

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Recommendation 288 (2010)¹ Achieving sustainable gender equality in local and regional political life

1. The declarations and action plans adopted by the heads of state and government at Council of Europe summits have reminded us that equal participation by women and men is a vital part of democracy. Despite all these activities, the Council of Europe's action to promote and implement gender equality should be increased to bridge the gap between legal and actual equality, both within the Council of Europe and in individual member states.

2. Similarly, balanced participation by women and men in political decision making, which is a vital requirement for any democratic society, is not yet a reality in all the national parliaments. The average representation of women in lower or single houses of parliament in Europe is only 19.3%.² Only three Council of Europe member states³ have achieved balanced gender representation (a minimum of 40% of either sex) and seven others⁴ have attained the threshold of 30% women.⁵

3. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe fully backs the recent Committee of Ministers declaration "Making gender equality a reality",⁶ and reaffirms its long-standing commitment to equality between women and men,⁷ including in the political and public administration spheres. In this connection, it welcomes the fact that, in accordance with its Charter,⁸ ever since its 15th session (May 2008), the delegations of all member states have complied with the provisions on the minimum participation of at least 30% of the under-represented sex. The Congress expresses its determination to continue along this road and it encourages the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to accede to the motion for a resolution tabled by a number of its members in June 2008,⁹ in order to guarantee a balanced representation of women and men in all national delegations.

4. Furthermore, now that the Council of Europe has prepared the ground by defining such concepts as "democratic parity" and by developing various strategies, the Congress welcomes the action taken by the Council of Europe administration to promote parity, and encourages the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men¹⁰ to continue its efforts to improve the balance in the representation of the

Organisation's staff at all hierarchical levels (notably the goal of achieving a 40% threshold in the higher grades).¹¹ Moreover, the Congress considers that governments are primarily responsible for ensuring the promotion of equality between women and men. Local and regional authorities at all levels of governance, however, are responsible and must be involved in the defence and achievement of this equality and in the process of social and cultural change that it demands.

6. Accordingly, it recommends that member states reinforce the ability of national, regional and local authorities to carry out gender equality policies, in particular by means of:

a. legislation requiring the authorities to take the gender dimension into account in all their activities at all levels, assessing the impact and making this available to the public (equality indices);

b. assistance, including financial aid, to enable municipalities and regions to introduce gender mainstreaming into their departments, possibly through special programmes¹² geared to promoting a society based on sustainable gender equality via fair distribution of powers, resources and services of equal value among women and men;

c. incentives to women to become and remain involved in political life and accede to responsibilities, as well as measures to help them stand for election (establishing quota systems and ensuring their implementation, combined with other types of positive action);

d. an analysis, by the relevant bodies, of the presence of female election candidates in the media and the financing of awareness campaigns which encourage the election of women;

e. parity at all levels within the public administration, clear anti-discrimination messages and resources earmarked for developing specific tools and training, taking account of respect for equality in civil service careers and training civil servants responsible for preparing budgets in gender budgeting.¹³

7. It also invites the Council of Europe Development Bank to take account of the specific needs of women and men in the projects which it finances and of their gender-specific impact.

8. Lastly, the Congress welcomes the work of the Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men (CDEG), particularly its willingness to close the gap between de jure and de facto equality with positive measures, gendermainstreaming and action against stereotypes, thanks to education and the media. It invites the ministers who will be meeting in Baku on 24 and

25 May 2010 to take the local and regional level into account in addressing these matters.

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 19 March 2010, 3rd Sitting (see Document CG(18)10, explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: B.-M. Lövgren (Sweden, L, ILDG).
2. Asia: 18.3%; Sub-Saharan Africa: 18%.
3. Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden.
4. Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Spain, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", Iceland and Norway.
5. Inter-Parliamentary Union (www.ipu.org): conclusions of the report on the impact of electoral systems on the representation of women in politics. European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), June 2009.
6. Committee of Ministers Declaration, Madrid, 12 May 2009.

7. Recommendation 148 (2004) on gender mainstreaming at local and regional level: a strategy to promote equality between women and men in cities and regions.

8. Charter of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (adopted 2 May 2007), See appendix to the Statutory Resolution CMRes(2007)6, Article 2 paragraph 2.d.

9. Motion for a resolution from Ms Err and others on requiring a minimum of 30% of each sex on the Assembly's national delegations: a new imperative (Doc. 11664, 25 June 2008).

10. Set up in March 2004 by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

11. Articles 3 and 13 of the Staff Regulations (non-discrimination), Article 22 of Annex II to the Staff Regulations (equal opportunities).

12. Similar to the programme for sustainable gender equality run by the Swedish Association of Local and Regional Authorities (SALAR).

13. See Council of Europe, Directorate General of Human Rights and Legal Affairs: *Gender budgeting: practical implementation. Handbook*, April 2009.