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Assessing the impact of measures to improve women's political representation

Report[1]
Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination
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Summary

Although the figures have improved significantly over the last decade, the representation of women in politics is still largely disproportionate in most Council of Europe member States.

Women's participation in public life is determined by a variety of factors, be they political (electoral system, political parties' statutes, candidate selection criteria), social (such as the welfare system, parental leave schemes and measures to balance work and family life), economic (for instance the gender pay gap and access to professions and careers) or cultural (notably stereotypes on gender roles). Access to the media and to funding is also crucial for women who are active in politics.

Electoral quotas are the most effective positive measures, provided they are ambitious, designed in a manner which takes into account the type of electoral system in force, and coupled with effective sanctions for non-compliance. However, in order to ensure the impact of positive measures in the longer term, accompanying measures are also necessary.

The choice and combination of positive and accompanying measures depends on the social, cultural and political landscape of each country. In addition, the experience of Sweden and other countries shows that political representation reflects the role of women in public life in general and is the result of a holistic approach, encompassing qualitative and quantitative measures and based on a gender perspective in all areas of society.

1. Reference to committee: Doc. 13571, Reference 4079 of 3 October 2014.

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A. Draft resolution[2]

1. The Parliamentary Assembly notes that, in spite of political commitments and legal obligations under international equality and non-discrimination standards, women are still vastly under-represented in politics in most Council of Europe member States. In almost one third of them, the proportion of women among members of parliament does not reach 20%. Such a level hinders the representative nature of elected bodies. It is time to step up efforts. Whenever member States review their regulations governing elections, they should adopt measures to promote the participation of women that are able to have both significant impact and sustainability in the longer term.

2. Electoral quotas are the most effective measures to achieve significant, rapid progress, provided that they are correctly designed and consistently implemented. Quotas should be adapted to the electoral system in force, set ambitious targets and be coupled with stringent sanctions for non-compliance.

3. Accompanying measures are also needed to help women overcome the hurdles they face in accessing and progressing in political life. They include training and awareness-raising activities, media time reserved for women politicians, measures to help reconcile private life and political activities and, last but not least, legislation and other measures in favour of more equal sharing of family responsibilities between women and men.

4. Political factors determining women's participation in public life certainly include the electoral system, political parties and their statutes, candidate selection criteria, positive measures such as quotas, whether legal or voluntary, regulations, and the action of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and associations. The most general factor is the enshrinement in the constitution of the principle of gender equality, subsequently reflected in legislation and in the action of governments and institutions.

5. Relevant social factors are the welfare system, parental leave schemes, the sharing of care and household duties, measures to balance work and family life and pension schemes.

6. Among the economic factors, the gender pay gap and access to professions and careers is particularly relevant, as is the financing of small businesses.

7. Cultural factors determine the actual possibility for women to participate both in political life and in the economic and social development of a country. Education and training are crucial, as they are a precondition for acquiring the necessary skills and for eradicating the stereotypes which still prevent the achievement of full and real parity. These stereotypes are often related to a vision of women as part of the household context with a merely parental role.

8. For women who are active in politics, access to media, representation and media space allocated during electoral campaigns are crucial elements, as is campaign funding.

9. These elements should not be considered separately, as they are in fact closely intertwined. The right approach to adopt in order to achieve full gender equality in political life is a global, holistic one, encompassing quantitative and qualitative measures with a gender perspective in all areas of society.

10. Progress in the field of women's political representation has been achieved, in particular by means of reforms introducing equal constitutional rights such as the right to vote and to be elected, the right of access to public office and other fundamental rights and freedoms, such as the right to property, inheritance, marriage, citizenship, etc. These constitutional rights are aimed at removing discrimination on grounds of sex or any other discrimination limiting equal citizenship. Provisions on political and civil rights for women in the various constitutions pave the way for gender equality and for equal citizenship and are the foundation for more specific action for equality.

11. The electoral system has an impact on women's political representation. Even if quotas are not applied, the various electoral systems will in themselves work differently when it comes to the representation of women. Systems that are entirely or partially based on proportional representation appear to be more effective in promoting the election of female candidates than plurality/majority systems based entirely on single-member constituencies.

2. Draft resolution adopted by the committee on 11 March 2016.

12. The Assembly reiterates that political parties have a crucial role to play in improving women's political representation. As the main stakeholders in charge of submitting electoral lists and supporting the candidates, political parties are gatekeepers to elected positions and their choices determine to a large extent the final outcome of the elections as concerns gender-balanced representation.

13. The media are also key players in determining the visibility of candidates and the general image of women. They should avoid perpetuating gender stereotypes which are a barrier to the access of women to political life. They should also guarantee fair and proportionate airtime to political candidates irrespective of their gender.

14. The Assembly underlines the importance of the gender dimension in election observation missions. The Assembly is committed to promoting this dimension with its international partner organisations in the framework of election observation missions both concerning the composition of missions, which should be gender balanced, and the observation reports which should systematically include a specific focus on women's participation in all stages of the electoral process.

15. In the light of these considerations, the Assembly calls on the Council of Europe member and observer States, as well as partners for democracy, to spare no effort to increase women's political representation. They should, in particular:

15.1. consider introducing the principle of parity into their Constitution or into their electoral legislation;

15.2. with regard to quotas and other positive measures:

15.2.1. include, if possible, in the legislation on the functioning of political parties regulations on the nomination of candidates aimed at ensuring equal gender representation; such regulations should respect the principle of proportionality and be the least burdensome to political parties' autonomy;

15.2.2. introduce applicable sanctions for non-compliance with positive measures, such as rejection of lists of candidates; ensure that independent bodies such as electoral courts or commissions supervise the implementation of quotas and other positive measures and apply sanctions; allocate adequate financial and human resources to ensure the good functioning of relevant bodies;

15.2.3. attempt to introduce electoral legislation based on strict placement mandates or duos of paired candidates of the opposite sex;

15.2.4. regularly monitor the impact of the implementation of quotas and other positive measures aimed at increasing the political representation of women and propose relevant recommendations;

15.2.5. encourage political parties to ensure transparency in procedures for the selection of candidates and enhance women's representation through gender-balanced candidate nomination boards and internal decision-making bodies at all levels;

15.2.6. encourage political parties to enhance women's participation, including through women's associations, capacity-building efforts and mechanisms to support women in campaign financing;

15.3. With regard to accompanying measures:

15.3.1. encourage parliaments and other elected bodies to adopt measures to reconcile their activities with the private life of members, such as compatible session and voting times, and childcare services;

15.3.2. promote training and awareness-raising activities on gender equality targeting politicians irrespective of their gender; encourage political parties and other organisations to provide training for women politicians;

15.3.3. consider introducing incentives to increase awareness of women in politics among the media, both quantitatively and qualitatively, to ensure fair coverage of women in politics in the media;

15.3.4. ensure that part of the public funding of political parties, when applicable, is reserved for activities aimed at promoting women's participation and political representation and ensure transparency in the use of the funds;

15.4. with regard to electoral management and observation:

15.4.1. ensure that electoral commissions apply provisions on gender equality in the electoral process and involve them in the legislative process when reviewing electoral legislation;

15.4.2. strengthen co-operation with international election observation missions as regards the participation of women in the electoral process and provide them with comprehensive information and gender-disaggregated data;

15.5. with regard to research and data collection:

15.5.1. promote research and data collection on women's participation in political life at national, regional and local level;

15.5.2. promote the collection of gender-disaggregated statistical data by electoral management bodies and relevant administrations;

15.5.3. regularly assess the impact of national legislation and policies aimed at increasing women's political participation and, when needed, propose the relevant amendments;

15.5.4. collect, by means of surveys and research, data on the way in which men and women vote in order to identify, analyse and assess how men and women support candidates of their own sex;

15.6. with regard to civil society:

15.6.1. recognise the role of civil society and involve NGOs in designing, promoting and monitoring measures to increase women's political representation, particularly as concerns awareness-raising campaigns, training activities and monitoring of the implementation of measures;

15.6.2. encourage and support NGOs involved in the area of elections to monitor and report on women's participation in the electoral processes.

16. The Assembly supports the principle of gender parity, which would represent a further step beyond positive measures and the ultimate goal in political representation. Consistent enforcement of such a principle requires the State to go beyond positive measures and ensure equal representation of women and men in elected bodies and other institutions at all levels.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Elena Centemero, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. Although well over half of Europe's population are women,[3] and in spite of legal obligations and political commitments made by Council of Europe member States and their leaders, the institutions that make up our political systems have long been composed overwhelmingly of men. As the European Commission on Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) states in its Guidelines on Political Parties Regulation, "the small number of women in politics remains a critical issue which undermines the full functioning of democratic process".[4] I can only agree with this statement. Indeed, the current level of political representation of women is at odds with the principle of gender equality which should be one of the pillars of our democracies. Representative democracy, in spite of its shortcomings, is the fairest and most efficient system for governing complex societies. However, if the largest share of the population is not adequately represented, the question arises whether the system can be considered representative, and even democratic.

2. Changing this state of affairs requires the men who hold power, and who may have been holding it for long periods of time, to relinquish it. This result often cannot be achieved simply by asking, but may require either proactive measures such as the introduction of legal obligations, or sweeping changes in society's approach to these issues, or both.[5]

3. As one recent report noted, "At the current rate of progress, a child born today will be drawing her pension before she has any chance of being equally represented in the Parliament of her country".[6] Yet women have the right to be involved, and States have a duty to involve them, in political decision-making. There is indeed no credible reason why politics should be treated differently from any other field of life as regards the aim of achieving gender equality; on the contrary, the lack of representation of women in politics undermines the very democratic legitimacy of the bodies concerned.

4. The Parliamentary Assembly has consistently taken a stand in favour of measures intended to address the under-representation of women in democratic institutions.[7] Moreover, in the last decades, a wide range of measures have been introduced, in Europe and beyond, to enhance women's representation in politics. Research has been carried out on the current situation of women's political representation and a variety of sources provide information about it. Such research is essential to understanding the present situation as well as the mechanisms that created it.

5. However, little attention seems to have been paid so far to assessing the impact of the measures already adopted to improve women's political representation. There is also a need to examine whether measures already taken, and that have had a positive impact in the short term, have sustainable effects. This is why, prior to recommending new legislation and policies, I deem it necessary to analyse the measures introduced up until now and to evaluate their impact. It is important also to understand the specific contexts in which different measures may be most effective. The ultimate goal of this report is to identify successful policies, describe their functioning and recommend their adoption in contexts in which they are likely to produce positive results.

2. Methodology

6. In this report, I have looked into both the current level of political representation of women in Europe and the impact of measures so far introduced to promote their participation. I focused primarily on the representation of women in elected bodies, and especially in national parliaments.

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3. Out of a total population of 826 million Europeans in Council of Europe member States, approximately 400 million are men and 426 million are women – a ratio of 93.9 men to every 100 women. Figures based on the 2013 Demographic Yearbook of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, New York, 2014, Tables 2 and 6.
4. Document CDL-AD(2010)024, paragraph 99.
5. Réjane Sénac, Chairperson of the Committee on Parity in politics, administration and in the economic and social life, High Council on Gender Equality (France), presentation at the meeting of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination in Paris on 20 March 2015.
6. Centre for Women and Democracy, Sex and Power 2013: Who runs Britain? 2013.
7. See for example Resolution 1898 (2012) on political parties and women's political representation, Resolution 1780 (2010) and Recommendation 1949 (2010) on promoting the most favourable gender equality laws in Europe; Resolution 1615 (2008) and Recommendation 1838 (2008) on empowering women in a modern, multicultural society; Resolution 1489 (2006) and Recommendation 1738 (2006) on mechanisms to ensure women's participation in decision making; Recommendation 1676 (2004) on women's participation in elections.

7. I highlighted both the progress that has been achieved in individual Council of Europe member States and identified obstacles to women's participation in political life. I took account, where possible, of comparative studies to throw light on the reasons why different practices may be more or less effective in different political contexts. Within the Council of Europe, for example, the Venice Commission adopted a report on "The method of nomination of candidates within political parties", analysing the criteria, including gender, that are applied by political parties in selecting candidates. Ms Maria del Carmen Alanis Figueroa, one of the rapporteurs for this report, took part in a hearing with our committee on 10 September 2015, which represented an excellent opportunity to discuss the various aspects of this matter.

8. I deemed it important to complement this work with direct input from experts and guest speakers invited to hearings at committee meetings. For instance, I found it relevant for the committee to learn about the experience of the informal, cross-party Women's Parliamentary Network set up in Serbia in 2013, which Ms Obradović presented during the meeting of the Sub-Committee on Gender Equality on 25 June 2014 in Strasbourg. It was also useful to learn about political representation of women in France, through the presentation of Ms Réjane Sénac, Chairperson of the Committee on Parity in politics, administration and economic and social life, High Council on Gender Equality (France), at the committee's meeting in Paris on 20 March 2015. At the meeting of 10 September 2015, in addition to Ms Alanis Figueroa of the Venice Commission, Ms Zeina Hilal of the Inter-Parliamentary Union provided the committee with interesting information on trends about political representation of women. The added value of both experts' presentations was that their geographic scope was not limited to Europe. While the Assembly's texts are mainly aimed at Council of Europe member States, it is often useful to take into account lessons learned in other parts of the world, such as Latin America and Africa. I also received worthwhile input from Ms Marilisa D'Amico, Professor of Constitutional Law at Milan University, expert on gender-equal democracy and co-ordinator of the course on "Women, politics and institutions" at that University. I also had valuable indications from Ms Maria Elena Boschi, Italian Minister of Constitutional Reforms and Relations with the Parliament.

9. I have also relied on the help of the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD) and sent out a questionnaire to collect information about women's political representation in all Council of Europe member States and beyond. Thirty-four research services within ECPRD member parliaments, from 32 Council of Europe member States as well as observers Canada and Israel, replied to the questionnaire. The information collected through this questionnaire supports in particular my conclusions as regards "accompanying measures" (those adopted in addition to positive measures, to strengthen their impact and make it sustainable in the longer term).

10. In addition, I took part in the Assembly's observation mission of the Turkey parliamentary elections which took place on 1 November 2015. In this report, I present my considerations about these elections under the specific angle of women's political representation. Furthermore, on 10 and 11 November 2015, I conducted a fact-finding visit to Sweden, a country that I chose in view of its outstanding record in matters of gender equality. Sweden ranks first in the latest European Union gender equality index calculated by the European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE), with a score of 74.3 (the European Union average being 54%), and political representation contributes to achieving this rank. I also made use of the valuable information shared by participants in the 3rd International Conference of the North-South Process for the Empowerment of Women on "The participation of women in political life in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean Countries: Challenges and Opportunities", which took place in Rabat, Morocco, on 17 and 18 June 2014. This conference, co-organised by the Council of Europe's European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity (North-South Centre) and the Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Co-operation, in partnership with the Parliamentary Assembly and the Gender Equality Division of the Council of Europe, dealt in particular with gender-equal democracy in Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Libya and Morocco.

11. I consider as part of the preparation of this report my participation in the Regional Conference on gender equality in electoral processes, organised by the Venice Commission in co-operation with the Central election commission of Georgia, held in Tbilisi on 25 and 26 November 2015. Not only did I share with the other participants some of the information and the recommendations contained in this report; I also had opportunities for fruitful exchanges, including with Ms Khatuna Totladze, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, and with a number of experts from intergovernmental organisations, which are reflected in these pages.

12. Finally, I would like to thank my fellow members of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination for contributing to the preparation of this report with their ideas. Within our committee, increasing political representation of women finds support across the political spectrum. I hope that this will become increasingly the case also in national parliaments.

3. Facts and figures

13. The results of the last elections to the European Parliament illustrate both the overall progress achieved and the fact that such progress should never be taken for granted. In 1979, the percentage of women elected stood at 16%. Since then, the overall percentage of women holding seats in the European Parliament has increased at every election.[8] From the previous elections in 2009 to the most recent elections in 2014, the percentage of women elected thus rose from 35.05% to 36.88%. This overall increase however masks significant variations between individual countries: for example, the percentage of women MEPs from Ireland and Lithuania, which was in both cases 25% (3 out of 12 MEPs) in 2009, increased to 55% (6 out of 11 MEPs) in 2014 in the case of Ireland, but decreased to 9% (1 out of 11 MEPs) in Lithuania.[9]

14. At national level, only four national parliaments in the 47 Council of Europe member States currently include a proportion of more than 40% of women.[10] At the elections of December 2015, a record proportion of women were elected members of the low chamber of the Spanish Parliament (39%, up from 35%). Only 13 (including the above four parliaments) are composed of one-third or more women,[11]and only a further seven national parliaments include a proportion of between one-quarter and one-third women[12]. In other words, in the remaining 27 out of 47 Council of Europe member States, the number of women in the lower house of parliament or single-chamber parliament stands at less than 25%.[13] In my country, Italy, female members have constituted 31% of the Chamber of Deputies (the parliament's lower house) since the elections of 2013, and 28% in the Senate, with an increase due mostly to the choice of candidates by political parties. There has been some welcome progress at the lower end of the spectrum, in that currently no member State has less than 10% of women in their national parliaments;[14] this compares with five member States in 2005 and three in 2008.[15]Overall, however, it is evident that there remains considerable room for improvement in women's political representation in national parliaments.

15. These data highlight that gender equality and women's political participation depend on a variety of factors and the various political, economic, social and cultural contexts in each country. For instance, women obtained the most basic right in this field, namely the right to vote, only in the last century: for the first time in 1906 in Finland and as late as in the 1970s in other countries.

16. Political factors determining women's participation in public life certainly include the electoral system, political parties and their statutes, candidate selection criteria, positive measures such as quotas, whether legal or voluntary, legal regulations and the action of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and associations. The most general factor is the enshrinement in the constitution of the principle of gender equality, then reflected in legislation and in the action of governments and institutions.

17. Relevant social factors are the welfare system, parental leave schemes, the sharing of care and household duties, measures to balance work and family life and pension schemes.

18. Among the economic factors, the gender pay gap and access to professions and careers is particularly relevant, as is the financing of small businesses.

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8. Official figures published by the European Parliament, www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/fr/gender-balance.html.
9. Ibid.
10. International Parliamentary Union, Women in Parliaments: World Classification, situation as at 1 August 2015. The four member States, in descending order of the percentage of women in the lower or single house of parliament, are Sweden, Finland, Iceland and Spain.
11. Ibid. The nine additional member States are Andorra, Norway, Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Germany, Serbia and "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia".
12. Ibid. The seven further member States are Portugal, Italy, Austria, Switzerland, Luxembourg, France and Croatia.
13. Ibid. The States where less than 25% of members of the national parliament (lower or single house) are women are Poland, Lithuania, Greece, the United Kingdom, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Monaco, the Republic of Moldova, Albania, Bulgaria, Liechtenstein, Estonia, the Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic, Latvia, Montenegro, San Marino, Ireland, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Romania, the Russian Federation, Malta, Cyprus, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia and Hungary.
14. Ibid. Hungary currently has the lowest level of representation of women among the national parliaments of Council of Europe member States, with only 10.1% of the members of its unicameral parliament being women.
15. Armenia, Hungary, Italy, Turkey and Ukraine in 2005 and Armenia, Turkey and Ukraine in 2008. See Parity Democracy: a far cry from reality: Comparative study on the results of the first and second rounds of monitoring of Council of Europe Recommendation Rec (2003) 3 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 2010.

19. Cultural factors determine the actual possibility for women to participate both in political life and in the economic and social development of a country. Education and training are crucial, as they are a precondition for acquiring the necessary skills and to eradicate the stereotypes which still prevent the achievement of full and real parity. These stereotypes are often related to a vision of women as part of the household context with a merely parental role.

20. For women who are active in politics, access to media, representation and media space allocated during electoral campaigns are crucial themes, and so is funding for the campaign.

21. The extensive work that I have carried out in the preparation of this report leads to the conclusion that the above elements should not be considered separately, as they are in fact closely intertwined, and affect each other differently in the social and cultural context of each country. The right approach to adopt to achieve full gender equality in political life is, therefore, a global, holistic one, which includes quantitative and qualitative measures.

4. Constitutions and constitutional rights

22. Progress in the field of women's political representation has been achieved when legislators have introduced rules aimed at tackling the issue of low female representation in representative elected bodies, in particular by means of reforms introducing equal constitutional rights such as the right to vote and to be elected, right of access to public office and other fundamental rights and freedoms, such as the right to property, inheritance, marriage, citizenship, etc. These constitutional rights are aimed at removing discrimination on grounds of sex or any other discrimination limiting equal citizenship.

23. Provisions on political and civil rights for women in the various constitutions pave the way for gender equality and for equal citizenship and are the foundation for more specific action for equality.

24. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, refers to "the equal rights of men and women". The concept of equality between women and men was then expanded through the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), to which 189 United Nations member States are Parties. All constitutions or basic laws of the member States of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) enshrine full citizenship and equality for women, together with full electoral rights. However, it is worth noting that many reforms leading to formal equality are recent: voting rights were granted to women only in 1971 in Switzerland, in 1976 (abolition of all remaining restrictions) in Portugal and in 1978 in the Republic of Moldova.

5. Electoral systems

25. The electoral system chosen in a country will have a direct impact on women's political participation. The electoral system is the way in which votes are translated into seats and they can be classified into three main families, depending on the seat allocation formula: plurality/majority, proportional and mixed system, and a fourth with electoral systems which do not fit easily into the three main families. Even if quotas are not applied, the various electoral systems will in themselves work differently when it comes to the representation of women.[16]

26. While I do not intend to examine in detail the impact of electoral systems themselves on parity in political representation, it is a well-established finding that in general systems that are entirely based on proportional representation, or that include an element of proportional representation, appear to be more effective in promoting the election of female candidates than plurality/majority systems based entirely on single-member constituencies.[17]

27. However, in order to understand the mechanisms at play, it is important to break them down into their constituent parts and look at their three main elements: district magnitude and party magnitude, the formula (plurality/majority or proportional) and the ballot structure.

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16. Designing for Equality – Best-fit, medium-fit and non-favourable combinations of electoral systems and gender quotas, International IDEA, Stockholm, 2007.

17. Venice Commission, Report on "The Impact of Electoral Systems on Women's Representation in Politics", adopted by the Council for Democratic Elections at its 28th meeting (Venice, March 2009) and the Venice Commission at its 79th plenary session (Venice, 12-13 June 2009), CDL-AD(2009)029; see in particular paragraphs 42-60.

28. As regards women's parliamentary representation, a crucial factor is whether the electoral system has single-member districts (SMDs) where only one parliamentarian is elected per constituency, or multi-member districts (MMDs) where several members of parliament are elected per constituency. In SMDs, each party can only nominate one person per district, and only the candidate who receives the simple or absolute majority of the votes (depending on the system) will be elected there. The challenge for potential female candidates is, first, to be nominated by her party (see section 8.1 below) and, second, to be elected by the voters. This can prove difficult. The nomination of women is often hindered by the aspirations of powerful male politicians of the same party and their "old boys' networks". SMDs are usually considered to be less conducive to female nomination and representation than MMDs.

29. As explained by Dr Michael Krennerich, senior researcher at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, recent empirical research suggests that it is not so much district magnitude as "party magnitude" that matters. Only if a party anticipates that it will win several seats in a constituency will ticket-balancing come into effect. District magnitude and party magnitude are clearly interrelated. With medium-sized or large constituencies, strong parties can expect to gain several seats, making strategies for ticket-balancing effective. High district and party magnitudes alone do not guarantee high female representation levels, but at least they allow for effectively applying ticket balancing strategies, if the political will exists[18].

30. The ballot structure defines how voters are allowed to express their choice. Electoral systems can be either candidate-centred or party-centred. It is easier to apply quotas in electoral systems that are party-centred.

31. Only in countries where well-designed gender quotas with strict placement mandates (that is rules on the rank of candidates in the list) exist, are the differences between the various district and party magnitudes not necessarily significant, as long as the parties gain several seats.

32. Due to the effect of party magnitude, women will theoretically be helped by both the combination of high electoral district magnitudes and high legal thresholds. According to the dynamics of ticket-balancing, the combination of proportional representation in large or even nation-wide districts with legal thresholds appears to be advantageous for women's nomination and representation.

33. However, electoral systems in place in each country are designed bearing in mind a number of competing aims. These typically involve ensuring the fair representation of political parties, avoiding excessive fragmentation of parties in so far as this may lead to counter-productive levels of political instability, allowing voters some possibility of voting for specific candidates, and ensuring that the electoral system is both sufficiently clear to voters and not excessively costly to the State authorities. No system is able to reconcile all of these aims perfectly, and therefore different States make different choices based on the aims considered most important in their specific socio-cultural and political context.[19]

34. Among the institutional factors at work in politics, not only the electoral system as described above but also gender quotas can strongly influence women's parliamentary representation, and political parties also play a crucial role in determining who – and relevantly for us, how many women – may eventually be elected to parliament. The latter elements are therefore examined in more depth below.

6. Quota systems

35. Electoral quotas are the main type of positive measure taken to increase women's political representation and a form of affirmative action to help them overcome the obstacles that prevent them from entering politics in the same way as their male colleagues. The Quota Project, a global online database on quota systems originating from the joint efforts of International IDEA, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and Stockholm University, points out that the use of electoral quotas for women is much more widespread than is commonly held, and that an increasing number of countries are introducing various types of gender quotas. At present, approximately half of the countries in the world use some type of electoral quota for parliamentary elections.

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18. This and the following three paragraphs reflect the presentation on "The impact of electoral systems, including gender candidate quotas, on women's representation in parliament" by Dr Michael Krennerich at the Regional Conference on gender equality in electoral processes, Tbilisi, Georgia, 25 November 2015.
19. Venice Commission, Report on the Impact of Electoral Systems on Women's Representation in Politics, op. cit.; see in particular paragraphs 42-60.

36. There are different types of quotas, the main distinction being between voluntary party quotas on the one hand and constitutional and legislative quotas on the other. Legislative quotas are enshrined in the electoral law, political party law or other comparable law of a country and are therefore binding for all political entities. Non-compliance with legislative or constitutional quotas can result in penalties, ranging from disqualifying candidates, to the imposition of fines, up to disqualification of the entire party. Voluntary party quotas are set up by parties themselves to guarantee the nomination of a certain number or proportion of women. They are not legally binding and there are therefore no sanctions to enforce them.

37. Quotas can be applied during the nomination process or can be results-based. When applied during the nomination process, the purpose of quotas is to make it easier for women to be placed on a party's list of candidates or in an electoral district. Regulations can range from loose to strict rules which prescribe a specific ranking of women-men. But merely requiring a certain percentage of proposed candidates to be women, without prescribing where to place them on the list, means that they can be placed at the end of the list, where the likelihood of their actually being elected is minimal.[20]

38. Result-based quotas ensure that either a percentage or a certain number of seats in a legislature are reserved for women. One form of result-based quotas is a separate "women-only" list in an electoral district, or a "women-only" electoral tier, electing women to a predetermined number of seats. Another form of result-based quota is the "best loser" system, which means that among the women candidates, those who received the most number of votes, up to the number set by the quota, are elected even though male candidates may have received more votes.

39. Whatever form they take, quotas need to be enshrined in the Constitution, the electoral law or the law on political parties to ensure that they are applied.

40. Support for quotas is far from unanimous and they raise criticism on several grounds. The main arguments against quota systems include the idea that they are in breach of the principle of equality, as some candidates are allegedly favoured over others based on their gender. They are also often viewed as reducing the freedom of choice of voters. Even many female politicians oppose quotas, as they "do not want to be elected just because they are women". However, support for quota systems is increasing as a new idea of gender equality gains ground: equality of results is replacing the older, more abstract concept of equal opportunities.

41. I myself changed my mind and I am now in favour of quotas, after I had the opportunity to attend a university course on women in politics, which gave me a much better understanding of the variety of barriers that women face both when entering a political activity and through all the subsequent steps (running for elections and campaigning, however important, is in fact only one of the many aspects of political life). I came to the conclusion that the competition is so unequal and the need to reverse the situation so urgent, that seemingly radical measures, such as gender quotas, are necessary.

42. A closer look at the situation in Europe shows that, in recent years, legally binding ("legislated") quotas for parliamentary elections have been introduced in a number of countries, including Albania, Armenia, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, France, Ireland, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain and "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia". Amongst these countries, representation of women currently ranges from 41.1% in the Spanish lower house to 10.7% in the Armenian Parliament.

43. In other countries, such as Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Norway, Sweden or the United Kingdom, some political parties have decided to apply voluntary quotas when drawing up party lists or allocating candidates to single-seat constituencies. Within this selection of countries, the representation of women ranges from 39.6% in Norway to 19% in the Czech Republic.

44. Still further countries, such as Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia and Liechtenstein, operate without any quotas at all. Here again, the proportion of women in the national parliament varies from 42.5% in Finland to 20% in Liechtenstein.[21]

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20. Designing for equality – What are quotas? International IDEA, Stockholm, 2007.

21. On the existence or otherwise of quota systems, see Venice Commission, report on "The Impact of Electoral Systems on Women's Representation in Politics", op. cit., and European Parliament Directorate General for Internal Policies, Policy Department C: Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs: Gender Equality, Electoral Gender Quota Systems and their Implementation in Europe: Update 2013: Note (European Union: Brussels, 2013), document PE 493.011. As regards the statistics on the representation of women, see International Parliamentary Union, Women in Parliaments: World Classification, situation as at 1 February 2015.

45. To take the example of two specific countries: in Poland, obligatory quotas are imposed on political parties: at least 35% of candidates in the electoral lists must be women. However, the proportion of women elected in the parliamentary elections in 2011 only reached 24%; in Denmark, where there are neither legally binding nor voluntary quotas in place, women constitute 39% of parliamentarians.

46. The above facts and figures make clear that the existence of a quota system (whether in the form of legislated or voluntary party quotas) does not automatically lead to a high level of representation of women in national parliaments. In addition, in a few countries a more gender-balanced representation has been reached without gender quotas. Countries having adopted obligatory quotas do not necessarily have better records than other countries having voluntary quotas or no quotas at all. I would like to discuss which factors have an influence on such divergent results.

47. The level of representation required by quota regulations is an important factor. Even in legally binding quota systems, the minimum percentage of candidates of any given sex may vary, from an equal share of women and men on party lists in Belgium and among the overall number of party candidates in France, to a specified minimum proportion of women of in most cases between 30% and 40%, to only 15% in Armenia's proportional representation system. The experience in several countries, particularly in Latin America, shows that in order to be effective, quotas should be ambitious. While the minimum proportion as set out on paper does not automatically translate into reality, it appears that a higher goal leads to higher results. Therefore, I believe that Council of Europe member States should consider introducing the principle of parity in their legislation. This requires strong political will and a wide consensus, as it may have important implications (in particular, a 50-50 parity system may be interpreted as permanent, as opposed to quotas which are generally considered as a temporary measure). This would represent an effective foundation for an authentically gender-equal democracy.

48. In addition, quota systems, whether legislated or voluntary, should not specify merely that parties should present a certain proportion of women candidates. In the case of Poland, the introduction of legally binding quotas did not produce the expected results as political parties in many cases put women candidates in lower positions on the list. Thus, unless quota systems include a requirement that a specified proportion of women candidates must be situated in winnable seats, or provide rules for the ranking order of candidates on a list, an increase in the proportion of women who stand as candidates will not necessarily translate into a higher proportion of women actually elected to parliament.

49. Even well-designed regulations on quotas can fail to have adequate impact due to a variety of external factors, linked to the general political situation. The case of the 2011 elections in Tunisia is a clear example of this. "Equality of opportunities between women and men to have access to all levels of responsibility and in all fields" is enshrined in the Tunisian Constitution and reflected in the electoral law, which imposes gender parity in the lists through a "zipper" system. However, in the wake of the "Arab spring" uprising and after the establishment of democratic institutions, the political landscape was so fragmented that over 80 parties and movements participated in the October 2011 elections with separate lists. Most movements only managed to have their head of list elected, who in the vast majority of cases was a man. This suggests that, depending on the electoral system, "horizontal" quotas (concerning the top, across the lists for different districts), as a complement to "vertical" ones, may be necessary to ensure that the system is effective.[22]

50. It is also well documented that even where legislated quota systems exist, their impact largely depends on whether and how effectively they are enforced. For example, despite the imposition of significant financial sanctions on political parties failing to respect legally binding quotas for parliamentary elections in France (50% of candidates of each sex), not all parties have complied. On the contrary, in some cases the parties deliberately chose to incur the sanctions rather than abide by legal obligations, as they deemed that a high proportion of female candidates would be detrimental to their electoral score.[23]The most effective sanction for non-compliance of provisions on quotas appears to be the rejection of the lists. This sanction, which for a question of proportionality may possibly be limited to cases of severe non-compliance, cannot be ignored by political parties. This has proved to be very efficient for instance in Senegal, where over 42% of members of the current parliament are women.

22. Zeina Hilal, Programme Officer, Gender Partnership Programme, Inter-Parliamentary Union, presentation at the committee's meeting in Paris on 10 September 2015.

23. Réjane Sénac, Chairperson of the Committee on Parity in politics, administration and in economic and social life, High Council on Gender Equality (France), presentation at the committee's meeting in Paris on 20 March 2015; see also Venice Commission, report on "The Impact of Electoral Systems on Women's Representation in Politics", op. cit.

51. The experience of the European elections in 2009 and 2014 confirms that whereas gender quotas are an effective tool for increasing women's presence in political bodies, they do not automatically result in equal representation of women and men. According to a study of 2013 of the European Parliament, quota provisions must incorporate rules about the placement of candidates on the list, and in a plurality/majority electoral system rules are needed with regard to the gender distribution of "winnable" or "safe" seats.[24]

52. Quotas must include rules about order of candidates and sanctions for non-compliance. The effectiveness of quota provisions also depends on the existence of institutional bodies that supervise the application of quotas and impose sanctions for non-compliance.

7. The participation of women in politics at local and regional level

53. As emerged in the debates within the committee, better political representation of women should begin at the local and regional level. This would ensure both a better representation of the diversity of population and an opportunity for women and men to develop a political career on an equal footing. While the proportion of women in national parliaments and within government cabinets is often used as an indicator of women's political representation, we should not forget that for many politicians, experience at local and regional level is a necessary step in the path towards political responsibilities at national level. All the main aspects of political activity, including running for elections, dealing with social and economic stakeholders and taking decisions affecting the life of a community, may be experienced at local and regional level.

54. As far back as 1999, the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities adopted Resolution 85 (1999) and Recommendation 68 (1999) on women's participation in political life in the regions of Europe. In the latter, the Congress called on member States to, among other things, amend national legislation with a view to removing the obstacles to implementing genuine equal opportunities for men and women in political life, and to introduce positive measures to facilitate women's access to public and political office.

55. Over a decade later, in 2010, the situation had not changed radically, as the Congress had to recall, in Resolution 303 (2010) on achieving sustainable gender equality in local and regional political life, that "in European local and regional political life, elected representatives do not always represent the diversity of the whole population". In that resolution, the Congress invited local and regional authorities to, among other things, encourage women to stand for elections, to ensure the renewal of persons having political mandates, to induce elected representatives to encourage and attract women to stand for elections, and to design or adopt action plans on promoting equality, involving women's organisations.

56. In Italy, a law of 2012 aimed to establish a more gender-balanced representation in elected bodies at local and regional level by means of a double gender preference and a requirement that at least one third of candidates in local elections be women. At regional level, these provisions are not often implemented, as it is left to each region to "promote equal access of men and women to elected mandates by means of measures promoting the access of candidates of the under-represented sex". The increased number of women elected as members of city councils shows that the positive measures set forth by the law are effective and should be enforced also at regional level.

57. I deem it important to constantly take into account the local and regional dimension. Achieving gender equality in political representation is a long-standing challenge which requires unity of action among all stakeholders. This means not only that women and men should co-operate to reach this goal, and politicians throughout the political spectrum, but also that all levels of political representation should benefit from increased gender sensitivity.

8. Measures and stakeholders

8.1. Political parties

58. "Contrary to what is commonly believed, generally speaking it is not the voter, but the political parties that decide who gets elected", gender expert Drude Dahlerup states.[25] Three key stages can be identified in the process of recruitment of candidates: self-selection by individuals expressing the wish to stand for

24. Ms Alanis Figueroa, presentation of the report of the Venice Commission on "The method of nomination of candidates within political parties", Paris, 10 September 2015.
25. Political Parties as Gatekeepers to Equal Political Representation, D. Dahlerup, University of Stockholm, 2006.

election, selection by political parties, and finally, election by voters. Research has shown that at the final stage, voters' choices are swayed primarily by parties, their policy positions and records, rather than by the question whether the parties' candidates are women or men.[26] Political parties thus largely determine the composition of parliaments (and of elected bodies at local and regional level). Therefore, they can play a crucial role in improving the political representation of women. Measures to increase the number of women in our parliaments, should therefore, on the one hand, promote a higher number of women to self-select as potential candidates and, on the other hand, lead political parties to select a higher number of women as candidates in slots where they may realistically expect to be elected.

59. Political parties have their internal rules and standardised procedures for the recruitment and selection of candidates for elected offices. Effective strategies by parties for increased recruitment of women include the adoption and implementation of party-specific gender quotas, informal targets, and other positive action mechanisms at all levels of office, including for internal party positions.[27]

60. Party quotas entail commitments by individual political parties which aim to include a specific proportion of women among their own candidates nominated to political office. Party quotas are usually implemented through party constitutions, statutes and rulebooks. In Europe, these measures were first adopted in the early 1970s by a few socialist and social democratic parties. Over the course of the 1980s they began to appear in a diverse array of parties in many regions of the world. Today, almost all participating States of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) include at least some parties using gender quotas in the candidate selection process.[28]

61. In terms of election results, as noted above, political parties have little to lose by choosing to present higher proportions of female candidates, and the scope for them to adopt proactive measures in this field is considerable. The Parliamentary Assembly has highlighted the important role that parties may play in Resolution 1898 (2012) on political parties and women's political representation. This resolution indicates a wide range of measures for political parties to adopt, based on good practices identified in Council of Europe member States. Recommendations include introducing a formal commitment to gender equality and gender mainstreaming in the statute, organising campaigns and activities to attract women's membership, setting up women-only structures and allocating them with adequate funding, as well as ensuring that party structures which select candidates to stand for election are fully representative of society and include a proportional presence of women. This resolution also recommended ensuring maximum transparency in the procedure for the selection of candidates, and introducing a minimum quota of 40% of the under-represented sex in executive decision-making bodies of parties at all levels. Another series of recommended measures concerns mentoring and training programmes to enhance the capacity to take up positions of political responsibility, training programmes on media skills, and adequate broadcasting time during campaigns.

62. Party quotas typically set a goal of between 25% and 50% of female candidates. They govern the composition of party lists in countries with proportional electoral systems and are directed at collections of single-member districts in countries with majoritarian electoral arrangements. Party quotas have an impact on the number of women elected when:

– many parties, especially several larger parties, adopt these policies;

– the quotas adopted call for a relatively high proportion of women to be nominated as party candidates and contain provisions related to the placement of female candidates on party lists in proportional representation systems;

– the quotas are framed in ways that link them to well-understood and widely accepted cultural practices and traditions;

– parties have bureaucratic organisational structures and formal nomination procedures, so that rules are enforced by internal party bodies. Where party nomination procedures are more informally determined, for example in clientelistic parties where the top party leadership personally hand-picks a shortlist of loyal supporters as candidates, few enforcement mechanisms will be able to guarantee the inclusion of women.[29]

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26. See for example Richard E. Matland, "The Norwegian Experience of Gender Quotas", paper presented at the IDEA/CEE Network for Gender Issues Conference on the Implementation of Quotas: European Experiences, Budapest (Hungary), 22-23 October 2004.
27. Mona Lena Krook and Pippa Norris, "Gender Equality in Elected Office: A Six-Step Action Plan". Commissioned by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Warsaw (Poland), September-December 2010.
28. Ibid.

63. Party quotas have been particularly effective in Sweden, where women have mobilised inside and outside the political parties since the 1920s to promote the selection of female candidates and where socio-economic reforms significantly changed structural and cultural factors such as education, work force participation, childcare and parental leave.

64. When gender quotas per se are particularly controversial, as in the case of some conservative parties but also in various national contexts, political parties may reject formal quotas but still establish informal goals or targets regarding the selection of women, or "soft quotas". The two main forms that "soft quotas" may take are informal targets, recommendations and quotas for internal bodies, which are expected to indirectly influence the numbers of women in the pipeline who will eventually run for elected offices.

65. As mentioned above, in June 2015, the Venice Commission adopted a report on "The method of nomination of candidates within political parties". The study is based on the replies provided by 27 countries, and several political parties to a questionnaire comprising two sets of questions, as well as on research on the rules existing in another 23 States. The information collected concerned the representation of women, young people, minorities and vulnerable groups. I have focused on the aspects which are relevant to this report and took into account the recommendations of the Venice Commission when preparing the draft resolution.

66. The report analyses the relation between the freedom of political parties to autonomously regulate their functioning, including as concerns the choice of candidates, and on the other side the ambition that the State may have to promote democratic values including by regulating the activities of the political parties.

67. The Venice Commission makes it clear that the adoption of legal measures to foster respect for democratic principles in the selection of candidates is consistent with international human rights standards and with the recommendations of the Venice Commission itself. On the other hand, interference from the State might jeopardise pluralism, particularly in countries which have recently transitioned to democracy. It is therefore for each country to choose between a liberal approach, favouring the freedom of political parties and the absence of regulations concerning their internal affairs, and the opposite approach aiming to strengthen internal democracy in the selection of candidates through legislation. The report also recommends that requirements imposed on political parties for selecting candidates be:

– coherent with the electoral system;

– effectively supervised by independent bodies, such as electoral tribunals or commissions;

– proportional, that is the least burdensome to political parties freedom.

68. At the hearing of 10 September 2015 and through our exchanges after the meeting, Ms Alanis Figueroa provided substantial information on the crucial role played by independent bodies in monitoring the enforcement of these regulations. In Mexico, the Federal Electoral Court has an extensive mandate, covering trials for the protection of citizens' political rights, particularly the right to vote, the right to be elected, the right to assembly and the right to join a party. Ms Alanis explained that political parties were starting to abide by the regulations on the nomination of candidates thanks to the decisions of the Electoral Court.

8.2. International organisations, NGOs, equal opportunities agencies, women's groups, networks in civil society, trade unions and other stakeholders

69. Alongside political parties, relevant policies may also be adopted by a variety of other organisations and bodies. Thus, public authorities may conduct a legislative review to ensure that equal rights for women and men are guaranteed, in particular as concerns political rights. As mentioned above, parliaments themselves may amend electoral legislation, for example so as to introduce quotas reserved for women in general lists, separate women's lists, or "zipper" lists alternating male and female candidates, or so as to introduce proportional representation with multiple-member constituencies, which has been found to be favourable to promoting equal opportunities for women and men candidates.[30] They may also carry out a review of their own rules and internal procedures, including the facilities and working conditions, rules for leadership recruitment, hours of sitting and provision of childcare facilities.

70. Other actors also play a role in promoting women's representation in politics, including international organisations, NGOs, governmental gender equality commissions, equal opportunities agencies, women's groups, civil society networks and trade unions. Through their own equality policies and training programmes

29. Ibid.
30. Venice Commission, report on "The Impact of Electoral Systems on Women's Representation in Politics", op. cit.

they may have an important role to play, also in conducting information and awareness-raising campaigns to encourage women to stand for election and in running capacity-building programmes to support women in this process.

71. These actors can contribute to developing the skills, experience, knowledge and resources of women in the pipeline for elected office and once they enter. A diverse range of initiatives are designed to build the skills and the capacities of women active in politics and to promote women's representation and participation in political life. These can be categorised in terms of three distinct but overlapping threads: equal opportunity initiatives (candidate training, recruitment initiatives and knowledge network), initiatives to combat stereotypes and raise awareness (media campaigns and citizen education).[31]

72. International organisations, such as the United Nations, the OSCE, and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, as well as of course the Council of Europe, do not directly adopt relevant policies other than those concerning their internal functioning. However, they may address non-binding texts (resolutions, recommendations, policy documents) to their members. This is for example the case of the OSCE's Ministerial Council Decision 7/2009 on Women's Participation in Political and Public Life, the United Nations General Assembly's Resolution 66/130 of 2011 on Women and political participation, and of a number of texts adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly, the most recent being the above-mentioned Resolution 1898 (2012).

73. Achieving and sustaining a better representation of women in politics presupposes that interested women already possess or can rapidly acquire relevant skills. Adequately funded knowledge networks, mentoring programmes and training can all serve to strengthen the skills and resources of women candidates. It is important that political parties, media and non-governmental organisations be actively involved in such initiatives.

8.3. Media

74. In 1995, the Beijing Platform set the strategic goal of promoting a balanced and non-stereotyped image of women in the media. Since then, a large number of resolutions and recommendations have been addressed by international organisations to their member States – but with little impact.

75. Women are less represented in the media than men and have limited space in news and political information shows. Women in politics are still mentioned in relation to the way they are dressed or for gossip and private life rather than for their political activity and achievements. In the media, women are still presented under the traditional angles of education, social affairs and gender-based violence or harassment. In Italy, women in politics are featured in only 20% of television time related to politics. This applies particularly to electoral campaigns.

76. Media often show a negative and stereotyped portrayal of women politicians, with a tendency to put them down and not focus on their political achievements. In the replies to the ECPRD questionnaire, the question whether there is media space reserved for women politicians received a negative answer by quite simply 100% of the 34 respondents. Newspapers often describe disagreements between women parliamentarians as "catfights"; and women who discuss political issues online receive torrents of sexist abuse in response.[32]

9. Barriers to women's participation in politics and accompanying measures

77. The measures highlighted above indicate that promoting women's representation is a multi-factor process, requiring various strategies to raise awareness of the need for gender balance. Beyond the possible reluctance to put in place measures such as legislative or party gender quotas, it is important to take account of other barriers that prevent or slow down progress in increasing women's political representation.

78. It is for instance not sufficient to integrate gender equality issues into campaigns if women are unable to make their voice heard effectively once they enter elected office. Legislative bodies are organised around a set of standardised rules, operating procedures, and institutional structures that may generate obstacles to the equal inclusion of women in all parliamentary activities, decision-making and leadership roles. In the course of

31. Krook and Norris, op. cit.

32. Laura Bates, Online misogyny prevents women from fully participating in democracy, Democratic Audit UK, 30 October 2013, www.democraticaudit.com/?p=1714.

the discussion in our committee, a large number of members referred to unsuitable parliamentary working hours, mobility requirements (the need to be present in the country's capital during parliamentary sessions) and access to childcare as key issues to be resolved in this field.

79. The study on "Gender Equality in Elected Office: a Six-Step Action Plan", commissioned by the OSCE, to which I have already referred, shows that there are two dimensions involved in developing a more gender-sensitive parliament. The first concerns the capacity of parliaments to mainstream gender into their policy work, legislative priorities, and debates by emphasising the gender dimensions of all public policies. The second dimension concerns parliamentary working conditions and operational cultures (issues may include parliamentary sittings late in the evening and lack of childcare facilities).

80. To facilitate women's participation, parliamentary bodies should review their internal procedures to ensure that there are gender-sensitive structures and working conditions,[33] as well as gender-balanced recruitment in leadership positions within the legislature and equal access to capacity development activities, induction programmes and training.

81. Another barrier to women's political participation that needs to be overcome, as I have previously underlined, is women's representation in the media and online. Research on the presence and representation of women in politics in the media shows the importance of training activities to enhance the media skills of women and make their presence more effective. At the same time, they highlight the need for journalists to convey a positive image of women and to increase their visibility, particularly concerning women who are experts in their respective fields.

82. Financing nomination and election campaigns is one of the greatest challenges facing women candidates, in both developing and more established democracies. Deciding to run, winning a party nomination and conducting an electoral campaign are costly and the lack of economic resources is one of the biggest obstacles and a particular barrier to women, in comparison to men. Women in fact have less access to or control over financial resources and powerful money networks. Experience has shown that a number of these challenges could be overcome by implementing comprehensive strategies designed to empower women candidates.[34]

83. As regards public funding of political parties, as the replies to the ECPRD questionnaire show, in a few cases funds are provided with a "gender clause": in Bosnia and Herzegovina for instance, 10% of the total amount of public funding is allocated in proportion to the number of seats allocated to the less represented sex; in Croatia, the amount provided to each elected deputy is increased by a 10% bonus for each deputy who belongs to the under-represented gender; in Georgia, a party will get an additional 30% if its list includes at least 30% of women. In Italy, the law of 2014 abolishing public funding of political parties provides that the parties which do not allocate at least 10% of the voluntary contributions that they receive from voters to activities aimed at increasing women's active participation in politics are subjected to a fine. On the other hand, political parties electing candidates of both sexes are rewarded. However, in no case are funds allocated to political parties for them to finance activities which promote the political representation of women. This would be advisable, especially to promote training activities, which are beneficial to women politicians but also to their male counterparts.

84. The participants in the first Regional Conference on gender equality in electoral processes, held in Tbilisi in November 2015, emphasised the importance of encouraging political parties to enhance mechanisms geared to assisting women in campaign financing, using public funding and promoting financial incentives for better representation of women within political parties as well as for promoting female candidates and ensuring transparency in the use of public funding aimed at enhancing gender equality.

85. Actions aiming to overcome these barriers are often referred to as "accompanying measures", as they accompany the main measures (in particular quotas), reinforce them and consolidate their impact. Accompanying measures range from training and other capacity-building activities for actual or potential female candidates, media space reserved for women politicians and measures of reconciliation between political activity and personal life, such as gender-neutral parental leave provisions but also practical services such as childcare facilities. Measures aiming to tackle structural inequalities in the labour market, and to alter the current balance between paid and unpaid work (for example household work and childcare within the family) also play an important role. The accompanying measures that I have listed, as the replies to the ECPRD questionnaire confirm, are unfortunately not commonly used.

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33. Enhancing women's representation in parliamentary institutions – The institutional and legal framework, Agora Issue Brief, Agora, June 2014.
34. Gender-Sensitive Parliaments, a Global Rewiew of Good Practice, Inter-Parliamentary Union, Geneva, 2011.

86. During the Assembly's fourth part-session of 2015, I had the pleasure of meeting Ms Marija Obradović, member of the Serbian delegation, to discuss in more detail the cross-party Women's Parliamentary Network that she had already presented to the Sub-Committee on Gender Equality in June 2014. Once again I was impressed with the enthusiasm and commitment of this colleague and with the relevance of the Network's activities. I consider it a good example of how accompanying measures may be put in place by a variety of stakeholders, not only the public authorities but also political parties, non-governmental organisations, international organisation and even international co-operation agencies.

87. Some of the Network's founding members were beneficiaries of training activities focusing on public speaking and other skills needed in politics, provided by a non-governmental organisation and funded by USAID, the United States' co-operation agency. In turn, the Network regularly organises training activities for women politicians, but also for female entrepreneurs. Training activities are of great importance: I can only welcome this initiative and recommend repeating it in other contexts.

88. In addition, the Network reacts by issuing a statement whenever a female politician is targeted by hate speech or misogynistic attacks. Indeed, it is important not to underestimate this type of personal attack because, besides casting a shadow on the image of the female politician targeted, they perpetuate negative stereotypes and may be detrimental to all women. The use of a "counter discourse", whether by providing accurate information when false rumours have been spread, or just by pointing out that inappropriate language has been used, is a good practice that should be recommended.

89. Accompanying measures are crucial. Increasing women's political representation by means of positive measures only, without tackling the root causes of the current gender imbalance, may prove an artificial practice, with unsound results. Our ultimate goal should not be an obligation for elected bodies to have a higher proportion of female members, but rather a gender balanced representation within political parties and institutions at all levels. This would require, among other things, that women and men have similar level of political experience and commitment, as well as personal connections. Accompanying measures should be geared towards creating these preconditions.

90. The choice and prioritisation of measures should depend on the actual situation and the obstacles that women face in each specific context and not on abstract, almost ideological preferences. Depending on the economic, social and cultural landscape of each country, the main obstacle may be represented by a lack of measures to promote reconciliation between work and private life, making political activity incompatible with family life, or strong cultural resistance, or a particularly loose legislation on political parties failing to have an impact on traditional gender-insensitive practices and making it more difficult for women to be represented at all levels of these organisations. It is of paramount importance that, prior to adopting new legislation and policies, an in-depth analysis of the situation of women in public and political life be carried out. Only this can ensure that the measures adopted are able to have an impact on the situation.

91. Obviously, there is also a wide variety of socio-economic, cultural and political factors that can hamper or facilitate women's access to parliament and elected office. Women's participation in politics is dependent on factors such as the socio-economic status of women, their level of education or the proportion of women in employment. Cultural approaches refer to gender differences in political socialisation and adult gender roles and the role of religion or cultural traditions[35].

92. Genuine political factors, such as the institutional features of democracies and party systems, the degree of party support or the strength of women's movement are important as well. Two fundamental political barriers affecting women on the way to an elected mandate are, as discussed above in section 8.1, the procedure of candidate selection by the parties, and the need to be elected by voters, which depend, among others, on women's role in society and in politics.

93. The crucial question is if and how gender quotas, voluntary party quotas, electoral system or others measures can affect and improve women's political representation and participation in politics.

10. Evaluating measures

94. Analysing policies already in place is necessary, as they have sometimes proved less successful than expected. It is worth noting that the evaluation of measures should be both quantitative, that is focusing on the proportion of women in the various political representative and decision-making bodies, and qualitative,

35. Michael Krennerich, op. cit.

aiming to identify the extent to which women occupy key positions within these bodies. Therefore not only the proportion of women parliamentarians should be taken into account, but also that of women speakers and vice-speakers, leaders of political groups, heads of committees and in other senior positions in the public eye.

95. In order to assess the impact of measures taken to increase women's political representation, relevant indicators should be used. They include:

– the number of women registered in electoral lists;

– the number of women actually elected to decision-making bodies;

– the pieces of legislation introduced to increase women's political participation;

– the number of female participants in training programmes designed to promote participation in politics (such as mentoring or media training programmes);

– the number of women in key positions.

96. Women's *descriptive* representation, which can be quantified through the above indicators, does not automatically reflect a commitment to advancing women's rights.[36] Women's substantive representation reflects better the effectiveness of gender equality in politics.

11. Women in Europe's national parliaments from 2005 to 2015: a comparison

97. The idea of comparing women's representation in Council of Europe member States' parliaments over time originated from discussions within the committee and seemed to me a good basis for identifying effective legislation and policies. We chose to compare the proportion of women in the parliaments of Council of Europe member States in 2005 and in 2015.

98. The overall level of women's political representation is on the rise. In the overwhelming majority of Council of Europe member States, the proportion of women parliamentarians has increased over the last ten years. Only four countries witnessed a decrease, and only in two of them, Cyprus and Latvia, is this decrease of considerable importance. In the two other cases, Denmark and Sweden, there is only a limited variation on figures that remain high. However, the European average grew by only just over 7 points, from 18.4% to 25.5%, in the last decade.

99. In a few countries, the increase in women parliamentarians is considerable. Andorra, for instance, leapt from 14.3% to 39.3%, Slovenia from 12.2% to 36.7% and Serbia from 7.9% to 34%. It is worth taking a closer look at these countries to find out what made these developments possible.

100. In Serbia, the electoral legislation was amended in 2011 and positive measures were introduced to increase women's representation. For every three candidates on the electoral list there must be at least one candidate of the under-represented sex. This principle applies both to national and local elections, and is enforced by considering successive groups of three places, so that candidates of the under-represented sex can be found throughout the list and not only towards the bottom. If the list does not meet this condition, the submitter of the list is called to remedy the deficiencies, and if these are not corrected, the national electoral commission shall not validate the list.

101. In Slovenia, a gender quota system for parliamentary elections was introduced in 2006. Under the current regulations, no gender shall be represented by less than 35% of the total number of candidates on the lists. Sanctions are strict: if the list does not comply with the law, the electoral commission shall reject it.

102. Quota systems and effective sanctions for non-compliance explain the leap forward in women's political representation in Serbia and Slovenia – an interesting indication on how to ensure rapid, substantial progress. On the other hand, in Andorra an even larger leap was not the result of radical changes in electoral legislation. The key to achieving this progress, as I learnt through the ECPRD questionnaire and further contacts with Andorran colleagues and experts, was instead a gradual evolution of culture and mentalities, adequately supported by law and policies. The law of 2014 on political parties and electoral funding, for instance, sets forth at Article 13 (on "Democratic functioning") that the statutes of political parties shall establish procedures to promote gender parity. Gender-balanced political representation is among the priorities of Andorra's

36. Venice Commission, report on "The Impact of Electoral Systems on Women's Representation in Politics", op. cit., paragraph 10, regarding the terms "descriptive" and "substantive" representation.

legislators, but they seem to prefer a "soft" approach, with general provisions and no sanctions, which is clearly bearing fruit. I can only welcome the cultural evolution in this country and congratulate my colleagues for the high proportion of women among the members of the General Council.

103. I remain nevertheless in favour of introducing gender quotas, as a way not only to achieve gender-balanced representation, but also to maintain it in the longer term. Human rights, as we all know, are never acquired once and for all, and the level of women's political representation can easily fluctuate. The case of Turkey, which I will now present, is a clear example of this risk.

12. Legislative elections in Turkey, November 2015: a lesson to learn

104. On 1 November 2015, I took part in the Parliamentary Assembly mission to observe the Turkish parliamentary elections. I intended this mission as an opportunity to learn more about the place of women in Turkish politics, considering that elections are a particularly meaningful moment in the life of any democracy and can help understand its functioning, also under this specific angle. At the briefing meeting with representatives of all political parties, I was able to enquire about their practice in the selection of candidates and the role of women in their structures.

105. Early parliamentary elections were announced by the Supreme Board of Elections on 25 August 2015. The electoral campaign took place in a tense atmosphere, following a sharp increase in the conflict between the security forces and the Kurdish insurgent groups after two and a half years of peace process, and was marked by a terrorist bombing which killed over 100 people at a peace rally in Ankara on 10 October: the deadliest terrorist attack in Turkey's modern history.

106. Although the Turkish Constitution guarantees gender equality, no specific legal obligations are set out as concerns the nomination of women candidates or their representation in the functioning of parties. Some political parties implemented quotas reserved for women on a voluntary basis and other positive measures to enhance the participation of women. The example of the HDP (Peoples' Democratic Party) is particularly interesting. This party applies a 50% quota reserved for women (as well as a 10% quota for LGBT people) and has a co-presidential leadership system with two chairpersons, one woman and one man.

107. A decrease in the proportion of female candidates could be observed in most political parties. Overall, 24% of candidates in party lists were female, few of whom were in good slots on the list. The outcome of this election was a sharp decrease in women's representation in the Turkish Parliament. The previous elections in June 2015 had seen 97 women (or 17%) become members of parliament. The new figure is 82 (14.9%).

108. How to explain such disappointing results? "During the extraordinarily tense periods following the June elections political parties forgot women in their election campaigns," a political commentator wrote in the *Hurriyet Daily News* newspaper. "None of the parties included gender equality in their election propaganda and they saw no problem in decreasing the number of women candidates on their lists."[37] Even KaDer, a group supporting women politicians regardless of their party affiliation, decided not launch a campaign for the 1 November elections as they had done in other elections, "because of the bloody attacks in Suruç and Ankara and because it did not look right to focus on women candidates in the violence spiral the country was going through", its leader Gönül Karahanoğlu said.

109. The importance of these elections also had an impact on the choice of candidates. The stakes were so high for the various political parties, the AKP which had lost its absolute majority at the June elections and sought to regain it, but also its main competitors, that most of them avoided "taking the risk" of losing votes by nominating women candidates.

110. Observing the elections in Turkey, which I had intended as a way of learning more about women's political representation in the country, ended up teaching me a more general lesson which applies, I believe, to the majority of countries. For a variety of reasons that I have already endeavoured to present, such as a lack of personal connections and funding, barriers within political parties and cultural factors in society at large, including gender stereotypes, women are still the weakest link in the political system. Their position in the political scenario often looks like a gracious concession, granted by men-controlled structures, and remains unsound. At any moment, particularly critical situations may put women's representation at stake. In difficult times, men in politics are tempted to take back the space that women had managed to gain and

37. Gila Benmayor, "Nov 1 elections: A sad picture for women", *Hurriyet Daily News*, 3 November 2015: www.hurriyetdailynews.com/nov-1-elections-a-sad-picture-for-women-.aspx?pageID=449&nID=90645&NewsCatID=402.

increase their own. Gender quotas are probably the best answer to this challenge. They not only guarantee adequate space for women in elected bodies, but also protect it from changes in the general landscape which threaten to have an impact on the balance of power.

13. Sweden: the ambition never to stop improving

111. On 10 and 11 November 2015, I conducted a fact-finding visit to Sweden. I chose to visit this country because of its long-standing commitment to promoting gender equality, including in political representation. As noted earlier, Sweden ranks first in the latest European Union gender equality index, calculated by the European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE), with a score of 74.3% (the EU average being 54%). Women's political representation is part of the domain of "power", one of the six core domains which contribute to defining the index (together with work, money, knowledge, time and health).

112. This was not achieved overnight, nor was it the result of a miracle formula. Fellow politicians and other interlocutors that I met in Stockholm underlined the close interconnection between political representation and the situation of women in Swedish society. They believed that women's representation in parliament had constantly grown since the 1920s (save at one election in the early 1990s) also because of their growing importance in the labour market and the public sphere in general. As political scientist Lenita Freidenvall of the University of Stockholm explained to me, the relatively high level of representation of women in the Nordic countries is the result of a combination of multiple factors: institutional (electoral system, party system, political parties' internal regulations and candidate selection procedures), socio-economic (high levels of education, high participation in the work force, welfare State) and cultural ones (gender equality culture, egalitarianism, secularism) as well as the commitment of relevant actors such as political parties and their women's sections, and civil society organisations.

113. Successive reforms aiming to improve gender equality both within and outside the family contributed to making room for women in the public sphere. These reforms include the introduction of individual taxation (as opposed to joint taxation for married couples) in 1971, parental leave in 1974 (and subsequent measures to promote its use by fathers), the gender equality law of 1979, the law against discrimination on grounds of sex in employment in 1980, the Violence against Women Act in 1998, the establishment of a Gender equality ombudsman in 1980 (later replaced by an Anti-Discrimination Ombudsman) and the prohibition of the purchase of sexual services in 1999. In 2011, Sweden signed the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CETS No. 210), which it ratified in 2014. In 2014, the government also proposed a system for improved follow-up of gender equality goals.

114. Political parties actively contributed to this process by introducing voluntary gender quotas or "recommendations" (that is, recommendations according to which bodies in charge of the selection of candidates should apply certain proportions as regards female and male candidates).

115. In order to achieve gender equality in politics, Sweden introduced a gender equality perspective in all areas of society, meaning that women and men have equal power to shape society and their own life.[38]

116. A working group on gender equality issues, the Speaker's Working Committee for Gender Equality Issues, was launched in the Swedish Parliament in 2003. The Riksdag Board, which is the parliament's main decision-making body, adopted a Gender Equality Plan. Its most important achievements include childcare services made available at the parliament, fixed voting times, one plenary-free week a month, the right to parental leave and seminars and meetings on gender equality issues. A new Gender Equality Plan now covers the period 2014-2018.[39]

117. All my interlocutors during the visit considered that, in spite of the remarkable progress achieved so far, there remains room for improvement. Distortions, they said, are still present in the labour market, which is segregated horizontally and vertically, and a gender pay gap still exists. Achieving gender equality remains a top priority and has become a pillar of the action of the current administration: the government headed by Prime Minister Stefan Löfven defines itself as a "feminist government". Measures to improve gender equality are generally supported by parties across the political spectrum, with the sole exception of the far-right Swedish Democrats.

118. Each member of the Swedish Government is responsible for gender equality in his or her main policy area, while the Minister for Gender Equality co-ordinates the policies for gender equality. The Division for Gender Equality is responsible for co-ordinating the government's work on gender equality, special gender

38. Women and men in Sweden, facts and figures 2014, Statistics Sweden, Stockholm, 2014.
39. Sveriges Riksdag – Gender Equality in Sweden and the Swedish Parliament.

equality initiatives and development of methods to implement the government's gender equality policy. There are experts in gender equality issues at every administrative board in the country. The Office of the Anti-Discrimination Ombudsman ensures that anti-discrimination legislation and the Parental Leave Act are followed. There is a Council against Discrimination that can impose fines on employers and educators if they do not take active measures to prevent discrimination. [40]

119. A party called Feminist Initiative was created in 2005. It is currently not represented in the Swedish Parliament, but sits in several city councils and has even won a seat in the European Parliament. Ms Gita Nabavi, member of Feminist Initiative and of the Stockholm City Council, explained to me that her party views feminism as a political doctrine in its own right, like liberalism or socialism. She believed that the movement was established to fill a gap in Sweden's politics, which lacked a party that was "feminist at heart". The fellow politicians I met did not seem afraid of or disturbed by the presence of Feminist Initiative. I had the impression that this relatively new party, with its reduced but committed membership and its unconventional methods (a pervasive presence in the social media, Tupperware party-style meetings in private homes, where activists present their programmes to an audience of a few people) has actually contributed to putting gender equality even more in the spotlight.

120. Cultural and political reflection on how to improve women's political representation continues. Even the question of why women and men should be equally represented within elected bodies is sometimes raised, and various answers are given. Experts and fellow parliamentarians noted that traditional motivations, such as the idea that a more diverse representation would have a positive impact on the quality of legislation, or that having more women in politics would reduce corruption, are not necessarily the best grounded. Too high expectations may even prove counterproductive. My interlocutors pointed out that, in fact, the best ground to call for increased political representation of women is fair democratic representation: women and men should quite simply be proportionately represented in politics.

121. I found the views of another political scientist, Elin Bjarnegård of the University of Uppsala, also very interesting. Policies, she told me, should not only take into account formal aspects, such as legislation or rules written in the statutes of political parties. Informal factors, such as personal networks and traditional practices, also play a crucial role in shaping the reality of political representation. Promoting gender equality has even become an integral part of Sweden's foreign policy, as it was formalised by establishing the mandate of Ambassador for Equality and Co-ordinator of the Feminist Foreign Policy within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Even before officially establishing its diplomacy of gender equality, Sweden had included this area in its international activities as part of development co-operation.

122. The visit to Sweden provided me with fresh inputs and confirmed concepts that I already believed in. The commitment of all actors, whether at governmental, parliamentary or civil society level, struck me as the best way of guaranteeing long-lasting progress. Gender mainstreaming appears to be one of the pillars of the government's action, which has been based on a genuinely holistic approach for decades. Policies and legislation take into account that private, professional and public life are closely interconnected. What I learned from the Swedish experience is that even when substantial progress has been made, it is possible to go further, and it is necessary to secure the achievements.

14. Beyond quotas: time to shift to parity?

123. The Parliamentary Assembly has consistently supported the introduction of positive measures to increase the political representation of women, in particular quotas. Resolution 1825 (2011) "More women in economic and social decision-making bodies" sums up the position as follows: "In the Assembly's view, gender quotas are a transitional but necessary exception to allow positive discrimination with a view to bringing about a change in attitudes and achieving *de jure* and *de facto* gender equality." Three words are key: "necessary", "exception" and "transitional". I have provided sufficient elements throughout this report to justify the necessary quality of positive measures.

124. I share the opinion that quotas should be provisional, because any given threshold reserved for one sex, be it 20, 30 or 40%, is arbitrary, and in the longer term it runs counter to gender equality. Considering that the population comprises approximately the same proportion of women and men, gender-proportionate political representation would be found only in elected bodies in which half of the members are of each sex. Therefore I wonder whether, after a transitional phase of quotas, we should not consider shifting to gender

40. Women and men in Sweden, facts and figures 2014, Statistics Sweden, Stockholm, 2014.

parity, and require governments and elected bodies, particularly parliaments, to be composed, insofar as possible, by half women and half men. Personally, I look with much interest at the recent developments concerning constitutional law in Latin America.

125. On 10 February 2014, Mexico passed an amendment to Article 41 of the Federal Constitution stating that political parties should put in place "rules to ensure gender parity in the nomination of candidates in federal and local congressional elections". Two elements of this amendment warrant our particular attention: first, the reference to "parity", and second, the fact that the obligation to ensure gender parity lies with political parties. These are recognised as key players in this field. Besides Mexico, six Latin American countries, namely Bolivia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama, have recently shifted from quota laws to parity regimes, by enshrining the principle of gender parity in their Constitution or electoral legislation.

126. France's 2013 law regulating the election of members of the local authorities (assemblées départementales) introduced "*binômes*", duos of paired candidates who must be of the opposite sex. This reform is innovative and ambitious, and an interesting example of implementation of the principle of parity in Europe. The fierce opposition that it triggered in some sectors of the French political establishment seems proof that the new regulations may have a real impact on the long-standing balance of power between women and men politicians, at least at local level. I hope that the *binôme* or duo system, tested in the local elections of 2015 for the first time, will prove successful and be used to elect members of other bodies in France. I also consider it advisable that Council of Europe member States follow this example.

15. Conclusions

127. Achieving gender equality, including in the realm of political representation, is an increasingly consensual goal. Council of Europe member States are bound by Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) to secure the enjoyment of fundamental rights without discrimination on grounds of, among other things, sex. The commitment to promote gender equality and improve the political representation of women is often reiterated by political leaders, parliamentarians and members of governments. Today, the question is how to accelerate progress in practice, which at present is intolerably slow. On 30 August 2015, the Tenth Meeting of Women Speakers of Parliament called for gender equality to be achieved within one generation. The conference called for "unity of thought and action" as a powerful agent for change.

128. I would like to make this call my own: unity of action means unity of all stakeholders, particularly of legislators and decision makers, irrespective of their gender and political affiliation. I believe that gender equality obtains increasing support across the political spectrum in most countries. It is necessary, however, to find the best ways to achieve this goal: this requires adequate assessment of measures which have already been put in place. It also requires a precise, in-depth analysis of the situation in order to identify the root causes of inequality.

129. Unity of action also implies that the question of women's political representation, often considered under the angle of the proportion of women in national parliaments and governments, should instead apply to all contexts, including the local and regional level and society at large.

130. The research that I have carried out, discussions within the committee and several fruitful hearings have made it clear that while a variety of positive measures are put in place to increase the political representation of women, constant monitoring of the enforcement of such measures and effective sanctions for non-compliance are crucial. It is also necessary to avoid loopholes in relevant regulations. As progress in women's representation often triggers resistance, flaws in positive discrimination measures are used by political parties and other stakeholders to bypass the obligations set forth and perpetuate traditional, discriminatory practices.

131. At the same time, accompanying measures are necessary both to make positive measures work and to ensure that they have an impact in the long run. These include training and awareness raising activities to develop women's capacity and skills, the allocation of resources and funding to promote the work and campaigning activities of women politicians, and measures making it easier to combine political work and family life, especially in major decision-making bodies

132. It is worth pointing out that the obstacles that women politicians encounter in gaining access to and in carrying out political activities are not the same throughout Europe. They are closely connected to the different cultural, economic and political contexts, as well as to the electoral systems. If the challenges that women face are different, the response should vary accordingly. In other words, there is no one-size-fits-all approach

to the promotion of women's political representation. A combination of positive measures, in particular quotas, and accompanying measures, is necessary. At the same time, in order to achieve gender equality in politics, it is necessary to adopt a holistic approach and a gender equality perspective in all other areas of society.