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Promoting parliaments free of sexism and sexual harassment

Reply to Recommendation[1]: Recommendation 2152 (2019)
Committee of Ministers

1. The Committee of Ministers has carefully examined Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 2152 (2019) entitled "Promoting parliaments free of sexism and sexual harassment", which it has forwarded to the governments of the member States and communicated it to the committees involved[2] for information and possible comments.

2. Promoting gender equality and combating violence against women and sexism are among the Organisation's key objectives. These issues have been followed closely by several recent presidencies of the Committee of Ministers, which have held various important events, in particular to launch the Gender Equality Strategy (2018-2023) (Copenhagen, May 2018) and to promote efforts to tackle gender stereotypes and sexism (Helsinki, March 2019). Reference should also be made to the conference held at the end of May 2019 under the auspices of the French Presidency of the Committee of Ministers and in co-operation with the Office of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences. On that occasion, the participants highlighted the importance of putting an end to violence against women and girls, sexism and sexual harassment and calling them out regardless of the places or circumstances in which they occur, including in parliaments.

3. The Committee of Ministers appreciates the steps taken by the Parliamentary Assembly as follow-up to the 2018 World Forum for Democracy on issues relating to sexism and violence against women in politics. In particular, it appreciates the #NotInMyParliament initiative launched by the Assembly following the publication of a study which revealed alarming levels of sexism, harassment and violence against women in national parliaments. The Committee of Ministers has taken due note of the Assembly's recommendations that these issues be taken into account in the areas of intergovernmental and international co-operation and of electoral assistance and co-operation.

4. In this respect, it would point out that many activities are carried out within the Organisation to combat political violence against women and sexism. The Gender Equality Strategy (2018-2023) addresses various aspects of the issue, drawing in particular on Recommendation Rec(2003)3 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making and follow-up to it. It also refers to other factors, including sexism, which can impact negatively on the gender balance and equal opportunities for female politicians. In this connection, Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 of the Committee of Ministers on preventing and combating sexism provides for a number of policy elements which are relevant to preventing and combating sexist acts, including in the political arena. It should also be noted that the issue of gender equality and, in particular, the representation of female politicians in the media during election campaigns has been examined in a study by the relevant Council of Europe committee.

1. Adopted at the 1354th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (18 September 2019).
2. Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), Conference of INGOs and Gender Equality Commission (GEC).

5. The Council of Europe's initiatives in the area of gender equality and combating sexism and violence against women are conducted in close co-operation between the relevant entities in the Organisation. The Committee of Ministers also notes the possibilities for expanding exchanges of information and the sharing of best practice in the context of specific interaction and joint initiatives on the matter between the Gender Equality Commission (GEC) and the relevant Assembly bodies.

6. With regard to the comments by the Parliamentary Assembly in paragraph 6.1 of the recommendation, the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) has informed the Committee of Ministers that it recognises the importance of data for combating violence against women in politics. It has expressed readiness to include the experiences of violence by women in politics in its first baseline evaluation procedure where information on such violence is made available in the State and shadow reports. It also encourages the Parliamentary Assembly to follow up on the findings and conclusions of the GREVIO evaluation reports and the recommendations of the Committee of the Parties to ensure full implementation of the Istanbul Convention, including with regard to tackling violence against women in politics.

7. In addition, the Conference of INGOs has noted with interest paragraph 6.2 of the recommendation, in which the Parliamentary Assembly encouraged it "to develop a model for national non-governmental organisations and civil society groups to collect data and information on violence against women in politics". Through its relevant bodies, the Conference of INGOs will endeavour to develop such a model for NGOs and civil society organisations.