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Gender equality principles in the Parliamentary Assembly

Reply to Recommendation¹: Recommendation 1819 (2007)

Committee of Ministers

1. The Committee of Ministers has taken note of Parliamentary Assembly [Recommendation 1819 \(2007\)](#) on “Gender equality principles in the Parliamentary Assembly”. It welcomes the interest shown by the Assembly, and its contribution to the efforts to achieve balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making. It also welcomes the support that the Assembly has shown for the implementation of the relevant recommendations of the Committee of Ministers and in particular Recommendation Rec(2003)3 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making, including within the organs and bodies of the Council of Europe.

2. Gender equality is not only a “principle of equality of women and men, as a *sine qua non* of democracy and an imperative of social justice”² – as reiterated at the Second and Third Summits of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe – it is also a “matter of both fairness and common sense”.³

3. With this in mind, the Committee of Ministers has been pursuing a gender mainstreaming policy. For it is convinced of the importance of this strategy, which promotes equality, highlights the gender perspective of every policy and activity and utilises the skills and talents of society as a whole.

4. The Committee of Ministers examined the general thrust of the Council of Europe's action on gender equality during a thematic debate in November 2008, which also enabled it to identify a number of broad policy lines for the future. Particular emphasis is placed on achieving *de facto* equality between women and men. Efforts will accordingly focus on the implementation and monitoring of Recommendations Rec(2003)3 and CM/Rec(2007)17 on gender equality standards and mechanisms. Much more than a list of good practices, as proposed by the Assembly, Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)17 provides a checklist that allows member states to take the necessary steps to make the transition from setting standards to actually implementing them, so as to achieve *de facto* gender equality.

5. The activities to be conducted in this context will include:

- analysing and monitoring changes in the legislation on gender equality, national equality plans and national gender equality machinery in member states;
- promoting the implementation of common standards throughout Europe in order to achieve balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making;
- promoting gender mainstreaming, including through co-operation with other Council of Europe bodies and by incorporating a gender perspective in the various policies and in the budgetary process.

In addition to the discussions on future activities, at the thematic debate the Committee of Ministers took a number of decisions which are set out in the appendix to the present reply.

1. adopted at the 1040th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (5 November 2008)

2. Declaration on equality of women and men, adopted on 16 November 1988 by the Committee of Ministers.

3. Statement by the Secretary General and the Deputy Secretary General – International Women's Day, 7 March 2007.



6. The Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men (CDEG) began the second round of monitoring the implementation of Recommendation Rec(2003)3 on 1 September 2008, with regard to the participation of women and men in governments, parliaments and at local and regional level, as well as in diplomacy and the judiciary, at the highest levels. The gender-based statistics published after this monitoring exercise also include figures for the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and the European Court of Human Rights. The Committee of Ministers hopes that this new exercise will show that the situation has improved in comparison to September 2005. It encourages the Assembly to promote an equitable participation of women and men at the highest levels in its midst. It took note of the measures advocated in [Resolution 1585 \(2007\)](#) with a view to a more balanced representation of women and men within the parliamentary structures and bodies, in particular the Assembly's presidency, Vice-Presidents and in its Bureau.

7. Under its equal opportunities policy, the Council of Europe aims to achieve parity in the number of women and men employed in each category and grade; in the event of equal merit, preference is given to the under-represented sex. With regard to the highest level appointments, the Committee of Ministers also encourages more balanced lists of candidates.

8. With regard to the participation of women and men in an equitable proportion in steering committees and other subordinate committees, the Committee of Ministers is firmly committed to the objective set in its own recommendations.⁴ In this respect, it reiterates its call on member states to take due account of those recommendations. The Committee of Ministers further informs the Assembly that it is regularly called upon to take decisions on mixed lists of candidates submitted by member states in accordance with the principles of the above-mentioned recommendations. In addition, and in view of the importance of promoting men's role in achieving equality, the Committee of Ministers emphasises the need to promote balanced participation of women and men in the bodies dealing with equality.

4. Recommendations No. R (81) 6 on the participation of women and men in an equitable proportion in committees and other bodies set up in the Council of Europe and Rec(2003)3 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making.

Appendix – Decisions adopted at the 1040th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (5 November 2008) under item 4.5 "Thematic exchange of views on Council of Europe action to foster gender equality"

The Deputies

Having taken note of the information document on Council of Europe action in the field of gender equality (document CM/Inf(2008)41), underlined the importance of achieving *de facto* gender equality as well as a higher visibility of the Council of Europe's action in this field and, in this perspective, agreed on the following measures in order to:

Improve gender mainstreaming

1. invited all committees and bodies set up by the Committee of Ministers, or with its authorisation, by virtue of Article 17 of the Council of Europe Statute, to include a gender perspective in their terms of reference in conformity with the Committee of Ministers' Message to Steering Committees of the Council of Europe encouraging them to use the gender mainstreaming strategy in their programmes of activities (628th meeting, 15-16 April 1998);
2. welcomed the studies carried out by the Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men (CDEG) for monitoring recommendations of the Committee of Ministers in the field of gender equality and instructed the CDEG to continue work in this field;
3. at the same time, reminded member states of the Committee of Ministers' recommendations in the field of gender equality and called upon them to fully implement the principles and measures contained in these texts;

Strengthen the work on gender equality within the structures of the Committee of Ministers

4. agreed to bear in mind the need for including a gender perspective into draft legal texts and declarations of the Council of Europe and invited their competent rapporteur groups to take account thereof when examining such matters;
5. invited their Thematic Co-ordinator on Equality between Women and Men (TC-EG) to regularly report on main developments and activities in his/her field of competence and to hold meetings as appropriate;

Ensure balanced participation in selection processes for different bodies, entities and committees of the Council of Europe and within the member states

6. recalled the principles established in Recommendation No. R (81) 6 on the participation of women and men in an equitable proportion in committees and other bodies set up in the Council of Europe and Recommendation Rec(2003)3 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making and encouraged member states to strive for greater balance in lists of candidates during the selection processes of candidates for different bodies, entities and committees of the Council of Europe;

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7. required the Secretary General to prepare an annual report on the follow-up given to the above decisions as well as on the implementation of the gender equality policy in the Council of Europe, including within Council of Europe bodies, entities and committees to be presented to the Committee of Ministers;
8. instructed the Secretariat to communicate the above decisions to the different bodies, entities and committees of the Council of Europe so that they could take account of them.