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The situation of women in the South Caucasus

Reply to Recommendation¹: Recommendation 1790 (2007)
Committee of Ministers

1. The Committee of Ministers has duly considered Parliamentary Assembly [Recommendation 1790 \(2007\)](#) on the situation of women in the South Caucasus and concurs with the Assembly's view that an effort must be made to promote women's participation at all levels of public and political life. This entails, where necessary, continuing to encourage women's effective access to education, including higher education.
2. In the context of the assistance and co-operation programmes for the countries of the South Caucasus, which the Parliamentary Assembly welcomes in paragraph 2 of its recommendation, the Council of Europe has implemented a number of activities, such as seminars on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making (for example, the Seminar on Women's Participation in Elections as Candidates and Voters held in July 2005 as part of the Council of Europe action plan with a view to the parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan). In the same vein, promoting women's participation in elections is one component of the pre-electoral assistance programmes recently introduced for the benefit of the South Caucasus countries. Attention could also be paid to this matter in the context of the future action plans aimed at providing assistance to the South Caucasian countries.
3. As the Assembly underlines in paragraph 3 of its recommendation, it is very important to mainstream a gender perspective in the activities. Already in 1998, a message of the Committee of Ministers on mainstreaming gender equality called on Council of Europe bodies to adopt such an approach in their activities.
4. In response to paragraph 4 of the recommendation, the Committee of Ministers recalls that, following its own declaration of 1988 and the declaration adopted at the 4th European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men, held in Istanbul in 1997, gender equality has been recognised within the Council of Europe as an integral part of human rights and a fundamental requirement of democracy. The Council of Europe's action to promote equality between women and men both in its member states and within the organisation itself is founded on these two principles. The 7th European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men, to be held in Azerbaijan in 2010, will provide an opportunity to take stock of progress made by member states in this area.
5. Concerning prison reform, in recent years, the Council of Europe has run assistance programmes for Azerbaijan and Georgia and a similar programme is to be launched for Armenia. It encourages the three countries to pursue the prison and criminal law reforms they have initiated, paying special attention to the application of justice to women.
6. With regard to fostering women's participation in conflict resolution, as recommended in paragraph 6, the Committee of Ministers could draw attention to the fact that this was the subject of the 5th European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men, held in Skopje in January 2003 on the theme "Democratisation, conflict prevention and peace-building: the perspectives and the roles of women". The resolution adopted at this conference called for full participation of women at all levels of decision making in local, national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management and

1. Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 16 January 2008, at the 1015th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies.



resolution of conflicts, including peace negotiations, and the democratisation of post-conflict societies. It also pointed out that policies for women's full participation must be supported by the integration of a gender perspective in all activities aimed at conflict prevention and resolution, including peace agreements, the promotion of peace and construction of a democratic society. As part of the follow-up action to this conference, a draft recommendation on the role of women and men in conflict prevention and resolution and in peace-building is now nearing completion.

7. Furthermore, in 2003, the Council of Europe provided assistance to an NGO in Azerbaijan under the confidence-building measures programme (project entitled "Training Programme Ethnic Minorities: Living without Conflicts") with a view to promoting conflict prevention and peace-building. This type of activity could continue and even be intensified in the region. Lastly, Recommendation Rec(2003)3 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making, adopted in March 2003, also recommends, in paragraph 14 of the appendix, that governments consider enhancing gender balance when appointing representatives to international mediation and negotiating committees, particularly in peace processes and conflict settlement.

8. As regards paragraph 7 of the Assembly recommendation, the Committee of Ministers attaches importance to the participation of all member states, including Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, in the Council of Europe's campaign on combating trafficking in human beings. On this matter, it recalls that seminars on the fight against trafficking in human beings were organised in 2005 in Georgia and in September 2007 in Armenia in the context of the promotion of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. It welcomes the action plans adopted by the three countries regarding the fight against trafficking in human beings. It also welcomes the fact that Georgia has already ratified the above-mentioned convention and that Armenia has initiated the procedure for the ratification of this instrument. The Committee of Ministers hopes that this procedure will be completed rapidly. It encourages Azerbaijan to sign and ratify the convention.

9. With regard to the Council of Europe Campaign to Combat Violence against Women, including domestic violence, the three countries of the South Caucasus have designated focal points and high-level officials to develop their national campaigns.² The Committee of Ministers encourages these countries to go further by introducing political and legal measures in the spheres of victim support and protection, data collection and awareness raising. It welcomes the fact that Georgia adopted the law on domestic violence in 2006 and in July 2007 an action plan on measures to prevent and combat domestic violence, which covers the period 2007-2008. It also welcomes the national action plan covering the period 2004-2010 on the improvement of the status of women in Armenia, which provides in particular for measures to combat violence against women, as well as the state programme on the fight against domestic violence adopted in Azerbaijan for the period 2007-2011.

2. Contact details for these focal points and high-level officials can be found on the campaign website: <http://www.coe.int/stopviolence/intergov>.