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Gender representation in the Parliamentary Assembly

Report¹

Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs

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Summary

This report makes concrete proposals to further promote gender balance in the Assembly by amending its Rules of Procedure. With regard to the composition of national delegations, the report supports a progressive approach, setting a minimum threshold of one third of members of the under-represented sex, with a view to achieving a minimum of 40% representation and, ultimately, parity of women and men in the Assembly. The report invites the national delegations and political groups of the Assembly to promote more proactively the representation and balanced participation of women and men in the activities of the Assembly, in particular in committees and decision-making bodies, as well as in political groups. The introduction of a minimum quota of members of the under-represented sex, based on the principle of “one in three”, should be applied in appointments to committees appointed by the political groups, ad hoc committees, as well as in the appointment of rapporteurs by committees.

1. Reference to committee: Bureau decision, Reference 4493 of 31 January 2020.



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A. Draft resolution²

1. The sharing of responsibilities in political and public decision making between women and men is an inherent element of any true and effective democracy, a matter of equity and justice, and responds to the necessarily legitimate aspirations that have been expressed in our societies for decades. Women's empowerment and capacity building are essential to achieve women's effective and active participation in representative institutions and decision-making bodies. Our societies are composed of an equal number of men and women. Combining this reality with political representation and establishing parliamentary parity is a legitimate objective; where there is political will and where the impetus is given at the highest institutional level, parity can become the norm.

2. In ten years, the proportion of women in the Parliamentary Assembly has increased to 37%, reflecting the clear progress made in most member States' national parliaments, where the entry of more women into each new legislature has been made possible by proactive electoral legislation. However, whether in the Assembly or in national parliaments, women are still the under-represented sex; in only ten national parliaments in Europe do women hold more than 40% of the seats.

3. The Assembly congratulates the member States which, through their proactive legislation, but also through awareness-raising, accompanying, support and training policies, have made it possible to open the doors of legislative power more widely and sustainably to women. It recalls all the recommendations it made in its [Resolution 2290 \(2019\)](#) "Towards an ambitious Council of Europe agenda for gender equality", its [Resolution 2111 \(2016\)](#) "Assessing the impact of measures to improve women's political representation", its [Resolution 1781 \(2010\)](#) "A minimum of 30% of representatives of the under-represented sex in Assembly national delegations" and its [Resolution 1585 \(2007\)](#) "Gender equality principles in the Parliamentary Assembly". The Assembly once again urges the national parliaments of member States, in particular the 16 national parliaments with less than a quarter of women members, to make women's access to elective office a priority, in line with the recommendations of the Assembly and the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, as contained in [Recommendation Rec\(2003\)3](#) of the Committee of Ministers on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making and [Recommendation CM/Rec \(2007\) 17](#) of the Committee of Ministers on gender equality standards and mechanisms.

4. In 2007, the Assembly set a target for national parliaments to ensure that their delegations include "a percentage of women at least equal to the percentage of women in their national parliament, with a target of at least 30%, bearing in mind that the threshold should be 40%". 32 out of 47 national delegations include a percentage of women greater than or equal to 30%, of which 21 delegations have a percentage greater than or equal to 40%. In this respect, the Assembly congratulates the national parliaments of Albania, Andorra, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, the Republic of Moldova, Monaco, North Macedonia, Norway, San Marino and the Slovak Republic for guaranteeing parity in their parliamentary delegations to the Assembly, even though some of them come from parliaments with a much lower percentage of women.

5. All the parliamentary delegations shall comply with the requirement set out in [Rule 7.1.b](#) of the Rules of Procedure to include at least one woman representative (full member). This requirement, which is binding for small delegations, is unquestionably minimal for medium-sized delegations and even more so for large delegations of 20, 24 or 36 members. In order to promote progress towards parity, and to call on certain parliaments to set a higher example, the regulatory requirements will have to be increased.

6. The Assembly therefore intends to redefine the representation criteria that national parliaments must meet when setting up their delegations to the Assembly. In this respect, it considers that a delegation made up entirely of women does not respect the principle of equal gender representation in the Assembly.

7. Finally, the Assembly supports the political objective in the Council of Europe of promoting the threshold to be reached for participation of women and men that is 40% minimum for each sex. However, such an objective cannot at present be regarded as a regulatory principle, the disregard of which by national delegations would be sanctioned. The Assembly therefore formally undertakes to increase the minimum representation of each sex in its delegations to 40% as from the opening of its 2026 session.

2. Draft resolution adopted by the committee on 8 September 2021.

8. In order to make the Assembly more representative and to encourage national delegations to promote more effectively the political objective of equal representation of women and men in the Assembly, in keeping with a non-discriminatory approach, which takes into account the size of the delegations, the Assembly decides to amend its Rules of Procedure as follows:

8.1. with regard to the *composition of national delegations*, in [Rule 6.2.a](#), delete the second sentence and add the following new paragraph [new Rule 6.2.b]:

“Each national delegation shall include members of the under-represented sex [footnote 1] to ensure at least the following gender representation:

- *delegations with two seats (4 members) shall include at least one representative of the under-represented sex;*
- *delegations with three seats (6 members) shall have a minimum of 2 members of the under-represented sex, including one representative of the under-represented sex [footnote 2];*
- *delegations with four seats (8 members) shall have a minimum of 3 members of the under-represented sex, including one representative of the under-represented sex;*
- *delegations with five seats (10 members) shall have a minimum of 3 members of the under-represented sex, including two representatives of the under-represented sex;*
- *delegations with six seats (12 members) shall have a minimum of 4 members of the under-represented sex, including two representatives of the under-represented sex;*
- *delegations with seven seats (14 members) shall have a minimum of 5 members of the under-represented sex, including three representatives of the under-represented sex;*
- *delegations with ten seats (20 members) shall have a minimum of 7 members of the under-represented sex, including four representatives of the under-represented sex;*
- *delegations with twelve seats (24 members) shall have a minimum of 8 members of the under-represented sex, including four representatives of the under-represented sex;*
- *delegations with eighteen seats (36 members) shall have a minimum of 12 members of the under-represented sex, including six representatives of the under-represented sex.”*

[footnote 1: “For the purpose of the present Rules of Procedure, the under-represented sex is considered to be the one holding less than 40% of the total number of seats in the Assembly.”

footnote 2: “Pursuant to [Resolutions 1113 \(1997\)](#) and [1376 \(2004\)](#), the delegation of Cyprus can only fill 4 of the 6 seats to which it is entitled; it should be considered as a four-member delegation”];

8.2. in order to clarify *the procedural grounds for a challenge to the credentials of a national delegation relating to its composition*, replace [Rule 7.1.b](#) with the following:

“the conditions set out in [Rule 6.2.a](#) and [Rule 6.2.b](#)”;

8.3. with regard to the *election of Assembly Vice-Presidents*, as delegations are encouraged to present candidates of the under-represented sex, add the following sentence at the end of [Rule 16.3](#):

“A delegation may propose a member of the over-represented sex only if it includes at least 40% of the under-represented sex”

9. In order to encourage the effective role of women in the decision-making process and in parliamentary work, the Assembly calls on the Assembly's political groups to promote more proactively the balanced representation and participation of women and men in the Assembly's decision-making bodies, and in particular to:

9.1. strengthen consultation when nominating candidates for the bureaux of the nine Assembly committees so as to achieve parity in the offices of chairpersons and vice-chairpersons;

9.2. follow the “one in three” principle in the appointment of women and men as group spokespersons in Assembly debates;

9.3. establish the principle that women and men shall be appointed in alternation in the allocation of group chair positions and respect parity in the allocation of vice-chair positions.

10. Moreover, the Assembly considers that the “one in three” principle shall apply to the composition and functioning of committees. It therefore decides to amend its Rules of Procedure as follows:

10.1. with regard to the appointment of members of the Monitoring Committee, the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs, and the Committee for the Election of Judges to the European Court of Human Rights, add the following sentence to the end of [Rule 44.3.a](#):

“At the beginning of each ordinary session, the candidatures presented by each political group to each of these committees must include at least 33% of members of the under-represented sex where the group holds at least three seats. The Bureau shall appoint members, ensuring that the committees concerned always include at least 33% of members of the under-represented sex.”;

10.2. with regard to the *composition of ad hoc committees*, including those in charge of election observation, in [Rule 44.4.c](#), after the second sentence add the following sentence:

“An ad hoc committee shall include at least 33% of members of the under-represented sex”;

10.3. with regard to the *appointment of rapporteurs by committees*, in [Rule 50.1](#), after the third sentence, add the following sentence:

“A committee shall include at least 33% of members of the under-represented sex among its rapporteurs”.

11. Finally, the Assembly instructs its Bureau to ensure that this “one in three” principle is applied in all appointment decisions for which it is responsible, in particular in the institutional representation of the Assembly.

12. The Assembly considers that the implementation of the obligations and objectives set out in this resolution is the collective responsibility of each national parliament and each political party or group. This responsibility should be shared equally within each delegation between all political parties and, in the case of bicameral parliaments, between the two chambers.

13. The Assembly decides that the changes to the Rules of Procedure contained in this resolution shall enter into force at the opening of the January 2023 part-session. The bodies concerned (national delegations, groups, committees) are invited to make adaptations over the months in order to achieve the objectives of better representation of the under-represented gender by that date.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Nicole Trisse, rapporteur

1. Context

1. The challenge to the credentials of the six parliamentary delegations at the opening of the 2020 session of the Assembly on the ground that these delegations did not include women in at least the same percentages as in their national parliaments led the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs to question whether the Assembly's current regulatory framework was still in keeping with the aims it had set itself many years ago with regard to the promotion of gender equality.
2. The sharing of responsibilities in political and public decision making between women and men is an inherent element of any true and effective democracy, a matter of equity and justice. Everyone is therefore aware of the challenges involved in promoting the equal representation of women and men in the Assembly.
3. The starting point is that our societies are made up of 50% men and 50% women. Combining this reality with political representation and establishing parliamentary parity is a legitimate objective; considered by some as utopian or unattainable, parity is nevertheless tending to become the norm where there is political will and where the impetus is given at the highest institutional level.
4. The aim of my report is twofold:
 - To make the Assembly more representative (in terms of gender equality) at all levels: national delegations, but also the Assembly's political groups, must be encouraged to promote in a tangible way the political objective of equal representation of women and men in the Assembly.
 - Achieving effective participation of women in decision-making processes and in all parliamentary work: simply increasing arithmetically the under-represented sex in the Assembly is not enough to promote genuine gender equality. It must be ensured that women are "visible", take part in all the Assembly's activities and missions and play an effective role in decision-making bodies, committees and political groups. Gender equality is not only about the number of women in a parliamentary delegation, but also about the positions they hold (vertical discrimination) and the sectors of activity or fields of action (horizontal discrimination).
5. This reflection also requires an explanatory approach to the political groups and national delegations. In particular, it is a question of anticipating the changes that will be required of national parliaments when they appoint their delegations to the Assembly by inviting them to take account of better gender representation, by applying a "1 in 3" principle: there must be at least one member of the under-represented sex for every three members.
6. This report is the Assembly's report: the objective is ambitious, because it is only a step, and it requires a change of culture in many national parliaments. That is why it must have the support of as many people as possible: members, delegations and political groups. I have therefore undertaken a wide-ranging consultation of the Assembly's political groups and would like to express my gratitude to them for their welcome, for listening to me, for the frankness of our exchanges and, I hope, for their support for the main thrust of my proposals.
7. Finally, I would like to thank the experts and speakers who took part in the hearing held on 3 June 2021, jointly with the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, to which this report was referred for opinion.³

2. Promoting gender equality in the Assembly: ambitious goals, limited achievements

8. The dimension of gender equality is naturally rooted in the three pillars of the Council of Europe's work, namely promoting human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. Strengthening the machinery to promote gender equality is, therefore, a priority task for the Organisation and its Parliamentary Assembly.⁴

3. Mr Dimitrios Papadimoulis, Vice-President of the European Parliament, Chairperson of the High Level Group on Gender Equality and Diversity; Ms Caroline Ressot, Policy Officer at the High Council for Equality between Women and Men (France); Ms Mariana Duarte Mutzenberg, Programme Adviser, Gender Partnership Programme, Inter-Parliamentary Union; Mr Pierre Garrone, Head of Division II, European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), Council of Europe.

The minutes of the hearing are available on the Assembly's website: <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/Page-EN.asp?LID=ProDocs>

9. Since [Recommendation Rec\(2003\)3](#) on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making, in which the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe recommended that member States should commit themselves to promoting the balanced representation of women and men, many changes have been introduced both at member State level and in the Organisation itself. The recommendation proposes a range of legislative and administrative measures (such as legislative reforms, a reform of electoral systems, action through the funding of political parties, and measures to improve working conditions and reconcile public responsibilities with family life), supportive measures (for instance, networks for elected women representatives, mentoring and training programmes), and ten indicators against which progress can be measured. It also recommends “adopting appropriate legislative and/or administrative measures to ensure that there is gender-balanced representation in all national delegations to international organisations and fora”. According to the recommendation, “balanced participation of women and men is taken to mean that the representation of either women or men in any decision-making body in political or public life should not fall below 40%”.⁵

10. [Recommendation CM/Rec \(2007\) 17](#) on Gender equality standards and mechanisms of the Committee of Ministers reiterates that the concept of “parity democracy” requires that women’s and men’s interests and needs are fully taken into account in policy making and in the running of society. The recommendation provides that the parity threshold to be attained for equal participation of women and men to exist is “40% at least of each sex”.

11. The Assembly recommended a series of measures ensuring gender equality in participation, visibility, and access to the decision-making process at all levels. Its [Resolution 2290 \(2019\)](#) and [Recommendation 2157 \(2019\)](#) called in particular for gender parity in decision-making bodies to be promoted through means including positive measures to ensure that women and men are equally represented in both elected and non-elected bodies and set a target of achieving equal gender representation in decision-making bodies by 2030. Achieving balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making and achieving gender mainstreaming in all policies and measures are among the priorities of the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023.⁶

12. Arriving at gender-balanced participation in all activities is the goal that has been set not only for the Council of Europe member States but also for the Organisation itself, including the Assembly. Although the Assembly has incorporated the general gender dimension principles into its conceptual framework and Rules of Procedure, the challenge is to guarantee their effective implementation.⁷

13. However, the situation in the Assembly is clear:

- there are no women on the Presidential Committee;
- 77% of the members of the Bureau of the Assembly are men; only 8 of the 35 seats are occupied by women;
- of the 20 Vice-Presidents of the Assembly, only six are women;
- two of the nine committees are chaired by a women (compared to two-thirds in 2018);
- 10 women sit on the Committee on Rules of Procedure (of the 33 seats actually filled) and 21 on the Monitoring Committee (of the 86 seats actually filled);

4. See the Assembly report “Towards an ambitious Council of Europe agenda for gender equality” ([Doc. 14907](#)), [Resolution 2290 \(2019\)](#) and [Recommendation 2157 \(2019\)](#), rapporteur: Ms Elvira Kovács (Serbia, EPP/CD). See also the report “Promoting diversity and equality in politics” ([Doc. 14556](#)) and [Resolution 2222 \(2018\)](#); the report “Assessing the impact of measures to improve women’s political representation” ([Doc. 14011](#)) and [Resolution 2111 \(2016\)](#); and the report on “Political parties and women’s political representation” ([Doc. 13022](#)) and [Resolution 1898 \(2012\)](#).

5. Following on from the Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers, the Assembly aimed, in [Resolution 1489 \(2006\)](#) “Mechanisms to ensure women’s participation in decision-making”, to promote the “full implementation of the principle of balanced participation by women and men in decision-making processes in the Council of Europe and its organs and bodies”, including the Assembly so as to increase the representation of women in national delegations and positions of responsibility, particularly in the bureaux of committees, sub-committees and political groups and in the function of rapporteur.

6. <https://rm.coe.int/prems-093618-gbr-gender-equality-strategy-2023-web-a5/16808b47e1>.

7. See the annual statistics on the gender breakdown of Assembly positions, presented in Chapter 6 of the Progress report of the Assembly’s Bureau and Standing Committee (31 January 2020 – 21 January 2021) – Gender equality in the functioning of the Assembly ([Doc.15213](#)). Previous statistics are set out in the preceding activity reports (Documents [15036](#), [14796](#), [14455](#), [14231](#)).

- only one third of the Assembly rapporteurs are women (43 out of 126); the Monitoring Committee has 39 rapporteurs, of whom 8 are women (20%), the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights has 18 rapporteurs, of whom 3 are women (16%)... but the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination has 9 women out of 14 rapporteurs (64%) and the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development has 11 women out of 19 rapporteurs (58%).

14. As to the composition of parliamentary delegations and the recommended goal that they should include at least 40% of each sex, major improvements were made between 2005 and 2016. Whereas only six delegations fulfilled this aim in 2005, 22 achieved it in 2016. However, the positive trend was reversed thereafter, with only 17 delegations reaching 40% in 2017, 14 in 2018 and 17 in 2019; in 2021, 21 delegations have a percentage of women equal to or greater than 40. Currently, 16 parliamentary delegations include less than one third women. 18 of the 47 delegations are chaired by a woman (but only two of the six largest 36-member delegations have a woman chairperson).

15. The question of balanced gender representation is addressed in the Rules of Procedure from the viewpoint of the penalty to which parliamentary delegations are liable if they fail to comply with the requirement laid down in the Rules. Rule 6.2.a establishes the principle that “national delegations shall include the under-represented sex at least in the same percentage as is present in their parliaments and, at a very minimum, one member of the under-represented sex appointed as a representative” while Rule 7.1.b provides that a delegation’s credentials may be challenged if it does not include “one member of the under-represented sex, appointed as a representative”.

16. However, increasing the representation of the under-represented sex in all the bodies of the Assembly, particularly its decision-making bodies, calls for measures on an entirely different scale to a simple sentence in one of the Rules of Procedure. Although the composition of parliamentary delegations is an essential building block for the rebalancing of the representation of the sexes in Assembly bodies, it is not the only issue at stake. All the other procedures such as the composition of committees and the appointment of committee bureaux and rapporteurs must also be looked at closely. The work of political groups in promoting the improved allocation of positions of responsibility has a decisive role to play in this respect.

17. It is essential to examine the functioning of the current procedures (for example, the procedure for challenging credentials of national delegations and the mechanism for the composition of committees and the appointment of committee bureaux and rapporteurs) and to consider whether these procedures need to be revised and enhanced to improve the achievement of the Council of Europe’s aims in this area.

3. Concept of gender-sensitive parliaments and gender-balanced policies in parliaments

18. Since 2010 the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) has introduced a concept of gender-sensitive parliament, which pursues the following aims: promoting and achieving quantitative equality of women and men across all parliamentary bodies; devising a gender equality policy framework suited to the national parliamentary context; mainstreaming gender equality throughout all of its work; fostering an internal culture that respects women’s rights, promotes gender equality, and responds both to the realities of parliamentarians’ lives and to their need to balance work and family responsibilities; acknowledging and building on the contribution of male members who pursue and advocate gender equality; encouraging political parties to take a proactive role in promoting and achieving gender equality; equipping its parliamentary staff with the capacities and resources needed to promote gender equality; actively encouraging the recruitment of women to senior positions and their retention; and ensuring that gender equality is mainstreamed throughout the work of the parliamentary offices.⁸

19. In 2012, the member parliaments of the IPU adopted the Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments.⁹ Since then, many parliaments have evaluated how gender-sensitive they are, assessed their practices and policies, and established mechanisms to monitor progress in this area.

20. In 2019, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) published a report which assessed the gender sensitivity of national parliaments in the 28 EU member States and the European Parliament.¹⁰ It concluded that women continued to be numerically under-represented in parliaments across the European Union. However, an upward trend was evident, chiefly due to the growth of electoral gender quotas in an increasing number of countries.¹¹ In addition, when the importance accorded to women’s interests on

8. <https://www.ipu.org/our-impact/gender-equality/gender-sensitive-parliaments>.

9. <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reference/2016-07/plan-action-gender-sensitive-parliaments> .

10. <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gender-sensitive-parliaments> .

parliamentary agendas is examined, equality structures seem to be well-established in most member States' lower houses (71 %) and in the European Parliament, taking the form of parliamentary committees, women's caucuses or cross-party networks. On the other hand, gender mainstreaming seems to be rarely implemented in member States' parliamentary work, despite the presence of official equality structures. For instance, few member States' parliaments mentioned gender equality in their strategic plan (21 %) or implemented gender budgeting (18 %). As to the production of gender-sensitive legislation, 78.6 % of member States had a dedicated body responsible for overseeing gender equality in government work and 75 % had adopted a gender action plan or national programme to implement the Beijing Platform for Action (which has been signed by all EU countries).

21. The Council of Europe has launched an on-line collection of electoral data as part of its "Gender equality in parliaments" project.¹² This platform shows the strengths and weaknesses of parliaments in terms of their gender-sensitivity and can serve as a starting point to survey progress in enhancing gender equality in parliamentary activities.

3.1. Examples of audits that have been conducted by national parliaments

22. The Report "Gender Audit of the Parliament of Moldova" contains the results of an assessment of the Moldovan parliament's capacity to mainstream gender, identifies the critical gaps and challenges, and provides recommendations on the ways in which parliament can best become a gender-sensitive institution and mainstream gender in its work.¹³ According to the report, as with other national parliaments, women in the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova had been assigned to committees devoted to what were traditionally considered "women's issues" such as those connected to the family, health, disabilities, education and women's interests and needs. More "prestigious and high-profile" committees such as the Committee on Economy, Budget and Finance, the Committee on National Security, Defence and Public Order or the Committee on Agriculture were dominated by men. It was even pointed out that the agendas of committees often assigned responsibility for reporting on laws relating to the economy to male committee members, while laws that addressed social and health issues were assigned to female members. In addition, a detailed review of the Rules of Parliamentary Procedure revealed that they did not promote the equal participation of men and women in parliamentary life, did not proactively promote systematic, concrete measures to foster gender equality among MPs, and did not contain any requirement to focus on gender distribution with a view to achieving equal gender representation in appointing MPs to committees, working groups or various positions.

23. In 2018, the UK Parliament held its bicameral gender-sensitive parliament audit and published a range of data on: the number of female MPs, peers, and administrative staff; the number of women in leadership positions; the culture, environment and policies of parliament from a gender perspective; and how parliament takes account of gender issues in its work.¹⁴ The report welcomes the steady progress that has been made to increase the proportion of female MPs to 32% and female peers to 26%. It also identifies a number of obstacles: the culture of parliament (including bullying, harassment and sexual harassment), the compatibility of work in parliament with family life (the unpredictability of business obligations and potentially long hours), bullying, harassment, online threats and threats to physical security, and gender-based violence. The report also notes that women parliamentarians do not appear to have encountered any obstacle to obtaining leadership positions in either House, although there is a lack of diversity within the Panel of Chairs. In general, the UK Parliament has processes in place that allow it to take gender issues into account in its legislative and scrutiny functions.

11. See also the statistics on the membership of national parliaments, updated quarterly: https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs/indicator/wmidm_pol_parl_wmid_natparl.

12. <https://www.coe.int/fr/web/electoral-assistance/gender-equality-in-parliaments>.

13. Report on "Gender Audit of the Parliament of Moldova", drawn up under the "Improving the Quality of Democracy in Moldova through Parliamentary and Electoral Support" programme, funded by Sweden and implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP),

https://www.md.undp.org/content/moldova/en/home/library/effective_governance/auditul-de-gen-in-cadrul-parlamentului-republicii-moldova-spre-d.html.

14. UK Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit: response published. <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/other-committees/house-of-commons-commission/news-parliament-2017/uk-gender-sensitive-parliament-audit-response/>.

3.2. Examples of institutional good practices

24. In many States, national parliaments have a special body dealing with gender equality issues. The Inter-Parliamentary Union's studies have shown that establishing women's parliamentary caucuses is one means for women to strengthen their political impact.¹⁵ Women's caucuses can also help to increase equality between men and women in the daily operations and work of parliament. Such caucuses have been particularly effective in changing legislation and policies from a gender perspective and raising awareness about gender equality.¹⁶

25. In almost all parliaments in Europe, there are issue-based parliamentary groups or cross-party women's assemblies. Often these groups do not have any formal official power and play a symbolic role as discussion forums or platforms to consolidate new gender equality concepts. However, over recent decades, many have been transformed from non-formal networks of female MPs into institutionalised bodies. In the Nordic States for example, there are parliamentary committees on gender issues which are appointed under formal procedures.

26. Since 1999, each House of the French Parliament – the National Assembly and the Senate – has included a Delegation for Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, whose task is to ensure that gender equality aims are taken into account when all public policies are devised and implemented.

27. The European Parliament is often presented as a gender-sensitive parliament. 39% of MEPs are women. Its Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality is tasked with gender mainstreaming in all the sectors and policies of the European Union and making gender equality a priority for the EU; its remit includes defining, promoting and protecting women's rights in the EU and in third countries, and the measures taken by the EU for this purpose, framing equal opportunities policy, including the promotion of gender equality between men and women and, in this connection, dealing with the under-representation of women in decision-making bodies.

28. At international and European levels, some interparliamentary assemblies have also set up similar bodies. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association has one of the oldest networks, namely Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians, which was founded in 1989 and set itself the task of increasing the number of female elected representatives in parliaments and legislatures across the Commonwealth and ensuring that women's issues are brought to the fore in parliamentary debate and legislation. In 2006 the Parliamentary Assembly of La Francophonie (APF) adopted the statutes of a "network of women parliamentarians of the Parliamentary Assembly of La Francophonie".¹⁷ The Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe has set up a post of Special Representative on Gender Issues, who is responsible for monitoring the situation in the OSCE area and within the Organisation, promoting discussion of gender issues at the OSCE, particularly in its Assembly, and giving the OSCE Assembly a more active gender profile.

29. One of the major concerns is still that the increased presence of the under-represented sex in parliaments does not mean that women will automatically enjoy increased influence and power over parliamentary decision making. To understand why the under-represented sex finds it difficult to acquire any substantive power in the exercise of parliamentary mandates, it is important to identify every stage in the legislative process and assess the actual role and involvement of members of the under-represented sex at each of these stages.

4. Gender quota and parity systems: necessary but insufficient

30. Setting quotas for the minimum number of the under-represented sex to be elected or appointed to office is now a measure that is widely used to rectify imbalances in participation in national parliaments and other decision-making bodies.

15. <https://www.ipu.org/our-impact/gender-equality/women-in-parliament/ipu-knowledge-hub-women-in-politics>

16. Guidelines for Women's Caucuses –

<https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reference/2016-07/guidelines-womens-caucuses>

17. Under Article 13 of the Statutes of the APF, the network of women parliamentarians brings together all the women in all the sections of the Assembly and is intended, in particular "to promote increased participation by women in political, economic, social and cultural life both at national level and throughout the French-speaking world; to strengthen the position and the role of women in the member parliaments and international organisations; to foster exchanges of experience and encourage solidarity between women parliamentarians and to help promote human rights, particularly those of young women, children and mothers". The Chair of the Network is a member by right of the APF Bureau.

31. The IPU report shows that electoral quotas for women have now spread to all regions of the world, with more than 130 countries adopting quota policies.¹⁸ 75% of the Council of Europe member States have some form of legislative or voluntary quota system.¹⁹ In 2018, women parliamentarians from 100 countries met in the UK House of Commons and discussed issues including quota systems for national parliaments. It was agreed that without balanced gender participation in national parliaments, there could be no fair legislation coming from parliaments and that if women did not take their rightful place in parliament, they would never take their rightful place in society.²⁰

32. The women's quota system has grown considerably in national parliaments worldwide and has been one of the most essential steps in the development of gender equality policy. No significant progress could have been made without direct intervention by means of quotas and targets, based on the collection of detailed data.

33. [Recommendation CM/Rec \(2007\) 17](#) of the Committee of Ministers on gender equality standards and mechanisms considers that the level of parity to be reached for there to be equal participation of women and men is 40% minimum for each sex.²¹

34. The main difference between the women's quota system and the parity system is that women's quota laws are temporary legal measures providing for a minimum proportion (30% or 40% for example) of the under-represented sex to be included among candidates to an election. By contrast, parity systems are permanent rules whose aim is to reach 50/50 parity to secure consistent equal representation of women and men in decision-making bodies.²²

35. While quota and parity systems increase the level of the under-represented sex in politics, and in some contexts, even lead to substantial change, they cannot be considered sufficient. The key question that remains is whether descriptive (quantitative) gender representation helps to increase the substantive role of the under-represented sex and whether the classic system of gender quotas truly guarantees gender equality. In contrast to the quantitative approach, substantive representation focuses on the impact of a specific group on parliamentary work. However, there is a common misconception that a growth in quantitative representation will inevitably result in an increase in the influence of the gender group in question.

36. As the under-represented sex is often in a less influential position and lacks substantive power, the chances that their legislative proposals will be adopted are lower. This disconnect between the involvement of the under-represented sex in law-making processes and the results obtained perpetuates the stereotype that parliamentarians of the under-represented sex are not as skilled and qualified as their colleagues of the other sex. These stereotypes foster negative views according to which, within a robust quota system, the under-represented sex lacks the ability to adopt front-line legislation and can only put forward proposals on limited issues. This may well explain why most female MPs are assigned to "women's committees".

37. There is nothing wrong with parliamentarians wishing to act to promote ideas and policies in a particular area if this is their field of interest. However, this should be voluntary, and parliaments should prevent any situation in which women parliamentarians feel obliged or pressured to focus their parliamentary careers on "women-orientated" issues only. "Women's committees" should not exist in a gender-sensitive parliament. Another stereotype is that only women have the qualities and skills to deal with issues relating to "women's issues". Gender quota systems may therefore end up doing more to accentuate gender differences among parliamentarians than to even up gender representation.

38. The involvement of parliamentarians in all parliamentary activities, be it in committees, delegations or plenary debates, and in all the traditional tasks of parliament, should, in principle, be guided by their wish to focus on a particular policy area, whatever it may be, in keeping with their interests and based on their

18. IPU report on "Women in parliament in 2018: The year in review", <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2019-03/women-in-parliament-in-2018-year-in-review>.

19. Gender equality in parliaments (minimum 40% representation of each sex) – Parliamentarians in Council of Europe member States

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/electoral-assistance/gender-equality-in-parliaments>.

20. "House of Commons to hold first ever meeting of women MPs from every parliament in the world," *Media Release*, <https://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/offices/commons/media-relations-group/news/house-of-commons-to-hold-first-ever-meeting-of-women-mps-from-every-parliament-in-the-world/>.

21. It should be pointed out, for example, that with regard to the procedure for the election of judges to the European Court of Human Rights, the Assembly may only take into consideration lists of candidates comprising only one sex if those candidates belong to the under-represented sex in the Court (i.e. the sex of less than 40% of the total number of judges).

22. Balanced participation of women and men in decision-making, Analytical Report of the Council of Europe, 2017, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality/balanced-participation>.

professional qualifications and skills, their personal and professional background and their actual contribution to parliamentary work. Parliaments, at all decision-making levels, should take better account of these factors when organising parliamentary activities, rather than seeking to individualise members of the under-represented gender group.

39. As Elvira Kovács mentions in her report of 2019 entitled “Towards an ambitious Council of Europe agenda for gender equality”, “[t]he idea of dignity is crucial to our understanding of politics. Participation in the political process, having a voice, being listened to and exercising political influence are key ingredients of dignity”. However, as she goes on to say, “[a] word of warning is probably necessary: while quotas may be indicated numerically as they are generally intended as a minimum threshold, the half-and half meaning of ‘parity’ should not be interpreted as a strictly arithmetic requirement. The ultimate goal is not to divide by two the number of seats in a given decision-making body and allocate exactly the same number of them to male and female members, but rather to have a balanced and proportionate representation of voters. In addition, a sharp division between male and female would be detrimental for people with non-binary identities. Parity should not be conceived in a way that may exclude these citizens”.²³ Similarly, [Resolution 2290 \(2019\)](#) concludes that “equal participation is about more than numbers. Women’s empowerment is crucial to achieving gender equality: it makes women aware of unequal power relations and equips them to overcome inequalities in all fields of life”.

40. Simply increasing the presence of the under-represented sex in parliaments is not enough to promote real gender equality. While quotas are generally regarded as temporary special measures, gender parity systems should be permanent rules that are sufficiently fleshed out to guarantee, in both quantitative and qualitative terms, the principle of equal opportunities in decision-making bodies at all levels of authority. The challenge today is to achieve gender balance in the substantive work of parliaments in all areas.

5. The gender equality principle in the Parliamentary Assembly

41. The Assembly has consistently upheld its commitment in principle to promoting the balanced representation of women and men in political and public decision making and to applying the principle of gender equality in its Rules of Procedure, with regard to representation in parliamentary delegations and internal bodies.

5.1. The composition of national delegations to the Assembly

5.1.1. Regulatory provisions

42. In 2003, the Assembly considered a report on gender-balanced representation in the Parliamentary Assembly²⁴ and adopted [Resolution 1348 \(2003\)](#). Failure to include at least one representative of each sex in a national delegation was then expressly recognised by Rule 7.1 of the Rules of Procedure as a ground for challenging the credentials of national delegations.²⁵

43. The Assembly reiterated its approach in [Resolution 1585 \(2007\)](#) “Gender equality principles in the Parliamentary Assembly”,²⁶ urging national parliaments to ensure that their national delegations to the Assembly comprised a percentage of women “in at least the same proportions as they are present in the national parliament with the aim of achieving, as a minimum, a 30% representation of women, bearing in mind that the threshold should be 40%”.

44. [Resolution 1781 \(2010\)](#) “A minimum of 30% of representatives of the under-represented sex in Assembly national delegations” established the current wording of Rules 6.2.a and 7.1.b of the Rules of Procedure, setting new conditions for gender representation and strengthening the existing provisions to ensure more balanced participation of women and men. Rule 6.2.a provides that “national delegations shall include the under-represented sex at least in the same percentage as is present in their parliaments and, at a

23. “Towards an ambitious Council of Europe agenda for gender equality” ([Doc. 14907](#)).

24. [Doc. 9870](#).

25. Moreover, [Resolution 1348 \(2003\)](#) invited national parliaments “to ensure that women are included in the national delegations to the Parliamentary Assembly, at least in the same percentage as is present in the national parliament, with the aim of including, as a minimum, a 30% representation of women”. It also amended Rule 6 of the Rules of Procedure, stipulating that “National delegations should include the under-represented sex at least in the same percentage as is present in their parliaments and in any case one representative of each sex. Each parliament shall inform the Assembly of the methods used to appoint seats on the delegation and of the number of its women members.”

26. [Doc. 11432](#).

very minimum, one member of the under-represented sex appointed as a representative". Failure to include at least "one member of the under-represented sex, appointed as a representative" in a national delegation is expressly acknowledged in Rule 7.1.b as a reason warranting a challenge to a delegation's credentials.

45. At the opening of the Assembly's January 2020 session, the credentials of the parliamentary delegations of North Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, San Marino, Sweden and Switzerland were challenged on the grounds that these national delegations should include a percentage of members of the under-represented sex at least equal to that in their parliaments. Applying its established practice on the subject,²⁷ the Committee on Rules of Procedure noted that the requirement laid down in Rule 6.2 of the Assembly's Rules of Procedure ("national delegations shall include the under-represented sex at least in the same percentage as is present in their parliaments and, at a very minimum, one member of the under-represented sex appointed as a representative"), was not sanctioned by Rule 7.1.b since "only a failure to meet the requirement that there must be at least one woman representative in each delegation can form the basis for a challenge to the credentials submitted". It also noted, however, that "this condition, which is most certainly very limited where it comes to the fair representation of women, can legitimately be considered unsatisfactory".²⁸

46. This challenge of credentials highlighted a contradiction in the wording of the Rules of Procedure, between the principle asserted in Rule 6.2 and its translation into the context of the procedure for challenging credentials (Rule 7.1.b). During the discussion in committee it became very clear that there was a need to harmonise the text to clarify what national parliaments' requirements are with regard to the composition of their delegations to the Assembly.

47. The requirement for delegations to include a percentage of women at least equal to that in their national parliaments is not punishable under the procedure for challenging credentials. The Committee on Rules of Procedure has been consistent in its interpretation of the provisions of Rule 7.1, read in conjunction with Rule 6.2.a. It has only applied sanctions when there are no women present in the delegation as a representative.

48. In [Resolution 1585 \(2007\)](#) "Gender equality principles in the Parliamentary Assembly", the Assembly adopted a position in principle that national parliaments should ensure that their national delegations include a percentage of women at least equal to that in their national parliaments "with the aim of achieving, as a minimum, a 30% representation of women, bearing in mind that the threshold should be 40%".

49. In a report of 2010, the Committee on Rules of Procedure examined a proposal to amend the Rules of Procedure for it to incorporate a stronger requirement, namely an obligation for each national delegation to include a minimum of 30% of each sex.²⁹ In this report, the committee made the following point: "simple arithmetical logic shows that a 30% minimum level of representation would lead to discrimination between delegations. Thus, in practice a minimum of 30% would require small delegations to appoint two of their four members from the under-represented sex, that is 50%. This 'strengthened' obligation would also be detrimental – albeit to a lesser extent – to eight and 14-member delegations".

50. Where is "equity" from a gender perspective for four-member delegations (comprising two representatives and two substitutes)? If we take the example of Liechtenstein, which has only one woman in its delegation – equating to 25% – while the proportion of women in its parliament is 28%, having two women – making up 50% of the delegation – would increase the percentage well beyond the stated objective.³⁰

51. Moreover, delegations from national parliaments where women are well represented stand to be penalised more heavily than delegations from parliaments where the representation of women is minimal. A delegation whose composition is below the level of representation of women in parliament – for example a delegation comprising only 47% women from a parliament comprising 49% women – could have its

27. The committee has examined several challenges to credentials on the grounds of lack of gender balance under the current version of the Rules of Procedure; they related to the delegations of Montenegro, San Marino and Serbia in January 2011, Iceland in June 2013, the Slovak Republic in January 2017, and Andorra in January 2018, and were submitted on the grounds that these delegations did not include any women appointed as representatives.

28. See the report prepared by the Chairperson of the Committee, document AS/Pro (2020) 04 def, 28 January 2020.

29. Report of the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs entitled "A minimum of 30% of each sex in Assembly national delegations" ([Doc. 12260](#)) (rapporteur: Mr John Greenway, United Kingdom, EDG). The rapporteur noted that the Assembly's Rules of Procedure "cannot include mere political objectives that have no binding force" and that at the time there was "no clear majority in the Assembly in favour of amending Rule 7.1.b and imposing a penalty for failure to comply with a tougher representation requirement. Neither does it make sense to amend the Rules of Procedure immediately to incorporate an obligation which practically all the delegations would like to phase in gradually."

30. The efforts made by the other three delegations of four members – Andorra, Monaco, San Marino – which, in 2021, have full parity and all include two women, including one representative, should be highlighted.

credentials challenged if Rule 7.1.b were amended to adopt the wording of Rule 6.2. Conversely, a delegation comprising 15% women, but from a parliament with 10% female membership, could not have its credentials challenged.

52. Lastly, it should be noted that, as currently drafted, the Rules of Procedure consider it perfectly valid for a delegation to be composed entirely of women. This is the case with the Slovenian delegation, whose credentials were ratified by the Standing Committee on 15 September 2020. This fact – a first for the Assembly – does raise questions however as to whether this delegation complies with the principle of equal gender representation in the Assembly.

53. Lending too much weight to a strict numerical equation overlooks the fact that the composition of delegations is determined by a number of criteria, including fair representation of parties and political groups, and it is not easy for national parliaments to form their – sometimes numerous – interparliamentary delegations in accordance with multiple and sometimes competing criteria.

5.2. A comparative analysis

54. It is interesting, from a comparative viewpoint, to note that other interparliamentary assemblies have not devised very detailed standards to ensure that more account is taken of gender equality in their composition and the composition of their subordinate bodies.

55. For instance the Rules of Procedure of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly simply provide that “each national Delegation should have both genders represented” (Rule 1.4). The Rules of Procedure of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly state that “delegations are strongly encouraged to seek gender diversity” (Article 1). Article 11 of the Statutes of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean provides that “members shall include male and female parliamentarians in their delegation” and Rule 2.4 of the Rules of Procedure of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean that “the member parliaments shall undertake to ensure that women parliamentarians are represented in their delegations, in accordance with the legal provisions of each country”. The South East European Cooperation Process Parliamentary Assembly is more progressive, establishing that each delegation should be composed of at least 30% of the less represented gender.

56. Other organisations (the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Co-operation (PABSEC), the Baltic Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of La Francophonie, the Benelux Interparliamentary Consultative Council and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association) do not have any rules on taking gender equality into account in the representation or composition of their bodies.

5.3. Statistics

57. As to our Parliamentary Assembly, on 1 September 2021, the statistics were as follows:

- 6 delegations have less than 25% women
- 10 delegations have between 25 and 29% women
- 11 have between 30 and 39% women
- 5 have between 40 and 49% women
- 15 have 50% or more women (one delegation is made up entirely of women).

Four delegations include only one woman (Cyprus, Liechtenstein, Malta and Montenegro).

58. There is no general pattern linking the extent to which women are represented to the size of delegations. The percentages of women present according to delegation size are as follows:

- in delegations with 18 seats (36 members) in the Assembly:

Less than 25 %: -

Between 25 and 29 %: Russian Federation, Turkey, United Kingdom

Between 30 and 39 %: Germany, Italy

40% or more: France

- in delegations with 10 or 12 seats (20 or 24 members) in the Assembly:

Less than 25 %: Poland

Between 25 and 29%: -

Between 30 and 39 %: Romania

40% or more: Spain, Ukraine

– in delegations with six, seven or eight seats (12, 14 or 16 members) in the Assembly:

Less than 25%: Czech Republic

Between 25 and 29 %: Bulgaria, Hungary, Switzerland

Between 30 and 39 %: Azerbaijan, Greece, Portugal, Serbia

40% or more: Austria, Belgium, Netherlands, Sweden

– in delegations with five seats (10 members) in the Assembly:

Less than 25 %: Denmark

Between 25 and 29 %: Georgia

Between 30 and 39 %: -

40% or more: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Finland, Republic of Moldova, Norway, Slovak Republic

– in delegations with between two and four seats (4 to 8 members) in the Assembly:

Less than 25%: Malta, Montenegro

Between 25 and 29 %: Armenia, Cyprus, Liechtenstein

Between 30 and 39 %: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg

40% or more: Albania, Andorra, Iceland, Ireland, Monaco, North Macedonia, San Marino.

100% of the members of the Slovenian delegation are women.

59. Nor can it be stated as a general rule that where there are few women in a delegation, this is because there are few women in the national parliament from which the delegation is drawn. It is true that most of the 16 delegations with lower than a 30% share of women come from parliaments where there is not a very high proportion of women either: 15 of the 16 delegations concerned come from parliaments which also have less than 30% women (Armenia, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Georgia, Hungary, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Malta, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Turkey). It is clear that for these 15 delegations, increasing the representation of women in their delegation beyond 30% would entail a major effort. However, for Denmark, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, who also have less than 30% women in their delegations, but more in their respective parliaments, this should be far from an insurmountable effort.

60. Some delegations prove an example in this respect, such as Albania (71% women in the delegation whereas there are 29% women in its parliament), Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina (60% in the delegation, 24% in parliament), Greece, Ukraine (42% in the delegation, 21% in parliament), and Croatia, the Republic of Moldova and the Slovak Republic (50% in their delegation, and 20%, 25%, 17,5% in parliament respectively).

61. Some attention also needs to be paid to the type of seat occupied by the under-represented sex in delegations, depending on whether the members in question are performing the function of representative or substitute. It is to be welcomed that, overall in the Assembly, there are slightly more women representatives (122) than women substitutes (113). However, parity – that is at least as many women as men occupying a representative's seat – has only been secured in 17 of the 47 delegations (a 18th delegation, Slovenia, is made up entirely of women). In seven delegations, women occupy less than one quarter of representatives' seats (Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Georgia, Poland, Russian Federation).

5.4. Proposals

62. All the parliamentary delegations meet the requirement under the Rules of Procedure that they must include at least one woman representative. This requirement, which is unquestionably very minimal for delegations of 20, 24 or 36 members, is less easy to meet for small delegations. An effort should undoubtedly be being made by the former, which should be setting more of an example. If we wish to make progress towards parity, demands should be increased by setting the bar higher.

63. In order to promote real gender balance and move towards the immediate objective of a minimum representation of the under-represented sex of one third, the regulatory criteria for national parliaments when constituting their delegations to the Assembly must be redefined.

64. In order to achieve results in terms of gender balance in national delegations, **quotas must be set:**

- The Rules of Procedure must set out a clear principle (minimum threshold of representation) with regard to the obligations of national parliaments in the composition of their delegations to the Assembly and make the conditions for compliance with this principle understandable and realistic in their implementation.
- The **reality of the figures** must be taken into account: quotas should be differentiated according to the size of the delegations – the same effort cannot be asked of the smallest delegations of 4 members.
- The principle must be **implemented progressively**, namely through successive stages: the progression in terms of percentages set should be defined if possible in the Rules of Procedure or, failing that, in an Assembly Resolution; **an obligation could be set for each delegation to be composed of one third of the under-represented sex in the Assembly from the opening of the 2022 session and this quota could be increased to 40% within 4-5 years.**
- It must be possible to allow a certain **margin of flexibility**, so as not to create difficulties for the smallest delegations, which cannot fulfil the same obligations as easily as the large delegations (delegations with four members are numerically under-capacitated to follow the activities of the committees; their members are not full-time parliamentarians and have a professional activity at the same time): a threshold of at least one-third would mean that, in practice, these small delegations would be obliged to nominate two people of the under-represented sex out of their four members (that is a parity of 50%). These delegations will therefore be required to appoint at least one female representative, but without imposing a parity constraint on them that is not required of other delegations. A deferred entry into force could also be set for some delegations.
- A **reassessment of the scheme** could be carried out 4-5 years after its entry into force.

65. The proposal therefore is to set a dual numerical requirement, stemming from a desire for fair treatment of the delegations. One will be based on the total number of members of the under-represented sex in each delegation – to be set at a minimum of 25% for small delegations and 33% for other delegations – and the other on the number of representatives belonging to the under-represented sex in each delegation, to be set at 33% for medium-sized and large delegations (for small delegations the current requirement that they must include at least one member of the under-represented sex appointed as a representative will be retained).

66. In concrete terms, each national delegation will ensure a balanced gender representation, at first stage, on the following basis, bearing in mind that women are currently the under-represented sex in the Assembly:

- delegations with 4 members (2 seats) should include at least one woman as a representative/full member
- 2 women in 6-member delegations, including 1 woman representative/full member (out of 3 seats)³¹
- 3 women in 8-member delegations, including 1 woman representative/full member (out of 4 seats)
- 3 women in 10-member delegations, including 2 women representatives/full members (out of 5 seats)
- 4 women in 12-member delegations, including 2 women representatives/full members (out of 6 seats)
- 5 women in 14-member delegations, including 3 women representatives/full members (out of 7 seats)
- 7 women in 20-member delegations, including 4 women representatives/full members (out of 10 seats)
- 8 women in 24-member delegations, including 4 women representatives/full members (out of 12 seats)

31. The delegation of Cyprus, although comprising 6 seats, has only 4 seats, in accordance with the Assembly's resolutions; it should be considered as a delegation of 4 members.

- 12 women in 36-member delegations, including 6 women representatives/full members (out of 18 seats).

67. Looking at the current statistics (see the appendix and paragraphs 57 to 61), we can be confident that the delegations will achieve this realistic goal. Something that would have been practically inconceivable for the large majority of delegations ten years ago is now within reach.³² The challenge, of course, is to continue progressing towards parity, raising the regulatory bar as we go along.

68. Moreover, the existence of one delegation made up entirely of women – the Slovenian delegation does not include a single man – opens up an unprecedented prospect which warrants some thought as to the requirement for national parliaments appointing delegations to the Assembly to observe the principle of equal gender representation in the Assembly. Since an all-male delegation cannot be ratified by the Assembly, I also propose that the Assembly cannot validate an all-female delegation.

69. The question of sanctioning non-compliance with the principle of gender equality in the composition of delegations has been hotly debated with some delegations and political groups. Some members consider that no progress will be effective without the sword of Damocles of sanction, and in the first place through the procedure for challenging the credentials of delegations. I consider that the approach of clarifying and harmonising the provisions of the Rules of Procedure is already a sufficient guarantee that national parliaments will be constrained in their obligation to respect a certain quota in their delegations.

70. The draft resolution therefore proposes to redraft Rules 6.2 and 7.1. The proposed new wording of Rule 6.2 allows national delegations, and ultimately the Committee on Rules of Procedure when examining a challenge to credentials, to assess more compliance with the principle of gender-balanced representation, as defined, and to achieve more consistency in the wording of the principle (Rule 6.2) and its sanction (Rule 7.1.b). Determining gender representation ranges according to the size of delegations makes it possible to set the criteria to be observed more precisely and fairly.

71. Framing the requirement for gender-balanced representation by means of differentiated, reasonable thresholds makes it possible to deal with the objections that some delegations have voiced (particularly the problems of a low number of women in the national parliament, the lack of availability or desire among women parliamentarians to sit on interparliamentary delegations, the lack of co-ordination between parliaments' political groups when appointing delegations, the priority given to members who have the specific skills, particularly language skills, needed to perform their duties in the Assembly properly, the risk that a seat in the delegation may remain vacant if it cannot be filled by a member of the under-represented sex). Such thresholds have the advantage that they can be adjusted gradually to reach the goal of parity that has been set.

72. However, it is crucial that such an obligation does not create a division within delegations, because the burden of fulfilling the objective would be left to certain "virtuous" political parties, or, in the case of bicameral parliaments,³³ to the one of the two chambers with more members of the under-represented sex: this obligation is the collective responsibility of the parliament and must be shared equally between all parties; a compensation phenomenon must be avoided.

73. Similarly, many members considered the criterion of fair representation of political parties in delegations to be of paramount importance, especially for opposition parties or small parties. They therefore feared that they would bear the brunt of the new criteria.

5.5. Gender equality in the Assembly bodies

74. The introduction of a quota system guarantees the presence of the under-represented sex through quantitative representation, but is limited where it comes to effective participation in decision-making processes.

75. The last report by the Committee on Rules of Procedure on gender representation in the Assembly, in 2010, focused on the composition of national delegations. One has to go back to the two previous reports (2003 and 2007) to find some food for thought on ways of promoting the principle of gender equality in the

32. See [Doc. 12260](#), section 3, which presents an analysis of the national delegations' replies to a questionnaire on the proposal to require them to include a minimum of 30% of representatives of each sex and the obstacles to the implementation of a measure of this sort. At the time, 19 of the 31 delegations which replied to the questionnaire supported the measure and 11 of them even said that they would be in favour of setting a higher threshold.

33. For example, in Ireland, the upper house (Seanad Éireann) is made up of 40% women and the lower house (Dáil Éireann) 22.5%; in Switzerland, the Council of States is made up of 27% women and the National Council 42%.

various Assembly bodies, particularly by highlighting the role of the political groups in nominating candidates to be committee chairpersons or vice-chairpersons and members of committees they appoint directly. In [Resolution 1585 \(2007\)](#) and [Resolution 1898 \(2012\)](#) referred to above, the Assembly acknowledged the key role played by political groups in giving the under-represented sex more visibility and responsibility. [Resolution 1898 \(2012\)](#) invited the Assembly's political groups to take account of gender distribution during negotiations for the allocation of seats in committee bureaux and the appointment of candidates to be put forward by groups "so as to ensure that the overall gender breakdown of committees' bureaux includes 40% of the under-represented sex, both among committee chairs and vice-chairs", and to pay increased attention to the gender distribution of persons appointed or elected by groups to Assembly posts and committees with a view to achieving equal gender representation in all key positions of responsibility.

5.6. Procedural provisions

76. The Rules of Procedure already contain a number of provisions which promote gender equality and contribute to gender-balanced representation in the Assembly's bodies:

- *Election of Vice-Presidents.* Under Rule 16.3, "no representative or substitute may be elected Vice-President unless proposed in writing by the chairperson of the national delegation concerned, on behalf of that delegation while taking into account the principle of gender equality".
- *Appointment of committees* – appointment of members of the Monitoring Committee, the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs, and the Committee for the Election of Judges to the European Court of Human Rights takes place "on the basis of the candidatures presented by the political groups and taking into account gender balance and regional balance" (Rule 44.3.a). However, the political groups, when nominating their representatives to the Committee for the Election of Judges, "should aim to include at least 40% women, which is the parity threshold deemed necessary by the Council of Europe to exclude possible gender bias in decision-making processes" ([Resolution 1366 \(2004\)](#) on candidates for the European Court of Human Rights). With regard to ad hoc election observation committees, the political groups "should bear in mind that appointments to an ad hoc committee should respect the principle of gender balance having regard to gender membership of their respective groups."
- *Bureaux of committees* – under Rule 46.1, "the Bureau of each committee shall consist of the chairperson and the three vice-chairpersons, normally elected at the first committee meeting of each ordinary session, while taking into account the principle of gender equality". The same provision applies to sub-committees (Rule 49.7)
- *Appointment of rapporteurs* – For the appointment of rapporteurs, "the committees shall take into consideration the following criteria by order of priority: competence and availability, fair representation of political groups (based on the d'Hondt system), gender-balanced representation, geographical and national balance" (Rule 50.1).
- *Constitution of standing or ad hoc sub-committees* – "National delegations and political parties or groups shall be fairly represented" (Rule 49.2).

5.7. Comparative analysis

77. A comparative view highlights the fact that few interparliamentary assemblies have procedural rules which make it possible to promote gender-balanced representation in their statutory bodies or posts and positions of responsibility. Rule 15.2 of the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament provides that "when electing the President, Vice-Presidents and Quaestors, account should be taken of the need to ensure an overall fair representation of political views, as well as gender and geographical balance". The same approach applies when setting up interparliamentary delegations of the European Parliament, for which "the political groups shall ensure as far as possible that Member States, political views and gender are fairly represented" (Rule 223.2).

78. The Interparliamentary Union is a rare example of an assembly which is determined to promote the participation of women in its bodies. Accordingly, member delegations of the IPU Assembly "shall include men and women parliamentarians ... and shall strive to ensure their equal representation". Likewise, each IPU member State is represented on the Governing Council "by three parliamentarians, provided that its representation includes both men and women", but single-gender delegations are limited to one member. Appointment of rapporteurs by the Assembly must "take into account the principles of gender equality". Lastly,

the composition of the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians is required to respect gender parity: it should “in principle comprise five men and five women. In any case, there shall be no fewer than four members of either sex”.

5.8. Proposals

79. There is a broad consensus that political groups play a vital role in promoting more proactively the balanced representation and participation of women and men in the Assembly's decision-making bodies and a change of culture in this area; the impact of their decisions may be more significant than rule changes where it comes to fostering changes in culture that are conducive to gender equality. But the facts and statistics seem to show that some political groups show little commitment to such an approach, making it necessary to step up the rule-based approach. However, here again, the reality of the numbers must be taken into account and a certain margin of flexibility must be reserved for smaller political groups.

80. Similarly, some political groups recalled that they are dependent on the composition of the affiliated national parties. With regard to appointments to committees, including ad hoc committees, these are based on a voluntary approach by the members who wish to be part of them, and sometimes few women express an interest. Furthermore, some groups have pointed out the obstacle posed by certain conditions laid down in the Rules of Procedure (legal competence and experience for appointments to the Committee on the Election of Judges; limitation of the number of members from a State under monitoring or post-monitoring for the Monitoring Committee).

81. I wish to make the following proposals:

- A "one in three" principle should apply in appointments to the Monitoring Committee, the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs and the Committee on the Election of Judges to the European Court of Human Rights: the three committees nominated by the political groups shall include a minimum quota of at least one third of members of the under-represented sex; at the beginning of each ordinary session, at least one out of every three candidates nominated by each political group for these committees (where the group holds at least three seats in the committee concerned) shall belong to the under-represented sex;³⁴ for subsequent appointments, the Bureau shall proceed to the nomination of members ensuring that the committees concerned always include at least one third of members of the under-represented sex.
- **Appointment of committee bureaux:** the political groups should strengthen their consultation when nominating candidates for the bureaux of the nine Assembly committees so as to achieve parity in the posts of chairpersons and vice-chairpersons.³⁵
- **Constitution of Assembly ad hoc committees and ad hoc sub-committees of the Bureau:** the Bureau shall ensure that at least one third of members of the under-represented sex are appointed to the ad hoc committees on election observation and other ad hoc committees or sub-committees; when candidatures for these committees are submitted by the political groups, each political group shall ensure that one out of every three candidatures is of the under-represented sex.
- **Debates** in the Assembly: the political groups shall ensure that men and women appear alternately as spokespersons in plenary debates (at least one woman in three).
- **Appointment of rapporteurs** by committees: a committee may only appoint a member of the over-represented sex as rapporteur if it already has at least one third of the under-represented sex among its rapporteurs.
- **Election of Assembly Vice-Presidents:** delegations are encouraged to nominate a member of the under-represented sex; a delegation may only nominate a member of the over-represented sex if it includes at least 40% of the under-represented sex.

It is proposed therefore to amend Rules 44.3, 44.4 and 50.1 of the Rules of Procedure.

34. The requirement set out in [Resolution 1366 \(2004\)](#) “Candidates for the European Court of Human Rights” that political groups should aim to include at least 40% women has, in practice, never been met.

35. [Resolution 1898 \(2012\)](#) “Political parties and women’s political representation” invited the Assembly's political groups to take gender distribution into account when negotiating the allocation of seats on committee bureaux and the nomination of candidates to be presented by the groups, “to ensure that the overall gender breakdown of committees’ bureaux includes 40% of the under-represented sex, both among committee chairs and vice-chairs”

82. Finally, it is up to the Bureau of the Assembly to ensure that this "one in three" principle is applied in all appointment decisions for which it is responsible, in particular in the institutional representation of the Assembly.

6. Other non-regulatory measures and good practices:

83. I looked at procedures and practices in other parliamentary spheres. I considered other avenues of reflection, which I did not finally retain after my preliminary discussions with members of the Assembly: for example the idea of reducing the voting rights of a delegation whose composition does not meet the minimum requirements (or, on the contrary, of increasing the number of votes of a delegation whose composition is more than 40% women) – which would be contrary to the Statute of the Council of Europe; the idea of alternating between women and men in the Presidency of the Assembly; or the idea of obliging gender alternation in the chairmanship of the groups, as well as parity in their vice-chairmanship.

84. On the other hand, some **positive incentives** can be envisaged. For example, with regard to debates in the Assembly, "virtuous" delegations (40/60 representation) could be allocated additional speakers or moved up on the list of speakers. The opposite measures, aimed at penalising "non-virtuous" delegations – for example by limiting the number of their speakers belonging to the over-represented sex, or candidatures as committee rapporteurs or election observers – could also be implemented, but I do not intend to promote them at this stage.

85. Some approaches are inspiring and deserve to be relayed in my report, independently of any change in the regulatory provisions:

- the establishment of specific structures to promote the implementation of gender equality, such as the creation of cross-party women's parliamentary groups, a Women's Forum or a network of women parliamentarians;
- the recognition of individual involvement in the promotion of gender equality (such as the "[UN International Gender Champions](#)");
- awareness-raising, coaching, support and training measures (based on the [IPU toolkit](#));
- additional training on the issue of sexism and violence against women ([Resolution 2274 \(2019\)](#));
- [good practices](#) for the organisation of or participation in events (conference, seminar, panel, etc.), based on the respect of a balance in speakers and experts (for example, members should refuse to attend an event where no women participate).

7. Conclusions

86. The Parliamentary Assembly incorporated the principle of gender equality into its Rules of Procedure 17 years ago, and was among the pioneering assemblies at the time. The challenge now is to increase the effective participation of members of the under-represented sex in all Assembly activities, particularly in positions of responsibility. The political groups have an essential role to play in this respect.

87. An all-male Presidential Committee, only two out of nine committees chaired by women, and six women vice-presidents of the Assembly out of 20 seats: the statistics speak for themselves and are hardly satisfactory. There is ample room for improvement and pragmatic solutions must be found. Just being "politically correct" is clearly not enough.

88. The Committee on Rules of Procedure is invited to consider the following proposals:

- with regard to the composition of national delegations, amend Rules 6.2 and 7.1 of the Rules of Procedure so as to harmonise the wording of the principle of gender equality in the composition of national delegations and make the requirements for compliance with this principle clear, understandable and realistic in their implementation, by increasing the minimum threshold of representation, and to simplify the procedure for challenging credentials on this basis;
- with regard to promoting gender-balanced representation in the Assembly's bodies, amend Rules 44.3, 44.4 and 50.1 of the Rules of Procedure to set a minimum quota of members of the under-represented sex in the three committees appointed by the political groups, in ad hoc committees and in the appointment of rapporteurs by the committees.

89. The present proposals are only the first step in an ambitious step-by-step approach, with a view to achieving a minimum of 40% representation and, ultimately, parity. It is therefore essential to evaluate the implementation of the Assembly's decisions before taking the next step.

90. Such an evaluation should be carried out annually, in an information report which would include not only performance criteria – such as statistics on the composition of delegations and Assembly bodies – but also new good practices implemented, and which would inform the Assembly on the progress made.

Appendix

Gender representation in national delegations to the Assembly (on 1/9/2021)

National delegations	Total number of members	Men	Women	Percentage of women in the delegation	Percentage of women in the parliament	Number of representatives	Number of substitutes	Percentage of women among representatives
Albania	7 (8)	2	5	71%	29%	2	3	50%
Andorra	4	2	2	50%	46,5%	1	1	50%
Armenia	8	6	2	25%	23%	1	1	25%
Austria	12	7	5	42%	43%	2	3	33%
Azerbaijan	12	8	4	33%	18,5%	1	3	17%
Belgium	14	8	6	43%	44,5%	1	5	14%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	10	4	6	60%	24,5%	4	2	80%
Bulgaria	12	9	3	25%	27%	1	2	17%
Croatia	10	5	5	50%	31%	3	2	60%
Cyprus	4 (6)	3	1	25%	21,5%	1	0	50%
Czech Republic	14	11	3	21%	18,5%	2	1	29%
Denmark	10	8	2	20%	39%	1	1	20%
Estonia	6	4	2	33%	28%	1	1	33%
Finland	10	3	7	70%	46%	3	4	60%
France	36	20	16	44%	38%	6	10	33%
Georgia	8 (10)	6	2	25%	19,5%	1	1	20%
Germany	35 (36)	23	12	34%	31,5%	5	7	28%
Greece	14	9	5	36%	21%	3	2	43%
Hungary	14	10	4	28%	12,5%	3	1	43%
Iceland	6	3	3	50%	40%	1	2	33%
Ireland	8	4	4	50%	31%	1	3	25%
Italy	36	23	13	36%	37%	8	5	44%
Latvia	6	4	2	33%	27%	1	1	33%
Liechtenstein	4	3	1	25%	28%	1	0	50%
Lithuania	8	5	3	37%	28%	2	1	50%
Luxembourg	6	3	3	33%	32%	1	1	33%
Malta	6	5	1	17%	13,5%	1	0	33%
Republic of Moldova	10	5	5	50%	25%	2	3	40%
Monaco	4	2	2	50%	33,5%	1	1	50%
Montenegro	5 (6)	4	1	20%	26%	1	0	33%
Netherlands	13 (14)	5	8	61%	41%	6	2	86%

National delegations	Total number of members	Men	Women	Percentage of women in the delegation	Percentage of women in the parliament	Number of representatives	Number of substitutes	Percentage of women among representatives
North Macedonia	6	3	3	50%	39%	1	2	33%
Norway	10	5	5	50%	44,5%	3	2	60%
Poland	23 (24)	18	5	22%	24%	2	3	18%
Portugal	14	9	5	36%	40%	3	2	43%
Romania	20	14	6	30%	18,5%	3	3	30%
Russian Federation	36	27	9	25%	17,5%	4	5	22%
Saint-Marin	4	2	2	50%	33,5%	1	1	50%
Serbia	14	9	5	36%	39,5%	4	1	57%
Slovak Republic	8 (10)	4	4	50%	17,5%	2	2	50%
Slovenia	6	0	6	100%	27%	3	3	100%
Spain	24	13	11	46%	42%	5	6	42%
Sweden	12	7	5	42%	46%	3	2	50%
Switzerland	12	9	3	25%	34,5%	3	0	50%
Turkey	36	27	9	25%	17,5%	5	4	28%
Ukraine	24	14	10	42%	21%	7	3	58%
United Kingdom	35 (36)	25	10	28%	34%	5	5	29%
Total	636	400	236	37%		122	113	

Gender representation in the Assembly's bodies

Function	Men	Women
President	1	
Vice-President	14	6
Presidential Committee	7	0
Bureau of the Assembly	27	8
Committee Chairpersons	7	2
Committee Vice-Chairpersons	16	11
Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy		
Chairperson	1	
Vice-Chairpersons	3	
Rapporteurs	10	4
Rapporteurs for opinion		1
General Rapporteurs	-	-
Sub-committee chairpersons	1	1
Sub-committee vice-chairpersons		1
Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights		
Chairperson	1	
Vice-Chairpersons	3	
Rapporteurs	14	5
Rapporteurs for opinion	3	1
General Rapporteurs	2	1
Sub-committee chairpersons	3	
Sub-committee vice-chairpersons		
Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development		
Chairperson	1	
Vice-Chairpersons	2	1
Rapporteurs	9	10
Rapporteurs for opinion		5
General Rapporteurs		1
Sub-committee chairpersons	1	3
Sub-committee vice-chairpersons	1	
Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons		
Chairperson	1	
Vice-Chairpersons	2	1
Rapporteurs	7	4
Rapporteurs for opinion	2	1
General Rapporteurs	-	-
Sub-committee chairpersons	2	
Sub-committee vice-chairpersons	1	1
Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media		
Chairperson	1	
Vice-Chairpersons	1	2
Rapporteurs	7	2
Rapporteurs for opinion	1	
General Rapporteurs	2	
Sub-committee chairpersons	2	1
Sub-committee vice-chairpersons	2	1
Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination		
Chairperson		1
Vice-Chairpersons		3

Function	Men	Women
Rapporteurs	5	9
Rapporteurs for opinion		1
General Rapporteurs	2	1
Sub-committee chairpersons		2
Sub-committee vice-chairpersons		1
Committee on Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States (Monitoring Committee)		
Chairperson	1	
Vice-Chairpersons	1	2
Rapporteurs	31	8
Rapporteurs for opinion	-	-
General Rapporteurs	-	-
Sub-committee chairpersons	1	
Sub-committee vice-chairpersons		
Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs		
Chairperson		1
Vice-Chairpersons	3	
Rapporteurs	3	4
Rapporteurs for opinion		1
General Rapporteurs	1	
Committee on the Election of Judges to the European Court of Human Rights		
Chairperson	1	
Vice-Chairpersons	1	2
Rapporteurs	-	-