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Impact of electoral systems on women's representation in politics

Motion for a resolution

tabled by Ms Lydie ERR and other members of the Assembly

This motion has not been discussed in the Assembly and commits only those who have signed it

Equal participation of women and men in political life is one of the foundations of democracy. Like any other political question, it is tied to political will.

Yet in spite of the progress achieved, women's political rights are still far from being a reality. In Europe, women represent only 21.1% of the membership of parliaments, according to Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) figures, whereas it would take a 40% proportion of male or female members to constitute the necessary critical mass to be capable of influencing the decisions to be reached.

In its declaration on women's participation in elections, the Venice Commission considered that the obligation to ensure a composition of lists of candidates alternating men and women in elections by a list system, and the obligation to ensure a balanced percentage of women and men among candidates of the same party for elections in single-member constituencies, were consistent with the principle of equal suffrage.

On the occasion of a seminar on "Equal participation of women and men in political decision making: state of affairs in 2007" on 9 November 2007 at the Latvian Parliament in Riga, the participants stressed the decisive role of electoral systems for women's representation in political life.

The Nordic countries are where women are best represented in politics. The situation is that in Finland and Sweden, for example, the electoral systems are founded on proportional representation and the political parties have applied internal quotas. This combination has made it possible to place as many women as men on the electoral lists in a position of eligibility. It shows that proportional representation systems afford more opportunities to present balanced candidacies, reflecting the different sensibilities of the electorate in some respects.

It is plain from IPU statistics that fewer women are elected under systems of election in single-member constituencies. Political parties, seeking to make sure of their single candidate's election, have been found to argue mistakenly that men are better placed than women to win an election.

The Parliamentary Assembly should analyse the impact of electoral systems on the number of male and female elected representatives, and where necessary envisage temporary proactive measures to attain the critical mass of 40% of both male and female representatives in all elected bodies. In particular, it should ascertain how political parties could make arrangements in their rules of procedure for balanced representation of women and men.



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The committee proposes to carry out a study on the impact of electoral systems on women's participation in political life in order to examine ways of attaining a critical mass of at least 40% of both male and female representatives in all elected bodies.

Signed (see overleaf)

*Signed*¹:

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