

## The Bureau of the Congress

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## Gender equality in the Congress

### *Summary*

The present document provides information about the minimum requirements currently in place as regards gender equality within national delegations to the Congress and their application and impact in practice, as well as the distribution by gender of various positions of responsibility within the Congress, and the evolution of this situation over time.

Action required: for information

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<sup>1</sup> This document is classified as confidential until it has been examined by the Bureau of the Congress.

## 1. Introduction

1. From the moment of the creation of the Congress in 1994, its Charter has included provisions designed to ensure a balanced geographical distribution of members from the territory of member States as well as equitable representation of the various types of local and regional authorities in the State, of the relevant political forces within local and regional authorities, and of women and men.

2. Initially, the Congress Charter did not define what constituted “equitable representation of women and men”.<sup>2</sup> As from the adoption by the Committee of Ministers of revisions to the Charter in 2007, however, equitable representation was defined as meaning that “all delegations must include, as from 2008, representatives of both sexes with a minimum participation of at least 30% of the under-represented sex” (Article 2.2.d), it being also provided that “the rules and procedures governing the choice of representatives to the Congress shall also apply to the substitutes” (Article 5).<sup>3</sup>

3. The gender quota of 30% among both representatives and substitutes has remained in force since then. The current wording of the Congress Charter defines equitable representation of women and men as meaning that “all delegations must include delegates of both genders with a minimum participation of at least 30% of the under-represented gender among the representatives and among the substitutes”.<sup>4</sup>

4. In the meantime, other Council of Europe bodies have adopted stricter rules. In Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)17 on gender equality standards and mechanisms, the Committee of Ministers recommended that the governments of member states “take or reinforce necessary measures to implement gender equality in practice, taking fully into account [a series of] principles and standards”. Concerning public and political life, it set out the following standard: “The existence and regular functioning of a parity democracy is also a guarantee that women’s and men’s interests and needs are fully taken into account in policy making and in the running of society. In achieving the goal of equal participation of women and men, a minimum participation rate of 40% for each sex is considered as the parity threshold to be attained.”<sup>5</sup>

5. In 2007, the Parliamentary Assembly set a target for national parliaments to ensure that their delegations include “a percentage of women at least equal to the percentage of women in their national parliament, with a target of at least 30%, bearing in mind that the threshold should be 40%”.<sup>6</sup> In September 2021, the Assembly adopted measures aimed at ensuring a more balanced representation of women and men in all its structures. Thus, delegations have since January 2023 been required to include at least the same percentage of women as in their national parliament, or, if this is more favourable to the representation of women, to respect the minimum “one in three” principle for the representation of women in national delegations and to include a minimum number of women as full members. In other words, delegations to the Assembly must include at least 33.3% women – or more, if the representation of women is higher within their national parliament.<sup>7</sup>

6. In addition, in order to encourage women’s effective participation in its decision-making process and in parliamentary work, the Assembly called on its political groups to promote more proactively the balanced representation and participation of women and men in the Assembly’s decision-making bodies. It therefore called on them, *inter alia*, to engage in more extensive consultations to so as to achieve parity amongst committee chairs and vice-chairs, to aspire to parity and alternation between women and men as political group chairs and vice-chairs, and to aspire to apply the one-in-three principle to the composition of election observation delegations.

7. This document sets out the current situation within the Congress and, to the extent possible, the evolution of this situation over time.

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<sup>2</sup> Charter of the Congress as adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 14 January 1994 at the 506th meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies.

<sup>3</sup> Charter of the Congress as appended to Statutory Resolution CM/Res(2007)6, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 2 May 2007 at the 994th meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies.

<sup>4</sup> Charter of the Congress as appended to Statutory Resolution CM/Res(2020)1, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 15 January 2020 at the 1364th meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies.

<sup>5</sup> Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)17 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on gender equality standards and mechanisms, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 21 November 2007 at the 1011th meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies.

<sup>6</sup> Resolution 1585 (2007) “Gender equality principles in the Parliamentary Assembly”

<sup>7</sup> See Resolution 2394 (2021) “Gender representation in the Parliamentary Assembly”. See also, most recently, Addendum 1 to the Progress Report presented by the Bureau to the Assembly in January 2024 on Gender equality in the functioning of the Assembly (Doc. 15885 Add. 1).

## 2. Facts and figures

8. The current 30% requirement in the Congress has been in force since 2008. Over the last 10 years, the following results have been observed.

### 2.1. Congress membership

9. As noted above, in accordance with the Congress Charter, all Congress delegations must include a minimum of 30% of the under-represented gender among their representatives and among their substitutes. This requirement is imperative (“must”). Proposed delegations that do not fulfil this criterion are therefore rejected and the appointing body is asked to rectify the situation before the credentials of the delegation can be ratified.

10. Furthermore, if the proportion of the under-represented gender amongst either representatives or substitutes falls below the 30% requirement due to a member or members’ departure from the Congress, the delegation is required to restore the balance when it fills the vacant seat(s). It must do so even if the delegation is only partially filled. This means that in practice, the overall membership of Congress cannot include less than 30% of the under-represented gender among its representatives and substitutes at any given time.

11. In addition, when it is applied to seats that can only be attributed as whole numbers, the minimum 30% criterion leads to rounding up in many cases. Thus, 30% of an 18-seat delegation is 5.4 seats. To ensure that at least this number of seats are filled by the under-represented gender, the delegation must therefore include at least 6 members of this gender. When applied to all the delegations of the Congress, and assuming that the same gender is under-represented in all delegations, the result is that at least 113 out of 306 seats must be filled by individuals of the under-represented gender, amounting to 36.9% of the Congress as a whole (see Table 1 below).

*Table 1: Application of quotas to seats in national delegations*

	Seats (Reps)	30%	Min 30% of seats
France, Germany, Italy, Türkiye, United Kingdom	18	5.4	6
Poland, Spain, Ukraine	12	3.6	4
Romania	10	3	3
Belgium, Czechia, Greece, Hungary, Netherlands, Portugal, Serbia	7	2.1	3
Austria, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Sweden, Switzerland	6	1.8	2
Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, Georgia, Norway, Republic of Moldova, Slovak Republic	5	1.5	2
Albania, Armenia, Ireland, Lithuania	4	1.2	2
Cyprus, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Slovenia	3	0.9	1
Andorra, Liechtenstein, Monaco, San Marino	2	0.6	1
	<b>306</b>	<b>91.8</b>	<b>113</b>
			<b>36.9%</b>

12. Since 2014, the percentage of seats held by women (not counting vacant seats) has been as indicated in Table 2 below. This table sets out the percentages of women representatives and substitutes as measured at each renewal or mid-term renewal session. The figures in the last column represent the current situation.

*Table 2: Overall composition of the Congress*

	10/2014	10/2016	11/2018	03/2021	10/2023	11/2024
	% ♀	% ♀	% ♀	% ♀	% ♀	% ♀
Representatives	40.83	41.43	41.93	39.20	40.96	43.37
Substitutes	42.75	43.89	44.95	44.65	45.52	45.59
<b>Overall</b>	<b>41.74</b>	<b>42.63</b>	<b>43.40</b>	<b>41.90</b>	<b>43.18</b>	<b>44.46</b>

13. As Table 2 shows, the percentage of seats held by women has consistently been well over 30%, and only once fell below the target of 40% identified by the Committee of Ministers (see paragraph 5 above).

14. It should also be noted, however, that the proportion of women members has always been significantly lower than absolute parity at 50%. Moreover, delegations have also always appointed more women as substitutes than as representatives. An alternative way of expressing this is that delegations have always appointed more men than women, and in addition, have always appointed more men as representatives than as substitutes.

## 2.2. Heads and deputy heads of national delegations

15. While national delegations have responded well to the requirement of gender balance for their delegation as a whole, the gender balance among heads and deputy heads of delegations has been considerably less favourable to women (see Table 3 below).

*Table 3: Heads and deputy heads of national delegations*

	10/2014	10/2016	11/2018	03/2021	10/2023	11/2024
	% ♀	% ♀	% ♀	% ♀	% ♀	% ♀
Heads of delegations	26.53	21.74	25.53	11.63	24.44	31.82
Deputy heads of delegations	39.53	42.11	47.37	51.22	53.66	51.35
<b>Overall</b>	<b>32.61</b>	<b>30.95</b>	<b>35.29</b>	<b>30.95</b>	<b>38.37</b>	<b>40.74</b>

16. Similarly to the situation described above for representatives and substitutes, women have been well represented among deputy heads of delegation. Indeed, they have even been in the majority among deputy heads of delegation since March 2021.

17. At the same time, however, women have consistently been significantly under-represented amongst heads of delegation. They currently represent 31.82% of heads of delegation, which is the highest proportion of women heads of delegation measured since October 2014. However, this figure is low compared with the fact that women currently account for more 44.46% of Congress members, as noted in Table 2. Moreover, for most of the last ten years, only around one-quarter of the heads of delegation, or less, have been women. From March 2021 until October 2023, only 11.63% of the heads of national delegation appointed were women.

## 2.3. Distribution by gender of positions of responsibility within the Congress

18. When it comes to the decision-making bodies of the Congress (Bureau members – i.e. the President and Vice-Presidents of the Congress and Chambers – and Bureau participants without voting rights in the Bureau – namely the outgoing President, the presidents of political groups and the chairpersons of committees – as well as the vice-chairpersons of committees), the situation is somewhat chequered.

19. Throughout its history, there has only been one female President of the Congress, from October 2016 to November 2018. Amongst the presidents of the chambers, there have also been fewer women than men. On the six dates mentioned in Table 4 below, a woman has been a president of one of the two chambers only four times, while a man held the presidency of the other chamber. From March 2021 until October 2024, all three functions of Congress President and president of one of the two chambers were held by men. There has never been a time when all three of these functions were held simultaneously by women.

20. From 2014 until 2018, the number of women vice-presidents of the chambers (third to sixteenth vice-presidents of the Congress) was high, with over 64% of Bureau members being women. This figure needs however to be seen against the broader backdrop: the number of women amongst Bureau participants was very low during this period, with only 12.5% of these seats held by women.

21. Political groups have rarely appointed women as their president. While the current situation (since October 2024) is 50-50, with two political groups headed by men and two by women, this is the first time that this has happened. From October 2014 to November 2018, all four political groups were headed by men, and from November 2018 till October 2024, one president of a political group was a woman while the other three were men.

22. Amongst committee chairs, since 2014 at least one of the three positions of committee chair has consistently been held by a woman. The situation amongst the vice-chairs has varied considerably. As noted earlier, however, it can be seen that generally speaking, when women's representation has been high in one part of the Congress decision-making apparatus (for example, among Bureau members), it has tended to be low elsewhere.

*Table 4: Key roles in Congress decision-making bodies*

	10/2014	10/2016	11/2018	03/2021	10/2023	11/2024
	% ♀	% ♀	% ♀	% ♀	% ♀	% ♀
Congress President	0.00	100.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Chamber Presidents	50.00	50.00	50.00	0.00	0.00	50.00
CPL Vice-Presidents	66.67	57.14	57.14	42.86	57.14	50.00
CPR Vice-Presidents	80.00	71.43	42.86	57.14	42.86	42.86
<b>Bureau Members Sub-Total</b>	<b>64.29</b>	<b>64.71</b>	<b>47.06</b>	<b>41.18</b>	<b>41.18</b>	<b>43.75</b>
Outgoing President	0.00	0.00	100.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Political Group Presidents	0.00	0.00	25.00	25.00	25.00	50.00
Committee Chairs	33.33	33.33	33.33	66.67	66.67	50.00
<b>Bureau Participants Sub-Tot.</b>	<b>12.50</b>	<b>12.50</b>	<b>37.50</b>	<b>37.50</b>	<b>37.50</b>	<b>50.00</b>
<b>Bureau Total</b>	<b>45.45</b>	<b>48.00</b>	<b>44.00</b>	<b>40.00</b>	<b>40.00</b>	<b>45.45</b>
Committee Vice-Chairs MON	n/a	40.00	40.00	40.00	20.00	25.00
Committee Vice-Chairs GOV	n/a	50.00	40.00	40.00	20.00	25.00
Committee Vice-Chairs SOC	n/a	20.00	20.00	80.00	60.00	60.00
<b>Committee Vice-Chairs Sub-T</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>35.71</b>	<b>33.33</b>	<b>53.33</b>	<b>33.33</b>	<b>38.46</b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>43.59</b>	<b>40.00</b>	<b>45.00</b>	<b>37.50</b>	<b>42.86</b>

#### 2.4. Bureau appointments

23. Due to changes in the number and denominations of appointments made by the Bureau, it has not been possible to put together a long-term perspective on gender equality in this field.

24. Currently, the number of women holding such functions is as follows (see document CG-BUR(2024)62-84):

- Bureau rapporteurs: 33.33% (2 out of 6 rapporteurs, with two posts vacant);
- Standing and deputy standing rapporteurs on human rights: 66.67% (2 out of 3 standing rapporteurs);
- Thematic spokespersons: 71.43% (5 out of 7 thematic spokespersons);
- Deputy thematic spokespersons: 42.86% (3 out of 7 deputy thematic spokespersons);
- External representatives of the Congress: 25% (1 out of 4 representatives);
- Deputy external representatives: 33.33% (1 out of 3 deputy representatives, with one post vacant).

25. Since 2023, the political groups have taken on the task previously managed within the committees of identifying appropriate Congress members to fulfil the relevant functions. More coordination between the political groups may be one means of ensuring a more even gender distribution for these functions.