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Strengthening co-operation with the United Nations in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Committee Opinion¹

Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination

Rapporteur: Ms Petra BAYR, Austria, Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group

A. Conclusions of the committee

The Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination congratulates Mr Adão Silva (Portugal, EPP/CD), rapporteur of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, on his report examining the co-operation of the Council of Europe with the United Nations for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is a comprehensive report presenting concrete proposals for strengthening co-operation and addressing current challenges to multilateralism which may affect the work of both the United Nations and the Council of Europe.

The committee fully supports the report of Mr Silva and thanks him for including information related to gender equality in the explanatory memorandum. It proposes the addition of some elements regarding this theme, on preventing and combating violence against women as well as on the role of civil society organisations.

The committee also tackles issues of general inequality and speaks out for the inclusion of persons with disabilities and minorities. In this respect, it proposes further amendments on specific goals of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and suggests concrete measures on how to involve members of parliament in a more regular and systematic manner when it comes to the implementation of, the reporting on and the accountability for the 2030 Agenda.

B. Proposed amendments

Amendment A (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 4, insert the following paragraph:

“The Assembly also welcomes the importance given to gender equality as a transversal objective throughout the 2030 Agenda and fully supports this approach. It commends the United Nations for making the fight against violence against women and domestic violence a priority.”

1. Reference to committee: [Doc. 14261](#), Reference 4286 of 28 April 2017. Reporting committee: Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy. See [Doc. 14848](#). Opinion approved by the committee on 8 April 2019.



Amendment B (to the draft resolution)

At the end of paragraph 6, add the following words:

“, in particular to SDGs 5, 10 and 16 which focus respectively on achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all girls and women, reducing inequalities and ensuring social protection for all, and guaranteeing unimpeded access to justice;”

Amendment C (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 10.5, add the following paragraph:

“involve civil society organisations during the review of the implementation of SDGs, including during the preparation of the Voluntary National Reviews.”

Amendment D (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 10.5, add the following paragraph:

“suggest impact assessments of national legislation by considering whether laws foster or hinder the meeting of the targets described in the SDGs.”

Amendment E (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 11.1, replace the words “both in setting priorities and in ensuring progress” with the following words:

“in setting priorities, ensuring progress and playing a role in monitoring and evaluation of the national efforts to implement the SDGs”.

Amendment F (to the draft resolution)

At the end of paragraph 13.3, add the following words:

“, including the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CETS. No. 210, “Istanbul Convention”).”

C. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Petra Bayr, rapporteur for opinion

1. I wish to thank Mr Silva for covering in his report topics relevant to the mandate of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination and for highlighting the importance given to gender equality in the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. With this memorandum, I intend to present some additional information on existing co-operation with the United Nations specifically on equality and non-discrimination issues, mainly in promoting gender equality, the inclusion of persons with disabilities and combating violence against women, with a view to contributing to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and more specifically to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 5, 10 and 16.

1. Promoting the inclusion of persons with disabilities

2. The 2030 Agenda pledges to “leave no one behind” and advocates for inclusive societies.² As stressed by United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, “Societies will never achieve the SDGs without the full participation of everyone, including persons with disabilities”.³ The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) aims at making the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in society a reality. In past years, the Council of Europe has called on numerous occasions for the implementation of this Convention, which has already been widely ratified, and has promoted it as a global standard.

3. In addition, the Council of Europe Disability Strategy (2017-2023) – Human rights: a reality for all⁴ addresses equality and non-discrimination, accessibility, equal recognition before the law, awareness-raising and freedom from exploitation, violence and abuse. It provides recommendations to member States on how to

2. SDG16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

3. www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/social/first-report-on-persons-with-disabilities-and-the-sdgs.html.

ensure full and effective participation of persons with disabilities in all areas of life and society. While the Council of Europe Ad Hoc Committee of Experts on the rights of persons with disabilities has discontinued its work due to budgetary restrictions, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights and the Parliamentary Assembly remain active in this regard and regularly raise awareness on the need to step up efforts to ensure full inclusion of persons with disabilities in society.

4. The Assembly's Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination has actively co-operated with the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in recent years. It has also held hearings with the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities. Rapporteurs went on fact-finding visits to discuss with United Nations representatives in the framework of the preparation of reports on "Detainees with disabilities in Europe" (rapporteur: Mr Manuel Tornare, Switzerland, SOC)⁵ and "Equality and inclusion for people with disabilities" (rapporteur: Ms Carmen Quintanilla, Spain, EPP/CD).⁶ I would also like to mention the report on "The political participation of persons with disabilities: a democratic issue" (rapporteur: Ms Mechthild Rawert, Germany, SOC)⁷ as it presents a set of concrete recommendations to encourage participation in political life, an essential element to achieving full inclusion.

5. In his statement on the occasion of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities on 3 December 2018, Mr Silva, rapporteur for a report on the topic "For a disability-inclusive workforce", stressed the importance of working towards full inclusion and guaranteeing access to education and to employment opportunities for persons with disabilities to reach the Sustainable Development Goals. The Assembly should, in my view, pursue its advocacy efforts for the promotion of full inclusion via future reports, and the work of its Sub-Committee on Disability and Multiple and Intersectional Discrimination and call on its members to be active on this topic in their national parliaments.

2. Promoting gender equality and gender mainstreaming

6. The targets of SDG 5 are clear and much of our work in the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination can be considered, in my view, as a contribution to their implementation. One should also highlight that the promotion of gender equality is not only present in SDG 5 of the 2030 Agenda, it is also a transversal objective, crucial for the overall success of the 2030 Agenda: "Women's equality and empowerment ... is integral to all dimensions of inclusive and sustainable development. In short, all the SDGs depend on the achievement of Goal 5."⁸

7. The Council of Europe has been working in the same direction and made the promotion of gender equality and gender mainstreaming an overarching priority. The Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023,⁹ mentioned in Mr Silva's report, could be used as a guiding tool for the implementation of SDG 5. I wish hereby to reiterate our full support to the strategy, which has a particular importance at a time when we are witness to a backlash on women's rights. At the Commission on the Status of Women, on 12 March 2019, Mr António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, regretted there was "deep, pervasive and relentless" pushback on women's rights and called for a fight to "push back against the pushback".¹⁰

8. His call was relayed by Liliane Maury Pasquier, President of the Parliamentary Assembly,¹¹ as well as by most participants at the Commission on the Status of Women. As parliamentarians, I feel it is essential to reaffirm our strong support for women's rights and gender equality, whenever possible, in national parliaments, in the media or when participating in public meetings. We need to be vigilant as rights which were considered "*acquis*" in some member States are now under threat. We must be firm and state that women's rights are human rights and not tolerate attempts to undermine them.

9. To counter these threats, I am currently working on the preparation of a report on "Empowering women: promoting access to contraception in Europe", with which I will present recommendations on how to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. I hope this report will be a useful contribution and help combat attacks on these rights.

4. <https://rm.coe.int/16806fe7d4>.

5. Resolution 2223 (2018) on detainees with disabilities in Europe.

6. Resolution 2039 (2015) on equality and inclusion for people with disabilities.

7. Resolution 2155 (2017) "The political rights of persons with disabilities: a democratic issue".

8. www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs/sdg-5-gender-equality.

9. <https://rm.coe.int/strategy-en-2018-2023/16807b58eb>.

10. www.pbs.org/newshour/world/un-chief-warns-of-relentless-pushback-on-womens-rights.

11. PACE President, at the UN, urges "a pushback against the pushback" on gender equality, 15 March 2019, <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/News/News-View-EN.asp?newsid=7408&lang=2&cat=15>.

10. For more than two decades, the Council of Europe and its Assembly have been particularly active in the field of promoting women's political participation, which can be a game changer for the promotion and protection of women's rights and bring tangible changes. A higher participation of women in politics is essential to ensure that women's rights and gender equality will be put high on the political agenda and not considered a secondary topic. We will undoubtedly remain active in this field and follow developments in member States, in the hope that there will not be a regression on this front.

3. Preventing and combating violence against women

11. Another essential topic is the prevention of and fight against violence against women. The Assembly has had excellent co-operation with the United Nations on this issue, which is the first target under SDG 5. On 1 March 2019, the Standing Committee held an exchange of views with Ms Dubravka Šimonovic, UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, and Ms Feride Acar, President of the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO). Ms Šimonovic also participated in a side event on sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians on 12 March 2019 at the Commission on the Status of Women, co-organised by the Assembly, the Finnish Presidency of the Committee of Ministers and the Inter-Parliamentary Union. In addition, the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination and its Parliamentary Network Women Free from Violence are in regular contact with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, including the secretariat of CEDAW, and UN Women.

12. In recent years, the Assembly has held debates on reports on specific forms of violence against women, including harassment of women in public space, female genital mutilations, stalking, forced marriage and psychological violence. The adopted resolutions all called for targeted actions to recognise and criminalise these forms of violence, thereby contributing to the implementation of SDG 5. In my view, in addition to these specific actions, we must make sure that we, as MPs, raise awareness of the fact that violence against women finds its origin in a deeply rooted belief that women and men are unequal.

13. In addition to the report's reference to the Istanbul Convention, I would like to add that the monitoring work carried out by GREVIO could be useful in gathering data with regard to the implementation of the SDGs. GREVIO's work can help with indicators on progress achieved and assess what changes have been made, for example at legislative level. Its comprehensive monitoring gives an excellent picture of the situation and helps to identify gaps in the implementation of the Convention.

14. Some Council of Europe legal instruments could prove their relevance beyond the European continent. The Istanbul Convention, which is open to ratification by non-Council of Europe member States, is one of them. At the Commission on the Status of Women in New York, official calls were made for a universal ratification of the Istanbul Convention, which is the most comprehensive international legal instrument in the field of preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. Ms Marlène Schiappa, French Secretary of State for equality between women and men and for the fight against discrimination, notably called for the universal ratification of the Istanbul Convention at a side event organised by the Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations, in co-operation with the Council of Europe, on 11 March 2019 on "The Council of Europe Istanbul Convention: a global instrument for preventing and combating violence against women and girls".¹²

15. I welcome these calls, particularly at a time when the Convention is under attack, including in countries which have already ratified it. I look forward to the report by Ms Zita Gurmai (Hungary, SOC) on "The Istanbul Convention on violence against women: achievements and challenges" and to the debate in plenary on this topic. I sincerely hope these initiatives will contribute to shedding light on the added value of the Istanbul Convention and the positive impact it has already had on the lives of victims.

16. Following the publication of the results of the IPU-PACE Study on Sexism, Harassment and Violence against Women in Parliaments in Europe in October 2018,¹³ Ms Liliane Maury Pasquier, President of the Assembly, launched the initiative #NotInMyParliament aimed at raising awareness of the need to prevent and combat violence against women parliamentarians. I welcome the fact that she made the prevention of violence against women in politics a priority of her mandate and wholeheartedly support her initiative. I also look forward to the plenary debate on "Promoting parliaments free of sexism and sexual harassment"¹⁴ (rapporteur: Ms Thorhildur Sunna Ævarsdóttir, Iceland, SOC) during the April 2019 part-session.

12. www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/-/side-event-on-the-istanbul-convention.

13. IPU-PACE Study on Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe, October 2018, <https://pace.coe.int/documents/19879/5288428/20181016-WomenParliamentIssues-EN.pdf/7d59e7c5-4a88-4d23-a6cd-7404449fd45f>.

4. Final remarks

17. It is not feasible, in an opinion, to highlight all areas of co-operation and all initiatives taken in the fields of equality and non-discrimination with a view to contributing to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. I would nevertheless like to commend the United Nations for managing to ensure a worldwide promotion of the SDGs and effectively engage regional organisations for their promotion and implementation. I also see here an opportunity to affirm our support of multilateralism, which ensures monitoring mechanisms function well.

18. Considering the mandates of the Council of Europe and the United Nations and their objectives, co-operation is essential. Both are well placed actors to bring forward SDGs and promote their targets. I would also like to bring my full support to the report prepared by Ms Jennifer de Temmerman (France, NR) for the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development on the “Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals: synergy needed on the part of all stakeholders, from parliaments to local authorities”, which will be debated together with the report by Mr Silva.

19. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe can help raise awareness of the SDGs via its members and their activities in national parliaments, where they may request the allocation of enough funds to this end and call for the implementation of the goals. Whenever we stress, as members of parliament, that the imbalance of power hinders women and girls in developing their full potential, we contribute to awareness-raising on the urgent need to implement SDG 5. We can contribute to putting the SDGs high on the political agenda in our countries.

20. In my view, it would be interesting to intensify co-operation between the United Nations and the Parliamentary Assembly. Parliaments could be encouraged to discuss how existing legislation either hinders or may help reach the targets described in the SDGs. I therefore very much welcome the fact that the proposed draft resolution calls on Council of Europe member States to “include parliamentarians in their national structures and delegations at the various stages of reviewing SDGs, including at the sessions of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and the United Nations General Assembly, as well as at thematic events, and provide them with the possibility to participate actively in the work of these processes and events”.

21. I agree with the rapporteur for report that the Council of Europe is indeed an important contributor to the 2030 Agenda. I feel particularly encouraged by the fact that both the ongoing Finnish Presidency of the Committee of Ministers and the upcoming French Presidency make gender equality and combating violence against women priorities of their presidencies and look forward to our future co-operation to this end, at a time when women’s rights are under threat in Europe.