

# **Genderware – the Council of Europe and the participation of women in political life**

Mariette Sineau

Integrated project “Making democratic institutions work”

Council of Europe

French edition:

*Parité: le Conseil de l'Europe et la participation des femmes à la vie politique*

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Cover design: Graphic Design Workshop, Council of Europe  
Layout: Pre-press unit, Council of Europe

Council of Europe Publishing  
F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex

ISBN 92-871-5343-4  
© Council of Europe, December 2003  
Printed in Germany

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*A democracy without women will no longer be seen  
as imperfect democracy, but as no democracy at all.*

Elisabeth Sledziewski in *The democratic principle  
of equal representation – 40 years of Council of Europe activity*

*With only a few women in politics, women change.  
With many women in politics, politics changes.*

Argentine feminist slogan



## FOREWORD

More than half of Europe's citizens are women, yet this population group accounts for an average of only 18% of parliamentary membership. Notwithstanding a few dramatic breakthroughs, top-level decision making in political and economic life are still gender-controlled preserves of masculine power, so much so that their legitimacy could be contested.

Everyone stands to gain from shattering the "glass ceiling". Women in decision making broaden the scope of political understanding through new approaches and fresh perspectives on all issues. Their viewpoints have proved to be particularly valuable in conflict resolution and peace-building efforts.

Political bodies should establish quotas and all measures taken should be monitored, legally enforceable and linked to timescales. Political parties are particularly important in this respect, as they are the gateway to the composition of parliamentary seats. Both parliaments and public administrations need to set up normative working methods that reconcile family and professional life.

*Genderware – the Council of Europe and the participation of women in political life*, prepared by the Council of Europe's integrated project "Making democratic institutions work", gives a clear message: without gender equality, human rights are not fully respected!



Walter Schwimmer  
Secretary General of the Council of Europe





## INTRODUCTION

Women's full participation in political life is an integral part of the Council of Europe's gender equality policy: indeed, it is central to it. As an organisation that promotes democracy and defends human rights, the Council of Europe, founded in 1949 by ten states and now made up of forty-five members, was bound to take an interest, sooner or later, in gender equality. Although it was silent on the topic in the first years of its existence, the Council has now become so active in this field that, of all the international organisations, it is undoubtedly a leader in gender equality,<sup>1</sup> particularly with regard to political life.

In terms of legal principles, the basis of equality policy, including equality in political life, is non-discrimination. The Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR or The Convention on Human Rights), which the member states signed in Rome in 1950, sets out the legal framework. Guaranteeing civil and political rights, its Article 14 states that enjoyment of those rights should be secured without discrimination on any of various grounds, which include sex. However, application of Article 14, even with the right of individual petition to the European Court of Human Rights, is limited by the subsidiary nature of the provision. The ECHR (unlike international instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) does not include a general prohibition on discrimination. Consequently, the Council of Europe has been engaged since the 1990s in considering how to widen the concept.

### **Women's under-representation in politics: conceptualising the problem**

Since the beginning of the democratic tradition, women have been excluded from political citizenship. Modern democracy, which emerged from eighteenth-century political philosophy and the English, American and French revolutions, is based on representation. The representatives elected by the people reflect the general will. In this tradition, the right to be represented gradually became a constitution-backed "universal" and fundamental right in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For a long time, however, so-called "universal" suffrage remained the prerogative of men, since women were deprived of all political rights. In France and throughout Europe, women had to fight for decades (notably through the suffragette movements) to win political

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1. The Council of Europe offers the following definition of equality between the sexes: "Gender equality is taken to mean equal visibility, empowerment, responsibility and participation of both sexes in all spheres of public and private life. It is the opposite of inequality – and not difference – between the sexes" (Council of Europe, 2000).

“enfranchisement”, in other words to be granted the same right as men to vote and to stand for election. In some countries (including Belgium, France, Italy, Liechtenstein and Switzerland) women had to wait until the second half of the twentieth century to become full citizens. So the European democracies took many years (a century and a half in France) to accept the idea of political equality between the sexes.

Once legal equality had been achieved, the most difficult task for women remained: exercising the political rights for which they had fought so hard and gaining entry to elected assemblies and government. Although being male is no longer a pre-condition for political citizenship in any European country, the right to stand for election remains a purely theoretical right for many European women.

The socio-economic changes that transformed women’s lives in the post-war boom years (1945-65) gave rise to the hope that many of them would accede to political power, and its attendant possibilities of change. For women made unprecedented strides educationally and societally during that period, as more and more of them took paid jobs and rose to senior positions. Despite this “silent revolution” in which women metamorphosed into autonomous individuals, their entry to the political sphere was largely blocked. Today, at the start of the new millennium, unequal distribution of political power between the sexes is still prevalent throughout Europe, although women’s participation in decision-making bodies varies greatly depending on geography (there is more participation in the North than the South) and power level (participation is greater in local assemblies than in national parliaments).

How can we explain the fact that political equality in law has not led more rapidly to *de facto* equality – that there is still such a yawning gap between formal and substantive equality? Several sets of factors lie behind women’s minor role in political decision making. Firstly, the situation reflects women’s economic subordination, which, despite progress, discourages them from exercising political responsibility. It is acknowledged that, even in democratic systems, people are likelier to attain posts of political representation if they have economic, social and cultural “resources” at their disposal. In other words, social selection is inherent in the electoral procedure – in some European countries, indeed, the social gulf between representatives and their constituents is so large that it is considered partially responsible for the current crisis in democratic legitimacy.

In men’s numerical superiority in the decision-making world there are also symbolic factors connected with ideas about the social roles of the sexes:

since politics is seen as a male “preserve”, women who venture into it are viewed as “having no right to be there”, as usurpers. They are perceived as violating two essential principles – the hierarchy of the sexes and the division of labour between them. As far back as 1955, the lawyer Maurice Duverger diagnosed the situation as follows, and the pertinence of the comments can be fully appreciated with hindsight: “Women’s elimination for basically competitive reasons is dressed up as an argument that politics is, by its very nature, an essentially masculine domain to which women should be admitted only exceptionally and in strictly limited fields”.<sup>1</sup>

Obstacles to women’s entry into the political arena can also be found in electoral institutions and laws, which frequently generate exclusion mechanisms. Unlike the more neutral list-based method, the first-past-the-post system, which personalises the electoral race, has always been unfavourable to female candidates. It puts well-known local figures at an advantage and strengthens (where legally permitted) the practice of holding several political offices simultaneously, a practice that itself is highly prejudicial to bringing fresh blood – men or women – into politics.<sup>2</sup> Last but not least, feminisation of elites has to overcome the oligarchic way political parties function: and in modern democracies, it is political parties that control access to elected assemblies and act as gatekeepers. Despite a duty to provide training and practise “open” selection (taking care not to leave out the newest members of society, including young people and women), for many years they functioned (and still function in some countries) as closed male clubs, encouraging self-reproduction of the elites already in place.

These deep-lying causes of gender inequality in the exercise of political power of course have to be tackled in various ways: it is easier to change an electoral law, introduce measures on the financing of political parties or change the rules on elected representatives than to correct the unequal distribution of economic power between the sexes.

For many years, women’s marginal role in politics, far from being a focal question, was seen as a minor issue; at best, it was merely viewed as an injustice done to women, who were partially blamed for the situation (they were not interested in politics, they were not forceful enough in election campaigns, and so on). Today, it has moved centre-stage. To simplify a little, it might be said

1. Duverger, Maurice, *La participation des femmes à la vie politique*, Unesco, 1955, p. 127.

2. This has been demonstrated in France under the 5th Republic: in 1958, the introduction of a first-past-the-post system (which replaced proportional representation, in force under the 4th Republic) led to a sharp fall in women’s representation within the National Assembly. See Sineau, Mariette, *Profession: femme politique. Sexe et pouvoir sous la Cinquième République*, Presses de Sciences Po, Paris, 2001.

that women's under-representation has gradually come to be seen not as a scandal for women but as a scandal for democracy. It is regarded as the symptom of an unhealthy democracy and of a deep crisis in political representation.

The work of women's movements in the 1970s played a significant role in this changed perspective. Although a minority of those movements expressed doubts about the usefulness of women's participation in electoral politics, others called on political parties to justify the marginalisation of "the second sex". Under pressure from women activists, parties had to concede the need for "positive action" to accelerate women's political advancement. Some parties (in particular, the Nordic social democratic parties) accepted the principle of setting aside a quota of seats for women in party-management bodies and electoral lists. At the same time, gender studies as an academic discipline (concerned with the social relationship between the sexes) shed light on the complexity of women's political status, and emphasised, with good reason, that "the issue of women in politics, far from concerning only the interests of a 'minority', raises the crucial problem of the legitimacy of political power in democracy".

Finally, around the same period (the mid-1970s), work by international institutions had a considerable impact: the United Nations and the Council of Europe were just two of the organisations that took up the issue and put women's political representation on the international agenda. "Free of electoral constraints, those institutions examined the impact of masculine power structures and the inequalities between the sexes. They held seminars and enlisted specialists."<sup>1</sup> More than that, they considered what could be done to remedy the situation. Fairly rapidly, this led to the idea of correcting political gender inequalities by legalising affirmative action on the basis of, for example, the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

At a Council of Europe seminar in 1989, philosopher Elisabeth Sledziewski gave a paper that provoked considerable comment. It sought to provide a principled basis for equal representation as a democratic requirement. No real democracy was possible in Europe, she argued, if equality between men and women was not treated as a political pre-condition, based on the system's constituent principles, in exactly the same way as universal suffrage or the separation of powers (Council of Europe, 1992). The Strasbourg seminar on equal representation in democracy triggered very wide response across Europe and demonstrated the Council of Europe's efforts to conceptualise the fundamental issues underlying women's participation in representative democratic bodies.

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1. Bataille, Philippe; Gaspard, Françoise, *Comment les femmes changent la politique. Et pourquoi les hommes résistent*, La Découverte, Paris, 1999, p.34.

## **Principles of equal representation in democracy<sup>1</sup>**

In order to understand the problem of equal representation in a democracy, it is necessary to analyse the law which underlies the liberal democracies. The modern ideal of European democracy, unlike that of democracy in Antiquity, for example, is resolutely universalist. The modern citizen is neither man nor woman, but an asexual, undifferentiated human being. This universalist ideal rejects individual identity, and the individual's rights are accordingly set out in universal, abstract form.

However, the paradox of democratic universalism lies precisely in the abstractness of the rights involved. The refusal to sexualise the definition of a citizen confirms that what we have here is a thoroughly sexist paradigm which automatically masculinises all positions of social and political responsibility. In addition, when most European languages speak of the rights of the citizen, or of the rights of man, the subject of the law is masculine in gender. Because women are legally ignored and invisible, they are the minor sex in terms of legal representation. The universalism of rights is a double trap for democracy, one that operates through two forms of denial.

Firstly, it makes out that it is possible to characterise social roles purely in terms of rationality, whereas any human group is in fact structured by a sexual division of roles. The universalist position is fragile – it promotes the rights of the human being, but at the cost of obliterating their sexual identity. And secondly, universalism's failure to acknowledge the individual's "sexual nature" is in fact a way of denying that discrimination can exist in that area. It denies that there can be any infringement of the individual's rights in a specific sphere, that of gender, by placing that sphere outside the rule of law. Universalism of the asexualised being's human rights is tantamount to promoting the rights of the male whilst claiming that they are the rights of all humanity.

So we have to go beyond the contradiction inherent in universalism, but without attacking human rights per se. If human rights are to be truly universal, they should be put forward as rights of all human beings, and sexual difference should be expressly mentioned. Objections to the effect that the sex-specification approach is a regression to biological criteria must be met in kind: it is precisely in order to prevent any biological discrimination that gender must be brought into creation of rights. Once incorporated into legal personality, sexual identity cannot be used to limit the individual's enjoyment of the rights granted to "man" in general.

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1. The section below summarises the analysis given by Elisabeth Sledziewski (Council of Europe, 1992).

If political life remains one of the least feminised areas in modern democratic societies, it is precisely because democracy has no doctrine of sexual difference. More often than not, the issue of gender equality continues to be seen as a problem of social democracy, and is not recognised as a political issue in liberal democracies. Here, liberal democracy fails to perform its function, which is to have political bodies (as representing the wishes of male and female citizens) initiate policies relevant to life in society. It is through the achievement of political rights that men and women in liberal democracy assert themselves as active citizens and consolidate their civil and social rights. The political position with regard to gender difference is thus a decisive factor in the construction of democracy.

What measures should be put forward to build parity democracy? In the first place, the use of quotas. Only participation quotas, imposing gender balance in all decision making and deliberative bodies, can ensure effective action by women in civic life. Quotas are the appropriate response by democracies, which have a duty to recognise gender difference. The human species comes in two forms, and therefore debate and decision making need to be conducted by men and women alike. But the quota approach must be adhered to as a policy, and not simply a method. Quotas should not be seen as an expedient for bringing about equality but as a tool for implementing the fundamental principles of democracy.

In order to have quotas accepted as a legitimate democratic instrument, international machinery must be used. While the legitimacy of quotas is contested as unconstitutional by some national legal systems, it is hard to see how it can be challenged by states parties to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. By signing up to Article 4, which sets out the principle of temporary favourable action, states accept the lawfulness of this type of measure, aimed at expediting *de facto* equality between women and men. The convention establishes the quota as a legal tool, and this international provision can be considered a starting point for national policies.

### **The Council of Europe's contribution**

The Council of Europe's concern with furthering women's participation in political life is reflected in initiatives by two of its bodies, the Committee of Ministers, in charge of intergovernmental activities, and the Parliamentary Assembly (previously called the Consultative Assembly), a deliberative body whose action has mainly been through its Committee for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men. On the basis of proposals from meetings of experts

under the Committee for Equality between Women and Men, the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly have produced various conventions, recommendations and resolutions<sup>1</sup> on women and political life.

They have also carried out numerous activities – publication of research findings, organising colloquies – in line with the Council’s customary co-operation methods. A third body has also worked to promote women’s political participation – the Congress (previously Standing Conference) of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE) – represents local and regional authorities in the member states and advises the Committee of Ministers on all aspects of this policy area. The CLRAE has done much to extend European women’s participation in regional political life. It recently published jointly with the integrated project “Making democratic institutions work” a condemnatory report on family voting, a practice found in some regions of the wider Europe that denies women their rights as individuals to political citizenship (Council of Europe, 2002c).

From the end of the 1970s, the Council of Europe gradually equipped itself with machinery and tools for coherent action on women’s participation in political life. The first gender-equality committee was set up in 1979. A mere *ad hoc* committee to start with, it became a European committee in 1987, then was promoted to steering committee in 1992. The gradual reinforcement of the committee says much about the prime importance that gender equality has taken on in the Council of Europe, especially with reference to participation in political and public life, the area on which the committee quickly focused. As the then Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Daniel Tarschys, said in 1995, the committee showed all the determination necessary to shed light on the question of equality as an essential political question in contemporary European society (Council of Europe, 1996).

The committee has done a great deal of frequently innovative work to promote women’s political equality, drawing up instruments and strategies, engaging in joint action towards equality at the pan-European level, organising the conferences of European equality ministers every four to five years. After 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall, the committee directed its attention to central and eastern Europe and activities to help women there cope with what they saw as the disastrous effects of the twofold transition towards democracy and the market economy. As women’s participation in political life overlaps into several other areas of the Council’s work, the committee has

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1. Recommendations and resolutions are legal instruments which, while not binding, provide legal and political guidelines to member states.

also collaborated productively with other Council bodies (such as the European Steering Committee for Youth and the CLRAE).

The successive changes in the title of the equality committee (initially the Committee on the Status of Women, now the Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men) are indicative of the distance the Council of Europe has come in its approach both to the general question of gender equality and the more specific issue of women's participation in public affairs. In the 1960s and 1970s, when the Council of Europe began its work in this field, the emphasis was generally on the status of women, the objective being equal rights. Later, in the 1980s, when *de jure* equality was gradually being acquired everywhere, greater emphasis was placed on *de facto* equality and on temporary "positive" measures to surmount the obstacles to genuine equality. Today, the talk is of genuine partnership, a necessary sharing of political responsibilities and power – and even of parity. (The concept of parity democracy originated within the Council of Europe before being widely taken up and developed.) It is one of those concepts that have been engines of political change.

The semantic changes seen in the Council of Europe's documents are also indicative of the basic change in perspective. In the 1960s, Resolution 356 (1967) of the Consultative Assembly was concerned with the political, social and civic "situation" of women in Europe. By the 1980s, Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1008 was looking at the "place of women in political life". Moving forward to the present day, the Committee of Ministers recently adopted Recommendation Rec (2003)3 on the balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making.

Behind this change in vocabulary lies a fundamental change in analysis. It is clear from Council of Europe documents over the thirty-year period that the interpretation of gender inequality in political participation evolved: perceived at the outset as merely an injustice affecting women, it is now viewed as a symptom of democratic shortcomings, and, ultimately, as an issue that challenges the very foundations of political authority. In other words, equal participation by women and men in political decision making is now considered an essential component of democracy.

We will first trace the history of the Council of Europe's policy of promoting women's participation in political life, whilst placing it in the context of the Council's overall work on gender equality. In particular, we will describe the policy's principles and methods, as well as the institutional mechanisms on which they are based. We will then analyse the major topics tackled within that policy.



## I. PRINCIPLES AND TOOLS OF A EUROPEAN POLICY

At the beginning of the Council's work, the issue of gender equality, including equality in political life, was certainly not as important as it later became. The Council's interest in equality issues came surprisingly late, as pointed out in 1989 by Joke Swiebel, taking stock as equality committee chair (Council of Europe, 1992). Until 1979, there was not even an *ad hoc* committee on the question, and this lack of a formal body within the Council of Europe prevented the Council from tackling equality questions effectively and setting out genuine policy guidelines. At most, the Council paid close attention to certain aspects of what was then termed "women's status": women's political rights and their participation in political life were included in that.

The first document referring to women and politics goes back to 1967. It was the Consultative Assembly's Resolution 356 on the political, social and civic situation of women in Europe. The Assembly noted that, although women's participation in elections seemed satisfactory, women were nonetheless "under-represented in most elective functions and posts of political responsibility". It hoped that changes in ideas and attitudes would "give women a real opportunity of holding political office and senior administrative posts ... in theory already open to them under national legislations".

But it was not until the mid-1970s that the Council of Europe really addressed the question of gender equality, particularly in political life, and took essential decisions in that area. This change of direction can be explained by the favourable international context – 1975 was the year of the 1st United Nations World Conference on Women, marking the start of the Decade for Women. "These events marked the end of one process and the beginning of another. The first process, where civil society and the feminist movement had a crucial role in moving equality issues from the margins of social concerns to the political sphere; and a second process of gradual acceptance by political powers, at all levels, of equality issues as being a political matter, resulting in their introduction on the global political agenda" (Council of Europe, 2002, p. 4).

Although the Council of Europe's equality policy initially followed the lead set by the United Nations' activities, it clearly tended to go its own way after 1981 and develop in its own right. In fact, with the Council's second medium-term plan, the issue of women's participation in political life became an integral part of the Council of Europe's programme, before gradually becoming a central aspect of its work and thinking.

## **The first steps: the influence of the Decade for Women**

Throughout the 1970s, the Council of Europe's activities to further women's political participation seemed to be modelled on those of the United Nations. Two UN events had a considerable impact on the question of gender equality, particularly as regards political life. On one hand, following the 1st World Conference on Women, held in Mexico City, the UN decreed that the period 1975-85 would be a decade for women's rights. The World Plan of Action adopted at Mexico City stated that increased participation by women at all levels of decision making would advance development and further peace. On the other hand, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was opened for signature in 1979. For the first time, governments' role and responsibility in using all appropriate measures to guarantee women equal participation in political life were laid down in an international treaty. So it was the United Nations which pioneered the question, placing women's participation on the international agenda and prompting the Council of Europe to action in that field.

Influenced by this UN momentum, the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly adopted Resolution 606 on the political rights and situation of women, in 1975. The Assembly said that reasons other than strictly legal ones, such as traditional ways of thinking and existing socio-economic structures, were still obstacles which prevented women from taking up as many posts in political bodies, including national parliaments, as the number of women in the community warranted. It was convinced that increased participation by women in political life at all levels would enable politicians of both sexes to gain a more thorough and more objective understanding of all the problems with which modern democratic societies were confronted. The resolution, which treated women's full participation in political life as an aspect of strengthening democratic institutions, contained a number of recommendations encouraging governments and parliaments to pay greater attention to the need for balanced representation of both sexes in public and political life.

In December 1979 – the Copenhagen World Conference took place in July 1980 as the lead-in to the second half of the Decade for Women – the Council of Europe equality committee held its first meeting. At the time it was called the Committee on the Status of Women (CAHFM). The meeting was held at the request of a large number of member states which thought a Council of

Europe initiative as part of the United Nations Decade for Women was overdue (Council of Europe, 1992).

So thirty years after the Council of Europe was founded, the first equality body was set up. It was only an *ad hoc* committee, within the Directorate of Legal Affairs. Its terms of reference, of limited duration, expired in 1981. It was then replaced by the Committee on Equality between Women and Men (CAHFM), whose mandate (running until 1986) went beyond mere examination of women's situation. Its instructions were to stimulate and co-ordinate the Council's activities on equality, and it rapidly identified the political arena as one area where the Council of Europe should take urgent action. Shortly afterwards, the committee was transferred to the Economic and Social Affairs Directorate, a move which considerably enlarged its scope.

### **The second medium-term plan and women's political participation**

In the second medium-term plan (1981-86), the Council of Europe made promoting equality between women and men, especially in political life, one of its priorities. One of the plan's objectives identified promotion of women's participation in political life as a Council goal for that period and said that women's full participation in political life was essential to *de facto* equality between the sexes, but that, as well as strictly legal factors, there were numerous social factors which it was necessary to identify and evaluate in order to be able to decide how to encourage women's participation in policy making and political decision making.

The second plan's pro-equality momentum spurred the Committee of Ministers – the foreign ministers of the member states, or their deputies – to issue a message to steering committees and *ad hoc* committees on equality between women and men, calling for a united effort by all Council of Europe bodies to bring about gender equality. Equality was “one of the values which the Council of Europe exists to protect and promote”, and the Committee of Ministers had decided “to consider it as one of the guiding principles of the Organisation's intergovernmental work”.

On 30 April 1981, the Committee of Ministers adopted a recommendation aimed at ensuring that the Council of Europe itself was a showcase for equality and power-sharing between the sexes: Recommendation No. R (81) 6 on the participation of women and men in an equitable proportion in committees and other bodies set up in the Council of Europe asked member states to nominate candidates of both sexes for such committees and bodies.

At the beginning of the 1980s, the first comparative study on equality mechanisms was carried out at the Council of Europe's request. It focused on the institutional machinery which some countries had set up to bring about equal opportunities for women more rapidly and ensure their full integration in national life, including the political arena. The machinery included ministries (for women's rights or women's situation), committees and advisory bodies. The basic data for the survey was collected by questionnaires in 1981 (from sixteen out of twenty-one member states), and the 1982 study. The Council of Europe had two aims in this early work: to provide detailed information for states which wanted to create similar mechanisms (or improve existing ones), and to keep up with other international organisations, several of which had already launched activities (concerned with publications, colloquies and so on) to promote gender equality. As the introduction pointed out, in terms of its subject-matter the study was one of an already substantial number of projects at international level, particularly within the United Nations, International Labour Organization and the European Communities (Council of Europe, 1982).

Shortly afterwards, the Steering Committee for Human Rights commissioned a study, "The situation of women in the political process in Europe" (Council of Europe, 1984). The aim of this survey, at that time the only one of its type,<sup>1</sup> was to review the European situation and identify the constraints holding back women's participation in political life, and to propose solutions. The survey would then be used as the basis for future activities within the Council of Europe's relevant bodies.

The study was carried out by academic specialists in the subject and comprised three volumes on, respectively, women's political and electoral attitudes, their role in trade unions and voluntary associations and their success in achieving political office. This last part included detailed statistics on the political power of women in Europe, from municipal councils to the highest government posts, assessed the role of different voting systems in the feminisation of elected assemblies and analysed the fundamental part played by political parties in inhibiting or encouraging women's access to representative posts. It emerged clearly that although there had been progress in recent decades, particularly in the Scandinavian countries, where women had really

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1. If we exclude the major investigation carried out in 1952 and 1953 by Unesco's social science department at the invitation of the UN's Commission on the Status of Women. The investigation covered seventeen countries (in Europe, the Americas and the Middle East). It was the basis for Maurice Duverger's work, *La participation des femmes à la vie politique*. (which deals with only four European countries: the Federal Republic of Germany, France, Norway and Yugoslavia).

established themselves, much remained to be done to secure balanced representation of the sexes in politics.

In 1983, the Committee of Experts on the Situation of Women in the Political Process (DH-WPP) was established, at the equality committee's instigation, with a particular remit to analyse the conclusions of this study. In its 1985 action plan "The situation of women in the political process – a programme of action in the Council of Europe", the committee noted that, in view of the forthcoming Nairobi Conference (July 1985), any steps taken by the Council of Europe to facilitate women's participation in politics should be seen as a regional contribution to achieving the objectives of the Decade for Women and the associated World Plan of Action.

The committee saw women's full participation in politics as one aspect of strengthening democratic institutions. There were hardly any more legal barriers to female participation, since with the exception of two member states, Switzerland and Liechtenstein, women had the same political rights as men, so what was needed was a broad, rather than a purely legal, conception of equality and the elimination of structural barriers to balanced political representation of the sexes. It identified eleven areas where Council of Europe action was appropriate: national equality machinery, positive action and special temporary measures, candidate selection by political parties, party and political campaign funding, the status and conditions of those exercising political responsibility, auxiliary bodies (trade unions, youth movements, women's organisations, non-governmental organisations and so on), the mass media, political education, the female elite, women in rural areas, and women's access to the labour market.

On 26 April 1985, the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly adopted Recommendation 1008 on women in politics. It noted that women "who are better aware of [multifarious sexual] discrimination, are not represented in national parliaments as they should be because they are not yet adequately represented in political parties, trade unions and government offices". It called on the Committee of Ministers to encourage member states' governments to establish ministries, with appropriate powers and financial resources, with responsibility for equality between women and men and ensure that women were adequately represented on all publicly appointed bodies and in posts in government departments. Political parties should ensure that women were represented in their leadership and decision-making bodies in proportion to their membership.

It is clear the reverberations of the 3rd UN World Conference on Women, at Nairobi in 1985, made a deep impression at the Council of Europe. While the international community was becoming aware, after ten years of effort, that the question of gender equality was more complicated than had initially been thought and had international, structural and political ramifications,<sup>1</sup> the Council and its equality committee were drawing the same lesson and now set about reconsidering their approach to equality, particularly in the political domain.

### **The first ministerial conference on political equality**

The ministerial conference held in Strasbourg on 4 March 1986 had great symbolic significance, and as such should be described at some length. It was the first ministerial conference to be devoted to equality and marked the culmination, in Europe, of the United Nations decade. It brought together the ministers responsible for equality matters in the then twenty-one Council of Europe member states to consider the theme “Participation of women in the political process – Policy and strategies to achieve equality in decision making”.

Yvette Roudy, the French Minister for Women’s Rights and conference chair, stressed the Council of Europe’s key role. “To uphold the principles of parliamentary democracy was one of the main objectives of the Council of Europe when it was set up. Today this entails greater participation by women in politics ...” (Council of Europe, 1986, p. 12). The response to the conference showed that the time was past “when the quest for equality was the concern of a marginalised group [and] was itself a marginal question. The evolution of the last two decades has caused it to move from the fringes of social questions to the status of real political ones” (Council of Europe, 1989c, p. 26). In other words, there can be no genuine democracy when half of all citizens – women – are effectively excluded from power or only constitute a small minority of those holding power.

At the end of its proceedings the conference adopted a resolution on policy and strategies for achieving equality in political life and in the decision-making process (4 March 1986). It appealed to political parties, governmental organisations, trade unions and other interest groups to take positive action to ensure that a greater number of women were designated, appointed or elected to all levels of political life. Governments should establish bodies at ministerial

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1. Later, in 1991, the OECD report *Women and structural change: new perspectives* (Paris, 1991) reached the same conclusion. It identified women’s under-representation in the corridors of power (economic as well as political) as a barrier to change and one of the causes of the crisis affecting the developed world.

level responsible for equality and pass legislation to restrict simultaneous holding of political mandates.

The ministers also adopted a declaration on equality between women and men in political and public life (4 March 1986) which called on member states to attach highest priority to such equality. The Council of Europe was asked “to continue to act as a dynamic instrument suggesting strategies to the member states designed to solve present and future problems barring the way to the realisation in law and in fact of equality between women and men”.

Several months later, the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe and the Committee for Equality between Women and Men jointly organised a conference in Athens (10-12 September 1986) on women in local and regional life. The result was the landmark “Athens message” inviting governments to encourage fairer representation for women in local assemblies and Standing Conference Resolution 179 (1986) on women’s participation in local and regional democratic life.

The Council of Europe’s third medium-term plan (1987-1991) gave fresh impetus to its work of promoting women’s role in politics. Equality between the sexes was one of the plan’s multidisciplinary objectives, in the context of defending and strengthening democracy.

A new equality committee was also set up in 1987: the European Committee for Equality between Women and Men (CEEG). Although it was now termed “European” it was still *ad hoc*, with all the constraints that that entailed. As Joke Swiebel noted, it had very little power to shape the course of events in the matters on its agenda, and remained dependent on the co-operation of other committees and sectors of the secretariat (Council of Europe, 1992). Having failed to secure steering-committee powers, the committee launched a series of joint ventures with other committees and sectors. In the case of women’s participation in politics it co-operated with the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, and this led, as we have seen, to the highly successful joint Athens conference.

The CEEG also sponsored studies to encourage an active Council of Europe policy on female participation in politics. In 1988, for example, it commissioned an expert to report on “ways and means of improving the position of women in political life”, which was published under that title in 1989. The report suggested several general measures aimed at democratising politics –

that is, making it easier for anyone of either sex to exercise political responsibilities – and including state financing of political parties, list systems for elections, limiting the number of elective offices any individual could hold, improving the status of local elected representatives and so on. Proposals were also made for forms of positive action, such as the appointment and co-option of women to government and senior public posts or the introduction of legal quotas to expedite feminisation of assemblies.

The report also showed how education could introduce future citizens to a different sharing of roles and tasks between the sexes, and to democracy. The transmission of alternative values through all the agents of socialisation – family, school, advertising, the media – was essential if boys and girls were to identify with other role models for men and women than the ones they were generally offered. In particular, teaching in school should be altered by eliminating all traces of sexual stereotypes from textbooks and introducing women as social and political protagonists into history courses. As Merlina Mercuri noted with a touch of humour, to judge from our lessons and textbooks men were the visible face of the moon, women the hidden one (Council of Europe, 1987).

Finally, although education and women's participation in politics is not a subject the Council of Europe has dealt with as such, it has found its way into many of the Council's activities. Education was very quickly spotted as one of the key areas for promoting political equality between the sexes. There are very few reports or legal instruments concerned with women and politics that fail to mention, however briefly, the need for educational measures as necessary preconditions for a new male-female social relationship and as an introduction for all those – women and men – wishing to become active in community affairs. Schools are definitely an emancipating force for girls, both in the developed west and the Third World.<sup>1</sup>

Within the Council of Europe the growing authority of the bodies responsible for gender equality since the mid-1980s offered clear evidence of a dynamic equality movement. Without this institutional underpinning, the organisation would not have been so effective in promoting female participation in politics.

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1. In Niger, for example, the babies of women who have attended primary school have a 60% higher survival rate: see Mary Robinson, honorary president of Oxfam International, "Tiers-monde et éducation: les filles d'abord", *Le Monde*, 9-10 March 2003.



This was the background to the Committee of Ministers adoption, on 16 November 1988, of the Declaration on Equality of Women and Men, a key political document that is now frequently cited. It stated that equality of the sexes was a principle of human rights and a basic condition of democracy. It also noted that in the political and other fields sex-related discrimination impeded the exercise of fundamental freedoms. The strategies needed to achieve equality must include temporary special measures, including ones concerned with participation in political life.

### **Parity democracy or the birth of a concept**

The year 1989 was an important one, marking both the fortieth anniversary of the Council of Europe and the equality committee's ten years in existence (also of course – auspiciously – the bicentenary of the French Revolution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen). The year was appropriately rich in events and initiatives concerned with promoting equality between the sexes and women's participation in politics.

One change of major symbolic importance was the CEEG's transfer from the Council of Europe's social and economic affairs sector to that of human rights, the organisation's flagship activity. This was a totally logical development since equality is one of the fundamental rights encompassed by human rights in their broad sense. Women's political participation and representation continues to be one of the Council's leading preoccupations.

The 2nd European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men was held in Vienna on 4 and 5 July 1989. The recently elected Council of Europe Secretary General and first woman to hold the post, Catherine Lalumière, attended in person. In her opening address she told her audience that equality had to be placed near the top of the Organisation's agenda and that during her term of office she fully intended advancing the cause of women in Europe. Nor did she fail to point a finger at inequalities within the Council of Europe, which she intended to rectify. There were of course women in the Council secretariat, but none in director posts. Far from setting an example of equality between women and men, the Council of Europe tended to do the opposite. She was committed, over time, to giving women their proper place (Council of Europe, 1989d). The conference theme, suggested by the CEEG, was "political strategies for the achievement of real equality of women and men".

The conference culminated in adoption of a further resolution calling for policies to accelerate the achievement of real equality between women and men. Specifically, these included the introduction of sex equality issues into all government policies, the enforcement of sex equality provisions in national legislation and international instruments, the strengthening of national sex equality machinery and the creation of conditions encouraging women's full participation in political life.

After ten years' activity and debate, the Council of Europe's equality committee decided that the time had come to consider the relationship between gender equality and the concept of democracy. The public needed to be more aware of the implications of this issue for pluralist democracies. And this coincided with another debate within the Council of Europe, namely how to extend and strengthen democracy as the former Soviet bloc countries made the transition to democratic forms of government.

The committee therefore held a major seminar, in Strasbourg from 6 to 9 November 1989, on the democratic principle of equal representation. The French title was "La démocratie paritaire", a concept that, as Maria Regina Tavares da Silva noted, was difficult to translate into English. Partly as a result, it became, in her words "a controversial issue within the committee, with most of the northern countries opposing and most of the southern ones welcoming it as bringing a new light to the concept of gender equality. [Nevertheless], for all countries it was clear that, beyond any formulation, the link between equality and democracy was one to be explored and strengthened." (Council of Europe, 2002 p. 9).

It should be noted that the northern countries had little faith in the benefits of parity (or legal quotas) precisely because their women's organisations had been sufficiently powerful to get their views across to political parties. In response to their pressure, in the 1970s and 1980s Scandinavian parties of both left and right had gradually adopted quota policies, making it obligatory to include a certain percentage of women in decision-making bodies and on candidate lists at election times (see below, Part II).

The seminar's specific themes were "democratic ideals and women's rights" and "the role of women in building democracy in Europe: theory and practice". Its conclusions are often cited and it led to fresh theoretical debate virtually throughout Europe. Women's under-representation in the corridors of political power is deemed incompatible with the democratic ideal. Guidelines

and strategies are therefore needed to safeguard women's and men's right to equal representation in the democratic system, starting with legal rules or other binding provisions enshrining the parity principle.

### **The CDEG: promoting European women's political role**

The year 1992 marked a turning point in the Council of Europe's equality policy with the committee's promotion to steering committee. This increased its influence and gave it more power, particularly to create subordinate bodies to consider particular aspects of its work in more detail.<sup>1</sup> Establishing the Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men (CDEG) showed that equality between women and men, particularly in the political domain, was a Council of Europe priority. More than ever the committee was to focus its activities on improving female representation in political and public life.

It has had a number of achievements, such as the production and publication of several reports, the setting-up of specialist groups to consider various aspects of women's involvement in politics, the organisation of seminars directly or indirectly concerned with this subject and participation in integrated projects.

The July 1993 Colchester seminar offers a striking example of the integrated approach. Although the general theme was "disillusionment with democracy: political parties, participation and non-participation in democratic institutions in Europe", the under-representation of women in politics was systematically examined under the heading of the crisis of representative democracy. Maria Regina Tavares da Silva also presented a paper, "Disillusionment with democracy: the case of women". Disillusionment with democracy, she said, was particularly significant for women. Their citizenship rights had often been limited to electing (as opposed to being elected), and even this after long struggle. In other words, they had had to delegate power into the hands of others instead of exercising it themselves for the benefit of the community (Council of Europe, 1994a, pp. 104-5).

The Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men is thus the key institution that the Council of Europe needed to give a real boost to women's role in politics. At its instigation the organisation took a stage further the examination

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1. The CDEG is directly responsible to the Committee of Ministers, which gives it its instructions and to which it submits its reports and proposals. It is composed of persons appointed by all the member states' governments, each of whom is a senior official concerned with sex equality policies.

of equality and democracy begun at the 1989 parity democracy seminar. In 1993, for this next phase, the committee set up the Group of Specialists on Equality and Democracy (EG-S-ED) to help implement the Human Rights and Genuine Democracy project the Council had launched the previous year (see below, Part II). Following the collapse of the iron curtain Europe was undergoing major political changes and the Council of Europe decided to carry out a general survey of the problems facing democracies and propose possible solutions. The aim was to establish a continent-wide European democratic area based on the values of democratic humanism, respect for the individual, the rule of law and pluralist democracy. The project focused on four themes, the first of which was genuine democracy and the functioning of its institutions, with reference to parity democracy and local democracy.

The group's specific role was to consider parity democracy, defined as "the full integration of women on an equal footing with men at all levels and in all areas of the workings of a democratic society, by means of multidisciplinary strategies". It had dual terms of reference. Firstly, it was to make an in-depth theoretical and political study of the linkages between the concept of democracy and the demand for real equality between women and men, based on the principle of universality of human rights and the concept of parity democracy. Secondly, it was to draft strategic multidisciplinary guidelines for women's full integration into political, public and other walks of life. The group's analysis focused on political participation, seen as *the* symbol of citizenship, while recognising that parity democracy must eventually be extended to such economic decision-making institutions as companies, trade unions and banks.

To guide the group's activities, a former secretary of the CDEG, Claudette Apprill, produced a review of the current situation regarding women's access to politics (Council of Europe, 1994). This drew on mainly international sources, such as the United Nations, Unesco, the Interparliamentary Union, the European Union and of course the Council of Europe, to identify the various types of action likely to assist women's entry into the political arena. These included general equal-opportunities strategies concerned with the education system, the workplace, reconciling work and family life, women's organisations, the media and so on; measures specifically concerned with the political system, such as reform of electoral procedure, restricting multiple office-holding and elected representatives' rights; and positive action to assist women.

In its final report the Group of Specialists on Equality and Democracy said that the parity principle was consistent with the whole human-rights

philosophy and the Council of Europe's activities. Its proposed guidelines included parity thresholds and target figures for the different organs of state and political parties. The parity concept eventually flourished and has been given direct statutory force in two countries: France and Belgium (see Part II).

In 1994 the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly adopted Recommendation 1229 on equality of rights between men and women. It made a number of recommendations to the Committee of Ministers, including that of establishing the principle of equality of rights between women and men as a fundamental human right in a protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights. It also asked for proper attention to be paid to ways of increasing the number of women in the representative organs of the Council of Europe.

### **The world conference on women**

The Council of Europe undertook a number of preparations for the 4th United Nations World Conference on Women, in Beijing in September 1995, which was concerned among other topics with equal political representation for women.<sup>1</sup> The texts adopted in Beijing gave fresh, worldwide impetus to efforts to secure gender equality. In the Council of Europe member states the notion of equality between women and men as a precondition of democracy acquired fresh legitimacy.

The Council of Europe's own contributions included a series of seminars in autumn 1994 in Budapest, Warsaw and Prague on women's participation in public and political life. The aim was to encourage the new member states to share information and ideas and assist the formation of networks. More than 200 women and men took part in the discussions, which revealed that the transition period had had very negative consequences for women, in terms of both unemployment and reduced access to political citizenship. As Joanna Regulska noted in her report on the seminars (Council of Europe, 1995) the notions of masculine democracy and women as second-class citizens were reflected in all aspects of the region's life. The democratic transition had led to a resurgence of traditional values and attitudes concerning women's place in the home, work and public life. In some central and east European countries women's representation was low and less than it had been in

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1. The conference Platform for Action recommended that governments take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision making. The measures include setting objectives and positive action.

the communist era, which suggested a deterioration in women's condition in all other areas of life.

Of the strategies discussed for achieving equal political participation, positive action was seen as a legacy of the communist past and as such still excited considerable mistrust in both official quarters and the public. At the Helsinki seminar in 1997 (see below), the deputy chair of the CDEG, Vera Kozmik, returned to the subject. In the new central and east European democracies quotas had "a negative connotation and, in the face of the dominant demand to move completely away from the socialist past, are discredited in advance. Under socialism, the prescribed quotas were merely a formal expression of actual inequality, they were a way of covering up inequality and solving the 'women's question'" (Council of Europe, 1997, p. 52).

The 1995 Strasbourg conference "Equality and Democracy: Utopia or Challenge" was another Council of Europe contribution to the 4th World Conference on Women. It was also the culmination of the organisation's discussions on the issue. It enabled the 250 or so participants to hold a pan-European exchange of views on the Council of Europe's distinctive approach to gender equality. As well as contributing to preparations for the Beijing conference, it highlighted a number of concerns specific to Europe. What obstacles prevented the achievement of real political equality and what new strategies were needed to surmount them?

Positive action and parity thresholds in parties, government advisory bodies and trade unions still had very high priority but proposals were also made for joint strategies, such as political and civic education, and assistance to women's organisations, which played a leading part in encouraging full female participation. Several speakers thought that without a total sharing of political power between the sexes there could be no real democracy.

In her conclusions the general rapporteur, the Icelandic president Vigdis Finnbogadóttir, stressed the urgent need for action, in a context of a genuine backlash against women's rights in many European countries. There was a need for a "new social contract", in which women could fully assert themselves. "This new contract concerns the social and political reorganisation of society as well as private relationships" (Council of Europe, 1996, pp. 32, 36-7). The conference report was translated into several of the new central and east European member states' languages, to ensure wide circulation.

## **Equality between the sexes as a fundamental criterion of democracy**

Several events organised by the Council of Europe in 1997 raised the issue of women's full participation in politics. The seminar "Equality between women and men in the political decision-making process" was held in Helsinki on 11 March at the invitation of Finland's Foreign Minister and Chair of the Committee of Ministers, Tarja Halonen. It gave political decision makers an opportunity to discuss how women could exercise their political and citizenship rights to the full. More specifically it looked at women's role in political institutions. As the then Secretary General, Daniel Tarschys, said in his opening address, "unless you have a good number of women represented in local councils, you will not get appropriate attention to issues that are of great importance to women". The composition of political bodies had a direct impact on the living conditions of men and women in society, he continued, which is why it was such a pity that women were so under-represented (Council of Europe, 1997, p. 8).

In the same year, the Final Declaration of the 2nd Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe, held in Strasbourg on 10 and 11 October, stressed "the importance of a more balanced representation of men and women in all sectors of society, including political life" and called for "continued progress with a view to achieving effective equality of opportunities between men and women".

Last but not least, a clear message was sent out by the 4th European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men, held in Istanbul on 13 and 14 November 1997 at Turkey's invitation. The declaration adopted on equality between women and men as a fundamental criterion of democracy was a decisive step towards European recognition of the importance of gender-balanced representation for democracy and social equality. Governments and political parties had to show commitment to promoting women's role in politics. To develop that role, the declaration proposed multi-disciplinary strategies in four main areas: equality in political and public life, equality in economic and professional life, reconciliation of family responsibilities with political and professional life and, finally, men's role in promoting equality in a democratic society. The ministers also adopted a communication on equality between women and men in the context of the Council of Europe's fiftieth anniversary, stressing the need for greater international co-operation within the organisation in the field of gender equality.

As part of its preparations for the fourth ministerial conference, the Council of Europe produced a number of documents including, in 1997, “Women in politics in the Council of Europe member states”, (Council of Europe 2002a-reprint) which presented statistics on women’s political representation in governments and national, regional and local elected assemblies. It also described the steps which countries had taken to encourage female participation in politics. It is regularly updated and has been of great value to academics and politicians seeking recent comparative data on women and political power in Europe.

The year 1997 also saw the publication of a “Compilation of internationally agreed texts concerning democracy and equality between women and men” (Council of Europe, 1997b), which lists the main legal instruments forming the basis of European policy on equality of the sexes, political and otherwise. These originate from both the Council of Europe and the United Nations (for example, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women).

### **Recommendation Rec(2003)3 on balanced participation**

Following the second summit and the Istanbul conference, since the late 1990s the Council of Europe has focused its attention on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making. This is exemplified in two documents from, respectively, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Committee of Ministers.

In its Recommendation 1413 (1999) on equal representation in political life, the Parliamentary Assembly drew attention to women’s serious under-representation in political institutions and the lack of progress made by Council of Europe member states. It complained that women’s involvement in political decision making in no way matched their real contribution to society and invited national delegations to urge their parliaments to introduce specific measures to correct women’s under-representation. In particular they should set up parliamentary committees for women’s rights and equal opportunities, institute equal representation in political parties (and make their funding conditional on achieving this objective), adopt provisions to reconcile family and public life and introduce legislation to create a system of equality education.

The equality committee realised that decision making was one of the most difficult areas in which to achieve progress and therefore decided to set up a



group of specialists on the subject (EG-S-BP). It started work in October 2000 and produced a series of proposals that the Committee of Ministers adopted on 12 March 2003 in the form of Recommendation (2003)<sup>3</sup> on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making. “Balanced participation” was taken to mean that neither women’s nor men’s representation in any decision-making body in political or public life should fall below 40%, the figure laid down in a European Parliament resolution of 18 January 2001.

The accompanying explanatory memorandum noted that the 1979 United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women made governments responsible for measures to ensure women’s equal participation in political life. Since no European country had entered reservations to Article 7 on equal representation in political decision making or Article 8 on the equal opportunity of men and women to represent their governments at the international level, European states were obliged to ensure equal participation of women and men in political and public decision making.

Balanced participation was one of the new democratic imperatives. More than twenty-five years after the start of the Decade for Women, low participation by women in decision making was quite unjustified for two reasons: firstly because during that period European women’s status, in terms of educational attainment and labour-market participation, had changed dramatically, and secondly because of the international commitments of the Council of Europe member states, which had frequently acknowledged that sharing power between women and men was a prerequisite for genuine democracy.

The recommendation includes guidelines showing how member states can encourage women to play an active part in politics, through legislation, policies and practices. In particular it invites them to protect and promote the equal civil and political rights of women and men, including running for office and freedom of association, ensure that women can exercise their voting rights and thus take all the necessary measures to eliminate the practice of family voting, consider setting timetabled targets for attaining balanced participation of women and men in decision making and, finally, monitor and evaluate progress and report regularly to the Committee of Ministers on action taken.

The numerous legislative and administrative measures listed include – firstly and most importantly – constitutional and/or legislative changes to facilitate

more balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making. Belgium, France and “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” are cited as examples of countries where political parties are obliged by law to observe parity between candidates in political elections. France is seen as a particularly interesting example because a constitutional reform in 1999 allowed Parliament to pass legislation providing for measures of positive action which would not be liable – as in the past<sup>1</sup> – to censure by the Constitutional Council.<sup>2</sup>

States are asked to consider adopting legislation to introduce parity thresholds – minimum percentage representation for each sex – for candidate selection at local, regional, national and supra-national levels. Where they have proportional voting, they should consider introducing “zipper” systems, with women and men alternating on each list. Public funding of political parties is also suggested as a way of encouraging them to promote gender equality. In France the Act of 6 June 2000 on equal access for women and men to electoral mandates or elective offices lays down financial penalties for parties that fail the fifty-fifty test. This only applies to parliamentary elections, which operate on a two-round simple-majority system, making it technically difficult to apply the parity principle. In such elections parity is not obligatory, as it is under the list system, but merely encouraged by reducing public financial assistance to parties falls once the proportion of candidates of either sex differs by more than 2%.<sup>3</sup>

The recommendation invites states to modify their electoral systems where they are shown to have an adverse impact on women’s political representation in elected bodies. They are also asked to restrict concurrent holding of several elected political offices. This can be a very effective means of preventing a small minority of politicians from exercising a quasi-monopoly of political functions, thus blocking access to political responsibilities, particularly for

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1. The conference Platform for Action recommended that governments take measures to ensure women’s equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision making. The measures include setting objectives and positive action.

2. The Constitutional Act of 8 July 1999 revised Articles 3 and 4 of the 1958 Constitution. It provided that “the law shall encourage equal access for women and men to electoral mandates or elective offices” and that “political parties and groups shall help apply that principle in accordance with the conditions set by the law”.

3. The penalty takes the form of a reduction of the first part of the public financing (based on the number of votes received in the first round). The percentage reduction is equal to half the difference between the number of female candidates and the number of male candidates as a proportion of the total number of candidates. For example, if a party presents 35% female and 65% male candidates, the difference is 30 percentage points and its financing is reduced by 15%.

women and younger people. Improving elected members' working conditions is also one of the main steps that governments can take, suggesting that anything that encourages democratisation also helps the feminisation process. This involves various measures such as improving members' remuneration, particularly at local level, granting entitlement to retirement pensions and parental leave, rescheduling meeting timetables and setting up child-care facilities.

Member states should also consider adopting legislative and administrative measures to ensure gender-balance in all appointments made by ministers or government to public committees and other public posts or functions. Several countries, such as Norway, Denmark and Finland, have specific legislation on this. Another suggestion is for governments to set a gender-balance example as employers, given the state's obligation to promote equality between women and men. Finally the action advocated affects another symbolic, but nevertheless politically highly important area – that of language. Member states should adopt administrative measures so that official language reflects a balanced sharing of power between women and men. Language must not enshrine a male-domination model but be gender neutral or refer to both sexes (see Committee of Ministers Recommendation No. R (90) 4 to member states on the elimination of sexism from language).

Turning to monitoring measures, the recommendation suggests that states submit reports to their national parliaments every other year on measures taken and progress made. These could be compared with a list of ten statistical indicators, providing regular information on women in politics and decision making.

All in all the balanced-participation recommendation offers a valuable and comprehensive legal tool. In a sense it embodies the most advanced state of pan-European thinking on this question. Its proposals cover a whole raft of measures ranging from the strictly political to the more general. It is accompanied by publications giving examples of good practices. One such by Alison E. Woodward, is *Going for gender balance* (Council of Europe, 2002), which presents good practices to achieve gender-balanced representation in political and social decision making. It looks at a whole series of new ideas for achieving such balance in numerous areas, including the electoral process.

The most recent event was the 5th European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men, in Skopje on 22 and 23 January 2003, on

the theme “democratisation, conflict prevention and peace building: the perspectives and the roles of women”. At the end of the conference the ministers adopted a resolution acknowledging the importance of women’s full participation at all levels of decision making, including conflict prevention and resolution – in other words decisions affecting war and peace, and countries’ diplomatic services. The ministers also adopted a declaration and programme of action setting out the Council of Europe’s priorities regarding equality in the coming years.

## Bygone days – Suffragette strategies in the United Kingdom



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After years of Parliament's dilly-dallying on extending the franchise, the Women's Social and Political Union – nicknamed the Suffragettes – decided to pursue measures of civil disobedience – smashing windows, arson and chaining themselves to rails. In 1906, Annie Kenny and Christabel Pankhurst got arrested deliberately, and made headlines by refusing to pay the fine.



Civil disobedience continued in prison. Evelyn Manesta, a Manchester Suffragette and a well-known window smasher, refused to have her picture taken in prison, and was restrained by a warder. The photographer was instructed to doctor the photo to avoid controversy, as sympathy for the Suffragettes was increasing. The doctored version appears on the next page.

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Undercover spy photography was born in the UK when, using a Ross telecentric camera lens especially acquired for the purpose, Scotland Yard took covert photographs of the Suffragettes in prison and on the outside in order to compile identity lists for the police in the field. Note that in photo No. 10, the warder's arm has become a scarf around Evelyn Manesta's neck.



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Violent confrontation between police and opponents, and a fallen Suffragette. Women received full equality of vote in 1928.



## II. THE MAJOR THEMES

The Council of Europe has now been actively promoting women's participation in politics for nearly a quarter of a century. It has pursued this policy, through its equality committee, using numerous and varied approaches. Although it is difficult to measure their precise impact on member states' policies – since this is often diffuse and may vary over time – they have undoubtedly helped to modify national political culture and stimulate political debate (one example being the parity democracy seminar's influence (p. 26) in France).

The Council of Europe's activities have also had the great benefit of showing the European public that women's participation in community life is a central political issue that affects the entire division of social labour between the sexes. This is why for Europe it still represents a real Gordian knot whose threads are so hard to untangle. Any commitment to rectifying gender inequalities regarding political power and representation also entails rewriting numerous clauses of the social contract. "In the prevailing social contract, women have been confined to the private sphere as if they were the only ones entrusted with the reproduction and care of the human species, and all the social structures have functioned in relation to the masculine norm. If democracy is considered as having to integrate all social forces, it is obvious that such a relegation can no longer be tolerated in a democratic society, whatever the structure of that society" (Council of Europe, 1996a, paragraph 42).

The Council of Europe's approach to female participation in politics has therefore focused on the numerous structural obstacles to balanced representation – in both the political and wider social spheres. Regarding the latter, school, language, the sharing of domestic and child-rearing responsibilities, vocational training and the labour market have all been highlighted by the Council as areas for action to create the necessary conditions for equal male and female participation in community life. Most of these topics are covered in Committee of Ministers Recommendation (2003) 3 on balanced participation, under the heading of suggested legislative or administrative measures (examples being gender-neutral language and reconciling family and public responsibilities,<sup>1</sup>) or of supportive measures (for example, the role of education).<sup>2</sup>

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1. Paragraphs 2 and 8 of the appendix recommend the adoption respectively of "administrative measures so that official language reflects a balanced sharing of power between women and men", and "appropriate legislative and/or administrative measures to support elected representatives in the reconciliation of their family and public responsibilities and, in particular, encourage parliaments and local and regional authorities to ensure that their timetables and working methods enable elected representatives of both sexes to reconcile their work and family life".

2. See paragraph 23 of the appendix: "incorporate into school curricula education and training activities aimed at sensitising young people about gender equality and preparing them for democratic citizenship".

A similar number of political themes are raised, covering such topics as political parties (particularly public funding and candidate selection), electoral systems, concurrent office holding, elected members' working conditions and status and the media. These are all seen as possible targets for action, though not always from the standpoint of women's political participation. For example,<sup>1</sup> there have never been any seminars or specialist working groups on women and political parties as such, even though in modern democracies it is parties that guard the political temple by controlling access to political representation, particularly in parliament.

The Council of Europe's activities concerned with equal political participation fall into three categories: conceptual aspects, such as equality of the sexes and democracy or equality through law, strategies and methods for achieving equality, such as positive political action, and more specific subjects, such as young people, women and the local community, women and regional planning or family voting. We will look first at the more general, or conceptual, aspects, then at the instruments and tools for action and finally at a number of more specific target groups or aspects of political life.

### **Gender equality and democracy**

Gender equality and democracy: if there is one issue which could be described as a Council of Europe stamping ground, it would be this one. The Council has for many years and on several occasions (see Part I) taken an interest in the relationship between gender equality and democracy, playing both a pioneering and innovative role. Debate was launched in 1989 at a seminar in Strasbourg, "The democratic principle of equal representation – 40 years of Council of Europe activity". This seminar was entirely consistent with the Declaration on Equality of Women and Men (adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 16 November 1988), which had stated that the principle of gender equality is an essential precondition of democracy.

Equality-based democracy – democracy in which there is balanced representation of women and men in all institutions – is another way of approaching and improving democracy. The outcome needs to be a partnership between women and men, a sort of new social contract between the sexes. In its deliberations, the Council of Europe queried the universality of human rights,

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1. The Council of Europe's concern with "women and the media" has stemmed from its "media" work rather than its "women and politics" activities. It has been the subject of several seminars and a Committee of Ministers recommendation.

given that humans are either male or female, and this marked a break with the universalist approach that views human beings in the abstract with no gender dimension. It highlighted the flagrant contradiction in Europe today between something which is at the heart of the democratic system and the fact that half of the population remain on the margins of political institutions (political parties, parliaments, local and regional assemblies, government). When political rights, for the majority of European women, are rights in name only, the very credibility of democratic institutions is called into question. "A democracy without women will no longer be seen as an imperfect democracy, but as no democracy at all" (Council of Europe, 1992 p. 27).

Among the ways and means of building an equality-based democracy, the seminar – in an acknowledgment of the influence exerted by language – recommended reviewing the main definitions of human rights to make sure that no suggestion of a dominant masculine model coloured the interpretation and application of laws. It also recommended that the democratic principle of equal representation be explicitly set down and that equal representation be recognised as an essential pre-condition of democracy instead of being treated as one of its remote consequences. Finally, the seminar called on the Council of Europe to examine the principle of quotas as a legitimate concept in democracy as long as inequalities between men and women persisted.

A few years later, in 1993, the Council of Europe's equality committee decided to take this conceptual work further and set up a high-level group of specialists on equality and democracy to lay down the principles of equal representation. The group pinpointed the gaps in a democracy defined solely in political terms. Democracy should be a dynamic construction process, designed to promote fundamental rights and freedoms as well as civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. This broad concept of democracy, which moreover has gradually gained acceptance at international level in recent decades, offers a framework for analysing gender-based systems in contemporary societies. In social (as opposed to merely political) democracy, "the citizen" takes a back seat as being too much of an abstraction and it is the specific needs of each individual that receive attention. "It is in this context that it will be possible to unveil the gendered dimension of society which democracy has never taken into account. It has been gender blind, whilst taking man as the norm. Today the concept of democracy is opening up in such a way that it can take up the idea of 'parity', as a goal for representation, a novel idea which sees democracy as a dynamic process with a gendered dimension" (Council of Europe, 1996a, p. 20).

How are we to make the transition from nominally egalitarian democracy to genuinely equality-based democracy? To answer this question, three studies were commissioned on the compatibility of equality-based democracy with the constitutions and electoral laws of France, the United Kingdom and Sweden. The studies, reproduced in a working group's 1997 final report, illustrate the practical obstacles encountered by some member states in implementing parity. The obstacles may be of a legal nature – for example, a country's constitutional court's basing itself on universality of human rights (the rights of individuals viewed in the abstract) to set aside positive-action legislation. Or they could be political – for example, first-past-the-post as opposed to list-based election, from the technical standpoint, lends itself less to positive action requiring the political parties to put forward a given percentage of candidates of each sex.

The group put forward a range of guidelines for a strategy to integrate women into the decision-making process, and they related to all aspects of life in society – not only politics and public life, but also the economic, social and cultural sectors. Ultimately, it was a new way of organising the social relationship between the sexes, on the basis of equal value and dignity of men and women, which was being advocated, and it followed on logically from acknowledging the two genders of humanity in the definition of democracy. The strategy for change which was being offered was a proactive one, requiring new legislation. First and foremost were statutory provisions establishing the parity principle by setting a “parity threshold” – a minimum percentage for each of the sexes (40%, say) in the membership of national advisory bodies, elected assemblies and, where appropriate, juries, as well as in political parties, trade-union committees, decision-making bodies in the media sector and so on.

The culmination of the gender equality and democracy work was the conference at Strasbourg in 1995 entitled *Equality and Democracy: Utopia or challenge?*, which was the Council of Europe's contribution to the 4th UN World Conference on Women. But these conceptual activities also provided an input to subsequent initiatives, in particular those concerning the balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making, which in a way were a direct extension of the earlier work.

In approaching political representation from the equality point of view, the Council of Europe helped renew debate and open up fruitful new perspectives

on political equality. If “today, the linking of democracy with gender equality is a generally accepted principle”,<sup>1</sup> part of the credit must go to the Council of Europe.

### **Equality through law**

Equality through law was the Council of Europe’s second area of conceptual work. This involved making the right to equality between women and men a fundamental and autonomous right.

Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights (1950) provides a general framework for examining women’s participation in politics, since it explicitly guarantees women’s equality with men in enjoyment of the fundamental rights and freedoms enshrined in the Convention. Of fundamental importance, Article 14 says, in essence, that human rights are at issue where women find themselves so marginalised politically that their political rights are neither recognised nor exercised. Article 14 states: “The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Convention shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status.”

However, application of this provision, in particular via the right of individuals to petition the European Court of Human Rights is limited because of its ancillary nature – Article 14 is not a general prohibition of discrimination but merely a prohibition linked to enjoyment of the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Convention.<sup>2</sup> In other words, it is unable to offer sufficient protection against inequality and gender-related discrimination, whereas constitutional or legal provisions recognise equality as a fundamental right. It has to be understood that the principle of non-discrimination is the “cornerstone and basis for promoting gender equality. Without legal protection against gender discrimination, it would not be possible to raise awareness of

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1. Ballington, Julie, in *Women in parliament: beyond numbers*, International IDEA, Strömsborg, 2002.

2. Nonetheless, Article 14 has led the European Court of Human rights to address the issue of gender equality and to set forth the overall concept. The Court has stated on several occasions that “the advancement of the equality of the sexes is today a major goal in the member States of the Council of Europe. This means that very weighty reasons would have to be advanced before a difference of treatment on the ground of sex could be regarded as compatible with the Convention” (cf the judgment in the case of Abdulaziz Cabales and Balkandali v. the United Kingdom, 28.5.1985, Series A, No. 94, p. 38, para. 78).

the need for justice and for promoting the abilities of both sexes.” (Council of Europe, 2000, p. 7).

The first step in this field of activity was taken in 1989: the seminar on the democratic principle of equal representation called on the Council of Europe to enshrine gender equality in the European Convention on Human Rights, as a fundamental principle essential to the existence and consolidation of democracy, by adding to the convention a specific new measure of general scope. It also called on the Council to resolve the linguistic problem, posed by the French term for human rights, “droits de l’homme” (literally “rights of man”) by using “droits de la personne humaine” (rights of the human person) instead.

In September 1992, as part of the preparations for the world conference in Beijing, the Committee of Ministers took the first steps in this direction: it approved specific terms of reference for a group of specialists on the elaboration of a fundamental right to equality between women and men. On completion of its work in 1993, the group of specialists presented a “draft reasoned proposal on a fundamental right to equality for inclusion in a protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights”.

In 1994, the Parliamentary Assembly, in Recommendation 1229 on equality of rights between men and women, called on the Committee of Ministers to establish the principle of equality of rights between women and men as a fundamental human right in an additional protocol to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. However, despite these calls, nothing came of the initiative.

Given the failure of all attempts to establish the fundamental principle of gender equality clearly and formally as a source of positive law, efforts were subsequently directed elsewhere: to transforming the anti-discrimination clause in Article 14 into a clause genuinely providing equality before the law, as was to be found in various national constitutions. It took several years of discussion at various levels, in particular in the Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH), before the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe finally adopted Protocol No. 12 on 26 June 2000. The protocol was opened for signature by member states in Rome on 4 November 2000, the 50th anniversary of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Article 1 of Protocol No. 12 is a general provision prohibiting discrimination and thus giving protection that is wider than the rights and freedoms in the Convention itself. It therefore broadens the scope of Article 14. When it enters

into force (once it has been ratified by at least ten member states) it will ensure that no one is discriminated against by any public authority on any ground (including sex). The new provision will be subject to supervision by the European Court of Human Rights, whose power will thus be enhanced.<sup>1</sup> While the protocol does not place a positive general obligation on member states to take measures to prevent or make good all cases of discrimination against individuals, it is possible that the European Court of Human Rights will interpret it as requiring that positive action be taken (bearing in mind that the preamble refers both to the principle of equality before the law and positive action).

### **Positive political action**

In most modern democracies equality of all citizens before the law, without discrimination on any ground (including sex), is a basic principle. However, equality of rights does not automatically mean equal access to rights, as is evident in the field of political rights: introducing universal suffrage is not the same as saying that each citizen, male or female, has the same opportunities of becoming a member of parliament. In many cases, legal equality is purely theoretical, given the social and cultural obstacles which previously disempowered groups still have to overcome. That is equally true for women. Merely granting women and men equal treatment in law is a denial of justice for women, “unless, that is, efforts are made, using appropriate methods, to compensate for the accumulated burden of the past and psychological and social inertia” (Council of Europe, 2000, p. 8).

Positive action is a strategic tool (on a par, for example, with mainstreaming) for attaining equality in practice, including political practice. The Council of Europe has for many years given thought to what kind of temporary or transitional positive action would speed up women’s involvement in politics (see Part I).

The legitimacy of measures of this type is beginning to be acknowledged in the legal opinion and case-law of a number of countries. It is also recognised by international legal instruments, including the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which was adopted on 18 September 1979 and entered into force on 3 September 1981. This convention provides for the elimination of all gender-based discrimination and grants women the right to vote and stand for election and the right to

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1. See on this point: Jeroen Schokkenbroek, “A new European standard against discrimination: Negotiating Protocol No. 12 to the European Convention on Human Rights”, in *European anti-discrimination standards and national legislation*, Kluwer, 2003.

take part in framing and implementing national policy. Article 4.1 lays down the principle of temporary favourable treatment and is the most frequently cited legal basis for positive action.<sup>1</sup> When a country ratifies the convention, and provided it has not made any reservations in respect of Article 4.1, its domestic legislation must contain a number of guarantees, including the guarantee that positive discrimination or preferential treatment to assist an individual or group of individuals of one or other sex will never be deemed an illegal derogation from the general principle of gender equality provided it is temporary and specifically designed to speed up equality between women and men.

The Council of Europe and its equality committee took the view that the concept of positive action should be explored and used to the full in order to achieve equality-based democracy. “Since this concept can be difficult to understand and often meets with a lot of resistance, it was important that it be clarified at an early stage of the Organisation’s work on equality” (Council of Europe, 2002, p. 7). The Council accordingly commissioned several studies. A preliminary study (“Positive action for the benefit of women”) was carried out in 1986. This was followed in 1989 by a second study, by Eliane Vogel-Polsky, “Positive action and the constitutional and legislative hindrances to its implementation in the member states of the Council of Europe”.

In 1998, the equality committee set up a Group of Specialists on Positive Action in the field of Equality between Women and Men (EG-S-PA), tasked with exploring the concept of positive action, studying the legal and administrative basis and providing examples of best practice both in the labour market and in political and public life. Its report, published in 2000, was widely distributed. First, it points out that it is no easy matter to secure recognition for a compensation strategy for women as it marks a distinct break with the principle of equal rights, or at least equal treatment as regards access to rights. This departure from legal individualism is “liable to cause concern among all those brought up in the liberal tradition, alive to the dangers of any form of social screening, or communitarian or corporatist isolation” (Council of Europe, 2000, p. 8). Furthermore, positive action in the field of decision making meets greater resistance than similar action in the labour market.

In the electoral field, most countries have consistently taken the view that positive action as regards women cannot be translated into a legal obligation to achieve *de*

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1. It is worded as follows: “Adoption by States Parties of temporary special measures aimed at accelerating *de facto* equality between men and women shall not be considered discrimination ...”.



*facto* equality in elected assemblies. The reasons most commonly given are the need to preserve the unity of the electorate and the freedom to vote and stand in elections. For this reason, most member states rely on the political parties to ensure gender balance among the candidates they put forward at elections.

However, three countries (Belgium, France and “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”) are exceptions and have recently passed legislation making it compulsory to have a minimum percentage of each sex as candidates. In Belgium, an initial law of 24 May 1994 provided that “on any list, the number of candidates of the same sex may not exceed two-thirds of the total number of seats which are to be filled”. Since then, new, more demanding laws (of 17 June and 18 July 2002) have been passed, providing for equal representation of the sexes on lists for European, federal, and regional elections, and with the first two candidates on any list to be of opposite sex.<sup>1</sup>

In France, the constitutional law of 8 July 1999 (authorising Parliament to take positive-action measures) led to the “parity” law of 6 June 2000, which obliges parties to have fifty-fifty gender balance in the candidatures they place on ballot papers, alternating parity being required for single-round elections and parity in each group of six candidates for two-round elections. For parliamentary elections, where only one candidate is to be elected, the act encourages parity, which nevertheless remains optional, by introducing financial penalties: parties may choose not to put forward equal numbers of men and women candidates, but in that case they do not qualify for all the public funding they would normally receive (see conclusions below).

“The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” passed a law on the election of members of parliament in May 2002. Section 37 provides that at least 30% of the candidates on any list must be men and at least 30% women.

The report gives a complete picture of positive action (formal or informal quotas) by European political parties. It points out that while the Nordic parties were the pioneers in the early 1980s, many parties in Europe have since also adopted quota policies in order to increase the number of women candidates. This has also happened in the countries of the south (such as Spain).<sup>2</sup>

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1. Since February 2002, the Belgian Constitution has given an explicit guarantee of the principle of equality between women and men, thereby legitimising the policy of positive action. See Bérengère Marques-Pereira, *La citoyenneté politique des femmes*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2003.

2. The Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) has just adopted the official rule that composition of both party-management bodies and lists of candidates must be at least 40% and at most 60% female.

Some parties have adopted a quota system as regards both their candidates and the members of their management bodies. However, more parties have introduced an internal quota than have set a quota for parliamentary elections.

Clearly the legal culture, both nationally and in political parties, has developed considerably in Europe in recent years, even in the countries most steeped in “universalist” values (including France). Positive action has progressed significantly in politics, even though the legal position may not always have kept pace. This legitimacy deficit makes it imperative to pursue a strategy of alerting people to the importance of positive action. Putting positive action into practice is partly contingent on how the intended beneficiaries of it react. The Council of Europe is therefore being asked to develop a stricter legal requirement,<sup>1</sup> which among other things would force discussion of any contradictions between constitutional provisions and international commitments.

### **Young women and participation in politics**

Through its youth agencies, the Council of Europe has sought to promote access for young people – of both sexes – to exercise of citizenship. A number of obstacles have traditionally made it difficult for young people to be politically participant (lack of socio-economic integration, unemployment problems, and so forth). In view of the current crisis of political representation in many member states, both in the west and the east, the apathy shown by young people is of particular concern and directly affects the functioning of democratic institutions. The most visible signs of this apathy are the high rate of electoral abstentionism and the very few young people joining political parties.

However, this indifference to elections and parties does not mean that young people are not interested in the community in which they live. They take an interest in politics, but in other ways – through demonstrations, petitions, and active involvement in associations and NGOs, which they regard as more flexible than traditional parties.

Until recently, the majority of the Council of Europe’s activities and conferences were not specifically concerned with participation of young women in politics, partly because this is a question, organisationally, that falls under two

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1. Such as: “The States parties agree, with a view to expediting the establishment of *de facto* equality between men and women, to adopt positive measures aimed at offsetting handicaps for either sex resulting from the attitudes or behaviour which have caused them to be under-represented in terms of qualifications, work or responsibilities.”

different Council sectors: gender equality on the one hand and youth on the other. As a result, the two aspects of the question have seldom been brought together, even though texts targeting young people have almost invariably made reference to gender equality.

In 1992, Resolution 237 (1992) of the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe adopted the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Municipal and Regional Life. The charter, for young people of both sexes, recommended that municipalities and other local and regional authorities pursue a “policy of equality between women and men”. In particular it encouraged them to make specific budgetary provision for the recruitment of a qualified person with responsibility for equality affairs, pursue specific policies to assist young women and train young women in the running of public affairs by entrusting them with responsibilities at the highest level, on the basis of a quota of places reserved for women.

To mark the charter’s tenth anniversary, a conference (“Young people, actors in their towns and regions”) was held in Krakow on 7 and 8 March 2002 on the initiative of the Committee on Culture and Education of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, in partnership with the Council of Europe’s youth and sport directorate. Its aim was to assess the progress achieved in youth participation in the course of the charter’s first ten years, and to consider how to further develop youth participation. The conference participants adopted the Krakow Declaration in which they stated that young people were citizens in the municipalities and regions where they live, and must therefore have access to all forms of participation in society. They pointed out that youth councils – which have been set up in the majority of member states – were an excellent way of involving young people in public affairs.<sup>1</sup> Local and regional authorities were asked to take a variety of measures, including encouraging access to elective responsibilities as of the legally-allowed age, and trying out innovative ways of involving young people in decision making.

A revised or “second generation” charter was adopted by the CLRAE in May 2003. It contains new chapters on certain entirely new policy areas, such as use of the Internet as a means of interesting young people in politics. It offers local and regional authorities guidelines on implementing policies for young

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1. In France, the Midi-Pyrénées region recently organised a regional youth council which proved to be a very constructive experience in the view of the president of the Regional Assembly. The young people who attended took a keen interest in the workings of a political institution.

people in various fields and on encouraging youth participation, and offers advice on setting up the appropriate institutional framework. Local authorities are called upon, among other things, to implement policies aimed at achieving equality between young people of both sexes, and in particular to take proactive measures to help young women and men gain positions of responsibility in working life, voluntary activities and politics. The charter will come with a handbook of best practice giving examples of successfully involving young people in the life of municipalities and regions of Europe.

Finally, Committee of Ministers Recommendation 2003(3) on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making (see appendix) comprises a number of supportive measures “targeting” young people. It asks member states to encourage participation by young people, particularly young women members of organisations and associations, which are viewed as an excellent introduction to political activity. It also advocates encouraging youth organisations to make sure there are equal numbers of women and men in their decision making.

In the publishing sector, the European Steering Committee for Youth recently brought out a report, *Keys to youth participation in eastern Europe* (Council of Europe Publishing, 2001) by Siyka Kovatcheva. It looks at how the forms of youth participation have changed ten years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the symbolic reunification of the two parts of the continent. It offers a comprehensive picture of youth activism in eastern Europe, the forms it takes and its resources and objectives, with reference to the concerns of the first post-war generation in Europe. In the political sphere, the author describes a campaign for youth votes led by young Slovaks in 1998 and an initiative by young Bulgarians aimed at participation in local government. The study concludes that young people are keen to become involved in shaping the future of their society in transition and becoming active citizens of an enlarged Europe.

For 2003, two events were organised by the Council of Europe to encourage political participation by young women. First, the Young Active Citizens Award was organised for the second year in succession by the Council’s Youth and Sport Directorate on the theme of participation of young women in politics. One of the aims of the award is to equip girls and young women to take an active part in political institutions and processes. It acknowledges projects relating to various problems in society (social exclusion, unemployment, racism, xenophobia, violence, conflict, and so forth) and is open to, amongst others, youth organisations and networks, including political youth organisations.

Second, on 16 and 17 September 2003, the first seminar on participation of young women in politics was held in Strasbourg. It was a joint initiative of various Council of Europe sectors,<sup>1</sup> and had three main aims: to assess the effectiveness of existing legal instruments on participation by young women, identify obstacles and take stock of the main approaches and suggest examples of good practice.

### **Women in local and regional political life**

Local and regional life is often regarded as the cornerstone of European democracy, which is why the Council of Europe has constantly sought to promote women's grass-roots political participation. Although local/regional government is differently organised from one Council of Europe member country to another, there are generally three tiers to be found – the region (highest tier), the province (an intermediate tier, not found everywhere and whose powers vary), and the municipality (the bottom tier, providing the direct link between government and the citizen).

It is important that women be able to enter these three basic tiers of political life, which provide an apprenticeship in conduct of public affairs. It is worth bearing in mind that in the Scandinavian countries, which is where women have progressed furthest in politics, the increase in women's numbers was initially at the lowest tier. The Swedish delegation to the 1st European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men described local politics as the "gateway to the Riksdag". Similarly, in the countries of central and eastern Europe, during transition to democracy, women observably served their apprenticeship in the local councils and assemblies, which provided a springboard to national careers.

In the early 1980s, the Steering Committee for Regional and Municipal Matters (CDRM) adopted Recommendation No. R(81)18, which called on member governments to adopt policy for promoting participation in public local life, in particular by "encouraging the participation of women in local politics".

A few years later the Committee for Equality between Women and Men (CAHFM) and the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of

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1. The seminar was organised as part of the Council of Europe's integrated project "Making democratic institutions work". Others involved in organising the seminar were the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe and the Gender Equality Grouping of NGOs enjoying consultative status with the Council of Europe.

Europe collaborated fruitfully on the question of women's participation in local life, with a joint conference ("Women in local and regional life: Equal participation by women in policy-making at local and regional level") in Athens on 10 and 12 September 1986. The conference, attended by over 500 participants, was organised around three topics: measures to facilitate women's entry to and participation in local and regional life, the rights and working conditions of representatives and elected representatives, and equal entry for women to senior positions in local/regional public service.

The conference's findings, as set out in the Athens Message, stressed two things. Firstly, Article 2(b) of the Charter of the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe needed amending to introduce the further requirement of equitable representation of women and men. Secondly, it was necessary to create conditions enabling both women and men in Council of Europe member countries to take part in local elections. In particular the message called on governments to take steps to eliminate the practice – known to impede fair political representation of women – of holding more than one political office simultaneously. It urged them to apply the relevant provisions of the documents adopted by the 1st European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men, together with the relevant provisions of Resolution 142 (1983) of the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe on the status and working conditions of local and regional elected representatives.

Following on from the conference, the standing conference adopted Resolution 179 (1986) on women's participation in local and regional democratic life, which made various recommendations and pointed out that "the local and regional levels constitute the first stage towards women's full participation in public life and towards translating the theory of equal opportunity in everyday life into practice".

On 25 June 1987 the Committee of Ministers adopted a resolution amending the Charter of the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe. Article 2(b) of the charter had a new sub-paragraph 4 added to it: "The membership of each member state's delegation in the CLRAE shall be such as to ensure: ... equitable representation of women and men on the statutory bodies of local and regional authorities in the member state".

In 1998, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (the standing conference having been renamed in 1994) conducted a survey of

women's participation in local and regional institutions in the member states. The finding of the survey was that although women's participation in local and regional councils and assemblies varied from country to country it was still unsatisfactory overall. Little was being done to involve women in local life, though initiatives by individual parties sometimes made up for the absence of statutory quotas. The survey stressed that whatever devices were used (legislative or not) needed to be adapted to the particular national political and cultural context. In other words, initiatives and measures which were regarded as "good practice" in Scandinavia – which led the way in equal political participation – might be premature if imported as they stood into countries which did not have the same culture.

Following the survey, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities adopted Recommendation 68 (1999) and Resolution 85 (1999) on women's participation in political life in Europe's regions. The two documents set out the various measures which states and regional authorities needed to take or promote in relevant quarters. In particular governments of member states were asked to introduce positive-action measures facilitating women's entry to public and political office and to collaborate in this with local and regional authorities in accordance with the subsidiarity principle.

Lastly, in the context of structural and operational changes in local/regional authorities in recent years, the Committee of Ministers adopted Recommendation (2001)19 on citizens' participation in public life at the local level, a document dealing in particular with women's participation. Urging member governments to work out (in consultation with local/regional authorities) policy for promoting citizen participation in local public life, it draws attention, in an appendix, to the importance of women's being fairly represented in local politics and underlines the urgency of considering introducing gender quotas for candidate lists in local elections.

### **Regional planning and gender equality**

In 1990 the Council of Europe added a new topic to its work programme: women's involvement in decisions concerning regional and environmental planning. The European Conference of Ministers responsible for Regional Planning (CEMAT) and the European Committee for Equality between Women and Men jointly held a seminar on the subject in Athens from 25 to 27 October 1990. The seminar – a persuasive example of the integrated approach to gender equality – was attended by some hundred researchers,

architects, town planners and other specialists. In her introduction to the published proceedings the then secretary to the CEEG, Claudette April, wrote of the urgency, in regional and environmental planning, of giving women an active role and taking decisions that had the benefit of women's culture, closeness to life and sensitivity to the environment and natural resources, all of the greatest relevance to quality of life.

The seminar adopted conclusions with recommendations to relevant Council of Europe bodies and member governments, setting out guidelines for a regional- and environmental-planning approach that reflected women's concerns.

The Athens seminar was followed, four years later, by a CEMAT colloquy at Örnköldsvik (Sweden) on 24-26 March 1994 on women's role and representation in regional-planning policy aimed at sustainable development, particularly in urban areas. It was once again pointed out that the universal concept of public interest, which was the cornerstone of planning, had not so far taken women into account in its definitions of the word "public", even though women and men had different lifestyles and different methods of social integration. The seminar highlighted the need for both women and men to be involved in every stage of the decision-making process.

### **Women's individual voting rights**

The practice of family voting, found in several of the newly democratic countries of central and eastern Europe (particularly some states of the former Soviet Union), is a patriarchal custom in which a male family member goes into the voting booth with one or more of the family, or the family votes as a group, or the man casts proxy votes for the female members of the family. In some cases the practice is part of an ethnic community's way of life, while in others it is described as a "post-communist" phenomenon. Family voting has been found exclusively in rural communities.

Family voting denies women their individual vote by secret ballot and is a factor in their exclusion from political life. The practice continues with the connivance of polling officers and is a serious breach of national and international law, as the constitutions of the countries in which the practice is found, and the Protocol No. 1 to the European Convention on Human Rights, establish the right to free elections by secret ballot. Women's right to vote is also protected by Article 7 of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All



Forms of Discrimination against Women, a treaty to which all the countries studied are parties.

The extremely difficult issue of family voting has recently received attention from the Council of Europe. Since 1995 the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) have been conducting observer missions in a number of countries in the enlarged Europe. Following the observer missions the Congress produced the previously mentioned report, *Women's individual voting rights: a democratic requirement*, published by the integrated project "Making democratic institutions work" (Council of Europe, 2002c). This booklet contains both a general report on the persistence of the practice, accompanied by recommendations on combating it, and a country-by-country report covering nineteen countries which examines examples found by international organisations. It also contains the CLRAE Recommendation 111 (2002) on women's individual voting rights, adopted 6 June 2002, which advocates various strategies for eliminating the practice, some of them concerned with electoral institutions and others with the communities involved. The recommendation calls on the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers to develop a common action programme to prevent family voting and urges the Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men to cover the question in its work programme.



## CONCLUSIONS

Gender equality is set to be a central consideration in European policy making, for otherwise policies will be democratic in name only. At the dawn of the new century, the democratic ideal of balanced involvement of women and men in political and public decision making remains – as we have said – a long way off. With rare exceptions (the Scandinavian countries), men are plainly still in the overwhelming majority in positions of power. This is particularly true in parliaments (see Appendix 2). More seriously, in some countries of central and eastern Europe there are fewer women in government than before because quotas applied under former communist regimes no longer exist.

A Council of Europe booklet, “Equality between women and men”<sup>1</sup> (Council of Europe, 2003a) serves as a timely reminder of the gender imbalance typical of apportionment of political power in Europe. In seven member countries there were no women in government and in another ten fewer than 10% of government posts were held by women. In eleven member countries over 90% of members of parliament were male, and women accounted for over 30% of members of parliament in only seven member countries (30% being regarded as the minimum for women to make their influence felt).<sup>2</sup> The average percentage of women in member countries’ parliaments was 17.9%, far below the now widely recognised “critical mass” which would enable women to break free of what might be regarded as the standard power-exercise model. In addition – an illustration of the “glass ceiling” – senior positions in parliaments continued to be male bastions.

Less pessimistically, it might be said that, in world terms, Europe is in something of a vanguard given that, of the eleven countries in the world in which women account for 30% or more of parliamentary membership, seven are European.

Venturing a look into the future, there are arguably three main political issues for the member states at the start of the twenty-first century if they are to achieve fully integrated national communities with total equality regardless of gender, social category or religion: the first is democratic political parties, the second social rights and the third secularity.

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1. This is an equality fact sheet available at [www.int/human\\_rights/](http://www.int/human_rights/). It is regularly updated for consultation.

2. The latest figures (see Appendix 2) show that women now exceed the 30% mark in nine member countries (in Sweden over 40% of members of parliament are women).

### **Political parties: necessary vehicles of democratic equality**

In the member states, is the positive action in recent years on electoral matters, whether by legislation or – as in most cases – the political parties themselves, capable of quickly achieving gender-balanced elective assemblies? Yes, on two conditions. Firstly, the rules – in the context of proportional voting – must insist on strict alternation of women and men on candidate lists. Alternation is a *sine qua non* in an electoral system in which position on the list is a prime factor in candidates' election. Secondly, parity or quota rules must lay down minimum percentages for both female and male candidates so that penalties can be imposed if the percentages are not complied with. Otherwise meeting the percentages is left to the discretion of party leaders, allowing them to impede attainment of political equality between women and men.

France is a striking illustration of political parties' betrayal of the spirit of parity, despite the principle's being laid down in the Act of 6 June 2000. In proportional voting, the act made it a requirement that there be the same number of candidates of both sexes (a discrepancy of one being allowed), with man/woman (or woman/man) alternation on the lists. In force for municipal and senate elections, the act proved capable of achieving equality.<sup>1</sup> In general elections, which use the first-past-the-post system, the Act of 6 June 2000, as pointed out, does not make parity compulsory but encourages parity by laying down financial penalties for parties failing to put forward equal numbers of candidates of both sexes (a 2% discrepancy being allowed). The results of the June 2002 election demonstrate the flagrant failure of the incentive approach. Of the parliamentary parties, only the Greens put forward equal numbers of male and female candidates. The other parties fell far short, especially on the right of the political spectrum. In the event only 12.3% of candidates elected were women (as against 10.9% in 1997, representing a disappointingly small improvement of 12.8%). With only 12.3% of National Assembly membership female, France remains one of the backmarkers for

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1. After the municipal elections in March 2001, women accounted for 47.5% of the membership of municipal councils in towns with populations of over 3 500. That figure, as compared with 1995 (25.7%), represented a clear leap forward (+84.2%). The French Senate elections in 2001 were the second test for the act: one-third of the membership was being replaced (that is 102 members out of 321), 74 members by proportional voting (governed by the parity rule) and 28 by first-past-the-post voting (not covered by the parity rule). Large numbers of women stood for election (42% of the candidates). They won 22 of the 102 seats (or 21.5%). The great majority of them (20 out of 22) were elected under the proportional system (governed by the parity requirement). After this partial replacement of the Senate membership, women occupied 10.9% of the seats (as against 5.9% previously, representing an 84.7% improvement).

female membership of a lower chamber. Despite what was thought to be pioneering legislation, it now ranks sixty-fifth in the world, twenty-eighth among Council of Europe member countries and thirteenth in the European Union, far behind the Scandinavian countries. All in all it seems clear that the political parties have failed in the mission which the amended Article 4 of the Constitution assigned them: to help implement the principle of equal access for women and men to electoral office. Under a voting system which places those prominent in public life at an advantage, the major parties opted to pay fines, even heavy ones, rather than put forward more women candidates, especially in key constituencies. They often reselected outgoing members – mostly men – who were known to the voters and therefore regarded as a safer electoral bet. At all events French experience shows that financial penalties cannot necessarily be relied upon to force parties to put forward more women candidates. It remains to devise effective legislation for enforcing parity among candidates and elected members in an electoral system – first-past-the-post – in which it is harder than in the proportional system to apply straightforward rules.

In contrast, Belgium's 2002 legislation containing a parity requirement and requiring that the first two candidates on any list be of opposite gender has proved effective. After the May 2003 general election the proportion of women members of the Chamber of Representatives rose from 19.3% to 34.6%, or nearly 80% improvement.

In modern democracies it is the political parties (since they select the candidates for seats) that set the qualifications for parliamentary membership as they see fit. They thus bear heavy responsibility for the democracy/parity or otherwise of parliamentary composition. For that reason there are some who argue that Europe needs to set strict rules to prevent political parties from sabotaging democratic procedure. The lawyer Eliane Vogel-Polsky is one who takes that view: in connection with the Convention on the Future of Europe (which is looking at reform of European institutions), she has argued that the Treaty article dealing with political parties in the European Union needs amending. "The parties do pretty well as they like in drawing up electoral lists. A party should obey the law and, in principle, democracy. If the Treaty is to continue to promote equality ... political parties in the European Parliament, as vehicles of integration and European citizenship, must clearly obey the European rules and thus abide by the objective of gender equality generally".<sup>1</sup>

1. "Agir pour les droits des femmes", interview with Eliane Vogel-Polsky, *Raisons politiques*, No.10, Presses de Sciences Po, May 2003, p.149 (editorial translation).

### **Promoting a “common heritage” of social rights**

The second great challenge will be to promote a “common heritage”<sup>1</sup> of social rights throughout the continent. The fact is that political citizenship and the rights which it confers (the rights to vote and stand in elections) are meaningless without the rights attached to social citizenship. And women are even more urgently in need of help from the welfare state because they account for more of the socially deprived and because society assigns them the main responsibility for looking after children and the family generally. If women are to become fully participant in representative democracy, they need including in the welfare state. That applies even more in central and eastern Europe, where, as we have seen, loss of social rights exposes women to great insecurity in various areas of life.

In the context of the European Union, one point is worth making: Union membership has been especially unpopular with women, who, as wage-earners, are the first victims of economic modernisation and, consequently, of Europe’s welfare shortcomings. The majority of those joining the Eurosceptic camp continue to be women. Wherever there have been consultations, women have either been more indifferent than men (as measured by abstentions) or more hostile (as measured by “no” votes) to joining the European Union. The tendency has been especially marked in Denmark, France<sup>2</sup> and in Sweden. Clearly therefore, women urgently need convincing of the case for the European political project: Europe will only become popular when it has become socially responsive.

Council of Europe policy must therefore seek to promote greater community and greater solidarity of all citizens. It has already set standards in that sphere: through the European Social Charter, drafted in the 1950s and revised in 1996, and the European Code of Social Security it set high social standards in Europe. But there is still progress to be made. Of the forty-five member states, only France and Italy have accepted all the sections of the revised Charter, including Protocol No. 3 allowing collective complaints.

The Council of Europe thus has a part to play – no less so than the European Union, but at a different level – in creating “European awareness through legal rules”,<sup>3</sup> particularly in the social-welfare field. More generally, its work also

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1. The term used by Council of Europe Director of Social Cohesion Gabriella Battaini in *Le Monde*, 17 June 2003.

2. See Jacques Capdevielle, “La construction européenne confrontée aux attentes des Françaises”, *French Politics and Society*, volume 20, No.1, spring 2002, pp.58-67.

3. As Eliane Vogel-Polsky puts it, *loc. cit.*, p.140.

equips it for educational action aimed at propagating the European idea in the community, particularly among women, who are the group most concerned about social rights being reduced to the level of the least progressive countries. It would not be the first time the Council of Europe has been singled out for an educational function: it is frequently seen as the ideal forum for building the great European house (da Silva in Council of Europe, 1994a, p.22).

### **Secularity as the founding value of democracy**

In Europe it is generally recognised that the secular society is further advanced than on other continents. We must resist any challenges to secularity at a time when varieties of religious fundamentalism are everywhere gaining ground. There is doubtless action the Council of Europe could take to prevent religion – which so readily subjugates women (particularly younger women) and reduces them to subordinacy – from prevailing over politics. It is more urgent than ever to educate European opinion in the concepts of secularity, separation of church and state, and segregation of the temporal and the spiritual. And to take care those concepts are applied in various areas of community life, starting with school, which is where republican and egalitarian values are handed down and learned.

In future, the Council of Europe's prime function might be to lay down guidelines for reactivating the "secular covenant" – that is, for establishing secularity as the founding value of democracies. Secularity is undoubtedly essential if we are to have a *res publica* inclusive of all, and is crucial to women's full emancipation from fathers, brothers and husbands.

Attainment, in the reasonably short term, of genuine equality between women and men and of all citizens will depend on meeting the three key challenges of compelling political parties to be democratic, promoting the welfare state and affirming the principle of secularity. The Council of Europe's task will be to help member states meet them.





# **APPENDICES**



# **1. WOMEN AND POLITICS – KEY DATES AT THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

*4 November 1950*

European Convention on Human Rights signed in Rome. Article 14 prohibits all discrimination on various grounds including sex as regards the rights which the Convention protects.

*28 September 1967*

Resolution 356 of the Consultative Assembly on the political, social and civic position of women in Europe.

*9 October 1975*

Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 606 on the political rights and position of women.

*December 1979*

First meeting of the first Council of Europe equality committee, the Committee on the Status of Women (CAHFM).

*1982*

The committee changes its name and becomes the Committee for Equality between Women and Men (CAHFM). It identifies the political sphere as one of the fields for priority Council of Europe action.

*1984*

Publication of the first comparative European study, “The situation of women in the political process in Europe”.

*26 April 1985*

Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1008 on women in politics.

*4 March 1986*

1st European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men (Strasbourg) looks at women’s participation in political life and policy and strategies for achieving equality in decision making. Adoption of the resolution on policy and strategies for achieving equality in political life and in the decision-making process and the Strasbourg declaration on equality between women and men in political and public life.

*10-12 September 1986*

Athens conference on women in local and regional life, organised by the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE) and the Committee for Equality between Women and Men (CAHFM).

Athens Message on equal participation by women in policy-making at local and regional level.

*1986*

Resolution 179 of the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe on women's participation in local and regional democratic life (16 October 1986).

*1987*

New equality committee set up, the European Committee for Equality between Women and Men.

*16 November 1988*

The Committee of Ministers adopts the Declaration on Equality of Women and Men.

*4 and 5 July 1989*

2nd European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men (Vienna). Document adopted on political strategies for the achievement of real equality of women and men.

*6 and 7 November 1989*

Seminar "The democratic principle of equal representation – Forty years of Council of Europe activity" (Strasbourg).

*1992*

The Equality Committee becomes a steering committee (CDEG).

*1994*

Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1229 on equality of rights between women and men (24 January 1994).

*9-11 February 1995*

European conference "Equality and Democracy: Utopia or challenge" (Strasbourg) is the Council of Europe's contribution to the 4th United Nations World Conference on Women (Beijing, 4-15 September 1995).

*11 March 1997*

Helsinki seminar on “Equality between women and men in the political decision-making process”, organised by Finnish chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers.

*10 and 11 October 1997*

Declaration adopted by the 2nd Council of Europe summit of heads of state and government underlines importance of balanced representation of men and women in all sectors of society, including politics.

*13 and 14 November 1997*

4th European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men (Istanbul). Istanbul Declaration on equality between women and men as a fundamental criterion of democracy.

*22 June 1999*

Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1413 on equal representation in political life. Protocol No. 12 (non-discrimination) to the European Convention on Human Rights, widens scope of Article 14, making it generally applicable.

*22 and 23 January 2003*

5th European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men (Skopje), on the roles of women and men in conflict prevention, peace building and post-conflict democratic processes.

*12 March 2003*

Committee of Ministers Recommendation (2003) 3 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making.



## 2. WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT

**Table: Distribution of women represented in forty-five Council of Europe member states' parliaments – lower chamber**

Country	Date of elections	Seats	Women	% women
Sweden	09/2002	349	158	45.3
Denmark	11/2001	179	68	38.0
Finland	03/1999	200	75	37.5
Netherlands	01/2003	150	55	36.7
Norway	09/2001	165	60	36.4
Belgium	05/2003	150	53	35.3
Austria	11/2002	183	62	33.9
Germany	09/2002	603	194	32.2
Iceland	05/2003	63	19	30.2
Spain	03/2000	350	99	28.3
Bulgaria	06/2001	240	63	26.2
Switzerland	10/1999	200	46	23.0
Latvia	10/2002	100	21	21.0
Croatia	01/2000	151	31	20.5
Poland	09/2001	460	93	20.2
Slovakia	09/2002	150	29	19.3
Portugal	03/2002	230	44	19.1
Estonia	03/2003	101	19	18.8
“The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”	09/2002	120	22	18.3
United Kingdom	06/2001	659	118	17.9
Czech Republic	06/2002	200	34	17.0

*see over*

*Genderware – the Council of Europe and the participation of women in political life*

Bosnia and Herzegovina	10/2002	42	7	16.7
Luxembourg	06/1994	60	10	16.7
San Marino	06/2001	60	10	16.7
Andorra	03/2001	28	4	14.3
Ireland	05/2002	166	22	13.3
Moldova	02/2001	101	13	12.9
France	06/2002	577	71	12.3
Slovenia	10/2000	90	11	12.2
Liechtenstein	02/2001	25	3	12.0
Italy	05/2001	618	71	11.5
Cyprus	05/2001	56	6	10.7
Romania	11/2000	345	37	10.7
Lithuania	10/2000	141	15	10.6
Azerbaijan	11/2000	124	13	10.5
Hungary	04/2002	386	38	9.8
Greece	04/2000	300	26	8.7
Serbia and Montenegro*	02/2003	126	10	7.9
Malta	04/2003	65	5	7.7
Russian Federation	12/1999	449	34	7.6
Georgia	10/1999	235	17	7.2
Albania	06/2001	140	8	5.7
Ukraine	03/2002	450	24	5.3
Turkey	11/2002	550	24	4.4
Armenia	05/1999	131	4	3.1
<b>Average</b>	–	<b>10 268</b>	<b>1 846</b>	<b>17.9</b>

Source: Interparliamentary Union (situation at 31 May 2003).

- For the first time since Yugoslavia ceased to exist and the new state was founded, indirect elections were held to elect the 126 members of the new parliament.



### **3. RECOMMENDATION REC(2003)3 OF THE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS TO MEMBER STATES ON BALANCED PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN AND MEN IN POLITICAL AND PUBLIC DECISION MAKING**

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 12 March 2003  
at the 831st meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)*

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15.b of the Statute of the Council of Europe,

Bearing in mind that women make up more than half of the population and the electorate in its member states, but continue to be seriously under-represented in political and public decision making in a large part of its member states;

Bearing in mind that, in spite of the existence of de jure equality, the distribution of power, responsibilities and access to economic, social and cultural resources between women and men is still very unequal due to the persistence of prevailing traditional gender roles;

Mindful that the functioning of electoral systems and political institutions, including political parties, may hamper women's participation in political and public life;

Considering that balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making is a matter of the full enjoyment of human rights, of social justice and a necessary condition for the better functioning of a democratic society;

Considering that the realisation of balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making would lead to better and more efficient policy making through the redefinition of political priorities and the placing of new issues on the political agenda as well as to the improvement of quality of life for all;

Considering that balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making is needed for the development and construction of a Europe based on equality, social cohesion, solidarity and respect for human rights;

Recalling the declaration adopted at the 2nd Summit of the Council of Europe (October 1997) at which the heads of state and government of the Council of

Europe stressed “the importance of a more balanced representation of men and women in all sectors of society, including political life”, and called for “continued progress with a view to achieving effective equality of opportunities between women and men”;

Bearing in mind the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1950) and its Protocols;

Bearing in mind the European Social Charter (1961), the revised European Social Charter (1996) and the Additional Protocol to the European Social Charter providing for a System of Collective Complaints (1995);

Bearing in mind the texts adopted at the European Ministerial Conference on Human Rights held in Rome in 2000;

Bearing in mind the following Recommendations of the Committee of Ministers to member states of the Council of Europe: Recommendation No. R(85)2 on legal protection against sex discrimination; Recommendation No. R(96)5 on reconciling work and family life and Recommendation No. R(98)14 on gender mainstreaming;

Bearing in mind the following texts adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly: Recommendation 1229 (1994) on equality of rights between women and men; Recommendation 1269 (1995) on achieving real progress in women’s rights as from 1995 and Recommendation 1413 (1999) on equal representation in political life;

Bearing in mind the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;

Recalling the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979), especially its Articles 7 and 8;

Recalling also the commitments in the Beijing Platform for Action as well as in the Agreed Conclusions of the Special Session of the UN General Assembly in 2000 (Beijing +5);

Considering that democracy can no longer afford to ignore the competence, skills and creativity of women but must become gender sensitive and include women with different backgrounds and of different age groups in political and public decision making at all levels;

Mindful of the high priority the Council of Europe gives to the promotion of democracy and human rights,

Recommends that the governments of member states:

- I. commit themselves to promote balanced representation of women and men by recognising publicly that the equal sharing of decision-making power between women and men of different background and ages strengthens and enriches democracy;
- II. protect and promote the equal civil and political rights of women and men, including running for office and freedom of association;
- III. ensure that women and men can exercise their individual voting rights and, to this end, take all the necessary measures to eliminate the practice of family voting;
- IV. review their legislation and practice, with the aim of ensuring that the strategies and measures described in this recommendation are applied and implemented;
- V. promote and encourage special measures to stimulate and support women's will to participate in political and public decision making;
- VI. consider setting targets linked to a time scale with a view to reaching balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making;
- VII. ensure that this recommendation is brought to the attention of all relevant political institutions and to public and private bodies, in particular national parliaments, local and regional authorities, political parties, civil service, public and semi-public organisations, enterprises, trade unions, employers' organisations and non-governmental organisations;
- VIII. monitor and evaluate progress in achieving balanced participation of women and men in political and public life, and report regularly to the Committee of Ministers on the measures taken and progress made in this field.

### **Appendix to Recommendation Rec(2003)3**

For the purpose of this recommendation, balanced participation of women and men is taken to mean that the representation of either women or men in any decision-making body in political or public life should not fall below 40%.

On this basis, the governments of member states are invited to consider the following measures:

### **A. Legislative and administrative measures**

Member states should:

1. consider possible constitutional and/or legislative changes, including positive action measures, which would facilitate a more balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making;
2. adopt administrative measures so that official language reflects a balanced sharing of power between women and men;
3. consider adopting legislative reforms to introduce parity thresholds for candidates in elections at local, regional, national and supra-national levels. Where proportional lists exist, consider the introduction of zipper systems;
4. consider action through the public funding of political parties in order to encourage them to promote gender equality;
5. where electoral systems are shown to have a negative impact on the political representation of women in elected bodies, adjust or reform those systems to promote gender-balanced representation;
6. consider adopting appropriate legislative measures aimed at restricting the concurrent holding of several elected political offices simultaneously;
7. adopt appropriate legislation and/or administrative measures to improve the working conditions of elected representatives at the local, regional, national and supra-national levels to ensure more democratic access to elected bodies;
8. adopt appropriate legislative and/or administrative measures to support elected representatives in the reconciliation of their family and public responsibilities and, in particular, encourage parliaments and local and regional authorities to ensure that their timetables and working methods enable elected representatives of both sexes to reconcile their work and family life;
9. consider adopting appropriate legislative and/or administrative measures to ensure that there is gender-balanced representation in all appointments made by a minister or government to public committees;

10. ensure that there is a gender-balanced representation in posts or functions whose holders are nominated by government and other public authorities;
11. ensure that the selection, recruitment and appointment processes for leading positions in public decision making are gender sensitive and transparent;
12. make the public administration exemplary both in terms of a gender-balanced distribution of decision-making positions and in equal career development for women and men;
13. consider adopting appropriate legislative and/or administrative measures to ensure that there is gender-balanced representation in all national delegations to international organisations and fora;
14. take due account of gender balance when appointing representatives to international mediation and negotiating committees, particularly in the peace process or the settlement of conflicts;
15. consider taking legislative and/or administrative measures aiming at encouraging and supporting employers to allow those participating in political and public decision making to have the right to take time off from their employment without being penalised;
16. set up, where necessary, support and strengthen the work of the national equality machinery in bringing about balanced participation in political and public life;
17. encourage parliaments at all levels to set up parliamentary committees or delegations for women's rights and equal opportunities and to implement gender mainstreaming in all their work;

## **B. Supportive measures**

Member states should:

18. support, by all appropriate measures, programmes aimed at stimulating a gender balance in political life and public decision making initiated by women's organisations and all organisations working for gender equality;
19. consider the setting up of a data bank of women willing to serve in political and public decision-making positions;

20. support and develop women's political action by providing the opportunity for women elected representatives to network at the local, regional, national and international levels;
21. develop and support mentoring/work-shadowing programmes, confidence building, leadership and media training for women considering entering political and public decision making;
22. encourage training for women candidates and elected representatives in the use of information and communication technologies;
23. incorporate into school curricula education and training activities aimed at sensitising young people about gender equality and preparing them for democratic citizenship;
24. promote the participation of young people, especially young women, in associations to enable them to acquire experience, knowledge and capacities which are transferable to the field of institutional, and especially political, participation;
25. encourage youth organisations to ensure a balanced participation of women and men in their decision-making structures;
26. encourage greater involvement of ethnic and cultural minorities, and especially women from these minorities, in decision making at all levels;
27. inform political parties of the different strategies used in the various countries to promote the balanced participation of women and men in elected assemblies; encourage them to implement one or more of these strategies and to promote balanced participation of women and men in positions of decision making within the party structures;
28. support programmes initiated by the social partners (employers' and workers' organisations) to promote balanced participation of women and men in positions of responsibility and decisionmaking, within their own ranks and in the context of collective bargaining;
29. encourage enterprises and associations to ensure balanced representation of women and men in their decision-making bodies, in particular those subsidised for providing public services or implementing public policies;

30. promote campaigns aimed at the general public in order to raise its awareness of the importance of gender-balanced representation in political and public decision making as a prerequisite for genuine democracy;
31. promote campaigns aimed at encouraging the sharing of responsibilities between women and men in the private sphere;
32. promote campaigns aimed at specific groups, in particular politicians, social partners and those who recruit and nominate political and public decision makers, in order to raise their awareness of the importance of gender-balanced representation in political and public decisionmaking;
33. organise interactive seminars on gender equality for key people in society, such as leaders and top officials, to make them aware of the importance of the balanced participation of women and men in all levels of decisionmaking;
34. support non-governmental organisations and research institutes that conduct studies on women's participation in and impact on decision-making and the decision-making environment;
35. carry out research on the distribution of votes according to opinion polls in order to determine the voting patterns of women and men;
36. promote research on the obstacles which prevent women's access to political and public decision-making at the different levels and publish the results;
37. promote research on women's participation in social and voluntary sector decision-making;
38. promote gender-sensitive research on the roles, functions, status and working conditions of elected representatives at all levels;
39. promote balanced participation in decision-making positions in the media, including management, programming, education, training, research and regulatory bodies;
40. support training and awareness-raising for students of journalism and media professionals on questions linked to gender equality and how to avoid sexist stereotypes and sexism;
41. encourage media professionals to ensure that women and men candidates and elected representatives receive equal visibility in the media, especially during election periods.

### **C. Monitoring**

Member states should:

42. consider establishing independent bodies, such as a parity observatory or a special independent mediation body, with a view to following governmental policy in the field of balanced participation of women and men in political and public life, or entrust national equality machineries with this task;
43. consider setting up and applying indicators for the monitoring and evaluation of the balanced participation of women and men in decision making on the basis of internationally comparable gender segregated data;
44. consider adopting the following indicators for measuring progress in the field of political and public decision-making:
  - i. the percentage of women and men elected representatives in parliaments (supra-national/national/federal/regional) and local assemblies according to political party;
  - ii. the percentage of women and men elected representatives in parliaments (supra-national/national) compared to the number of candidates according to political party (the success rate);
  - iii. the percentage of women and men in national delegations to nominated assemblies such as the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly and Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe and to international organisations and fora;
  - iv. the percentage of women and men in national, federal and regional governments;
  - v. the number of women and men senior/junior ministers in the different fields of action (portfolios/ministries) of the national, federal and regional governments of the member states;
  - vi. the percentage of the highest ranking women and men civil servants and their distribution in different fields of action;
  - vii. the percentage of women and men judges in the supreme court;
  - viii. the percentage of women and men in bodies appointed by the government;
  - ix. the percentage of women and men in the decision-making bodies of political parties at national level;



- x. the percentage of women and men members of employer, labour and professional organisations and the percentage of women and men in their decision-making bodies at national level;
- 45. submit, every other year, reports to their national parliaments on the measures taken and progress made according to the indicators listed above;
- 46. publish, every other year, reports on the measures taken and progress made in women's involvement in decision-making and disseminate these reports widely;
- 47. publish and make readily accessible, statistics on candidates for political office and on elected representatives containing information on sex, age, occupation, occupational sector (private/public), education;
- 48. encourage the regular analysis of the visibility and portrayal of women and men in national news and current affairs programmes, especially during election campaigns.



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