sexist acts also in the political arena. It recommends that member States outlaw sexist words and actions as such, and it provides for specific policy actions to be taken in relation to the workplace (section II.D) and the public sector, including elected bodies (section II.E). It also provides for regular, detailed follow-up reporting and evaluation.

The GEC and its Secretariat in the Gender Equality Division – together with the Gender Equality Rapporteurs and the Gender Mainstreaming Team – are responsible for the implementation of the Council of Europe’s transversal programme on gender equality, which includes a [gender mainstreaming](#) programme. The Gender Equality Division is also implementing co-operation activities to support reforms and capacity building.

Council of Europe initiatives on gender equality and combating sexism and violence against women operate in close co-operation. PACE’s own recent steps¹ are very welcome. These initiatives are being promoted – including through participation of PACE representatives at intergovernmental events – for instance at a recent conference held in Helsinki on 28-29 March on combating sexism and gender stereotypes (under the Finnish Presidency of the Committee of Ministers). The Council of Europe is hosting on 24 May an event in co-operation with the Office of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its causes and consequences,² and under the auspices of the French Presidency of the Committee of Ministers.

In the light of the above,

- the GEC will bear in mind PACE’s recent initiatives and proposals when it prepares the fourth round of monitoring on the implementation of Rec(2003)3 and the first round of monitoring of Rec(2019)1;
- the GEC and the Gender Equality Division are fully committed to further promoting the fight against sexism and violence against women in politics both in other regional fora and inside the Council of Europe – especially when interacting with bodies dealing with the functioning of political institutions and elections;
- the GEC stands ready to discuss with PACE’s Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination possibilities to develop further specific interactions and joint initiatives on the above subject matter. For instance, a good practice survey could be conducted jointly, on ways to prevent and combat sexism and violence against women in politics and during elections.

2. [Recommendation 2155 \(2019\) – “The situation of migrants and refugees on the Greek islands: more needs to be done”](#)

The GEC takes note of this Recommendation and shares the concerns of the PACE. It recalls that the Council of Europe’s [Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023](#) now comprises a new Strategic Objective 5 “Protect the rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls”. This objective provides inter alia for the revision of Recommendation No. R(79)10 of the Committee of Ministers to member States concerning migrant women and regular review of its implementation. The GEC has decided to propose the inclusion of this Recommendation in its terms of reference for 2020-2021 and it will bear PACE’s Recommendation 2155 in mind when undertaking the revision.

¹ Especially [Resolution 2274](#), the [research work](#) carried out with the Inter-Parliamentary Union on the phenomenon of violence and sexism in the political field, its campaign #Notinmyparliament and the [Parliamentary Network “Women Free from Violence”](#)

² Conference on “Women’s Rights at the Crossroads: Strengthening International Co-operation to Close the Gap between Legal Frameworks and their Implementation”.

It also wishes to inform the Committee of Ministers that a new factsheet on “Protecting the rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls” has been adopted at the GEC’s 15th plenary meeting (22-24 May 2019).

The text of PACE’s Recommendation 2155 draws particular attention to “the numerous young male prostitutes to be found on the streets of Greek cities and who seem to fall through the safety net of the usual protection measures for women and children”. The GEC would agree that men should not be deprived of protection measures. However, the text of the Recommendation appears to be implying that the protections afforded in practice to women and children are perfectly adequate. Reliable reports indicate that this is not in fact the case and that much more would need to be done to address, in particular, issues surrounding violence against women, gender-sensitive reception and asylum procedures, and hygiene.