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A minimum of 30% of each sex in Assembly national delegations

Committee Opinion¹

Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men

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A. Conclusions of the committee

The Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men has considered with interest the proposals of the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs and congratulates its rapporteur, Mr Greenway (United Kingdom, EDG), for his thorough work. However, the committee considers that the main measures advocated by the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs could be enhanced to foster a more balanced representation of women and men in the national delegations and, by extension, the Assembly. Referring to Assembly [Resolution 1585 \(2007\)](#), it reiterates that it should be the aim for national delegations to include a minimum of 30% of the under-represented sex and proposes some amendments to the draft resolution to this end.

B. Proposed amendments to the draft resolution

Amendment A (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 2, add a new paragraph worded as follows:

“However, the Assembly regrets the fact that these positive developments are slow, restricted to only some national delegations, and that the presence of 30% of the under-represented sex in all the national delegations is a goal that is far from being achieved.”

Amendment B (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 5, after the words “to promote more balanced participation of women and men”, add the following:

“and to strengthen them, with a view to encouraging the national delegations to reach the minimum threshold set by Resolution 1585 (2007),”.

Amendment C (to the draft resolution)

In sub-paragraph 5.1, after the words “and, at a very minimum, one member of the under-represented sex appointed as a representative”, add the following sentence: “Each delegation should set itself the aim of including a minimum of 30% of the under-represented sex, keeping in mind that the threshold should be 40%”.

1. Reference to committee: [Doc. 11664](#), Reference 3522 of 26 January 2009. Reporting committee: Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs. See [Doc. 12260](#). Opinion approved by the committee on 4 October 2010.



Amendment D A (to the draft resolution)

After sub-paragraph 5.1, add a new sub-paragraph worded as follows:

“In Rule 6.2.a, replace the third sentence with the following sentence: ‘Each parliament shall inform the Assembly of the methods used to assign seats on its delegation, the number of representatives and substitutes per sex, and progress made towards the aim of a minimum of 30% of the under-represented sex among the members of each national delegation.’”

Amendment E (to the draft resolution)

Amend sub-paragraph 5.2 as follows:

“In Rule 7.1.b, after the words ‘one representative of each sex appointed as a representative’, add the following: ‘and each member of the under-represented sex appointed as a representative until the delegation includes a minimum of 30% of the under-represented sex for delegations with more than four members, keeping in mind that the threshold should be 40%’.”

Amendment F (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 5, add a new paragraph worded as follows:

“The Assembly invites the Bureau to consider revising its guidelines to reward national delegations which have helped to promote a more balanced representation of women and men, and to amend the Additional provisions relating to Assembly debates as follows: ‘the Assembly decides that members of national delegations including a minimum of 30% of the under-represented sex at the time of a part-session shall be moved up three positions on the lists of speakers on which they have been placed’.”

Amendment G (to the draft resolution)

Add the following sentence to the end of paragraph 7:

“In this connection, it encourages the Assembly’s political groups and the national parliaments to promote women’s access to decision-making posts and elected office and to take part in the next round of the Parliamentary Assembly’s Gender Equality Prize.”

C. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Keleş, rapporteur for opinion

1. The participation of women in political decision-making bodies in proportion with the population they represent is a prerequisite for pluralist, participatory democracy. However, the participation and fair representation of women in politics are impeded by many obstacles and much discrimination. This has made it necessary to introduce transitional measures in the form of quotas at national level, designed to facilitate access, as advocated by the Parliamentary Assembly.²

1. The Assembly’s aim: to reach 30% of the under-represented sex

2. In an attempt to apply to itself the principles which it aims to promote elsewhere, the Assembly has adopted several resolutions intended to increase women’s participation, in particular [Resolution 1348 \(2003\)](#) on gender-balanced representation in the Parliamentary Assembly and [Resolution 1585 \(2007\)](#) on gender equality principles in the Parliamentary Assembly. As to the composition of national delegations, [Resolution 1585 \(2007\)](#) urged the national parliaments to “ensure that women are present in the national delegations to the Parliamentary Assembly 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%”. In April 2010, 23 delegations had still not reached this goal. This is a situation which the Assembly should condemn and one which warrants the adoption of stronger measures (see Amendments A and B).

3. The current rules, in other words the requirement for national delegations to include at least one Representative of each sex, have had an uneven impact on the presence of women in the Parliamentary Assembly. The percentage of women members of the Assembly did increase from 19% in 2003 to 28.5% in

2. [Resolution 1706 \(2010\)](#) on increasing women’s representation in politics through the electoral system.

April 2010, but behind this facade national situations vary considerably. In my opinion, in view of the limited results yielded by the incentive measures introduced by the Assembly so far, rules should be tightened up to incite the national delegations to reach the 30% threshold. Women are not prepared to wait still more years before they can occupy their rightful place in political assemblies including the Parliamentary Assembly.

4. This situation prompted Lydie Err (Luxembourg, SOC) and others to table a motion for a resolution on requiring a minimum of 30% of each sex in the Assembly's national delegations,³ based on the amendments to the rules of procedure of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.⁴

5. I would like to thank the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs for its well-researched work and congratulate Mr Greenway (United Kingdom, EDG) for his comprehensive report. Some of the facts referred to, concerning the low representation of women in some parliaments, are quite true but should not be allowed to justify half-hearted measures.

6. Likewise, although the replies to the questionnaire help considerably to understand the specific situation of each delegation in its national context, they should not be regarded as obstacles to introducing amendments to the Rules of Procedure. Quite the opposite in fact: in the past, the Parliamentary Assembly had the courage to establish rules that brought progress in democracy within the institution, providing a model for national parliaments and sending out a strong political message, even if this implied an effort on the part of national delegations to adapt to the new requirements.

7. The time has now come to take a leap so as to bring about a significant improvement in the participation and representation of women in the Assembly. Unfortunately, the measures proposed by the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs cannot achieve such significant progress.

8. I note that some of the national delegations' replies read like excuses "justifying" the low representation of women in their delegations and explaining why it is impossible for them to reach the 30% threshold. On the other hand, I also note that 61% of the delegations which replied argue that they would be in favour of such a threshold.⁵

9. I am particularly disappointed to read that the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs does not intend "to consider in this report the value of quotas for encouraging the representation of under-represented sexes".⁶ As Mr Greenway points out, the Assembly has given several opinions on the issue of gender quotas, which are a necessary evil, to be applied for a limited time to re-establish a balance.

10. For my part, I am sceptical about the fact that "national delegations should include the under-represented sex *at least in the same percentage as is present in their parliaments*" (my italics), considering the fact that the proportion of women in some parliaments is far from exemplary, and far short of the Council of Europe's requirements. In April 2010, 22 parliaments included less than 20% women and six (those in Armenia, Turkey, Georgia, Romania, Malta and Ukraine) had less than 10%. As Mr Greenway's report shows, the percentage of women in a national delegation may be considerably higher or lower than that of women in the corresponding national parliament. Thus, Mr Greenway notes that "overall, the percentage of women in the Assembly reflects that in the national parliament, but the figures also show that certain parliaments with few women members have made a real effort to ensure female representation in the Assembly, in particular Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Georgia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro and Slovenia".⁷

3. [Doc. 11664](#).

4. Since 2007, the Charter of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe has stipulated (in the Appendix to Statutory Resolution CM/Res(2007)6) that the membership of each member state's delegation to the Congress must be such as to ensure "equitable representation of women and men on the statutory bodies of local and regional authorities in the member state, meaning that all delegations must include, as from 2008, representatives of both sexes with a minimum participation of at least 30% of the under-represented sex" (Article 2.2.d).

5. [Doc. 12260](#), paragraphs 16 and 17. The replies to the questionnaire show an extremely wide range of positions among the delegations. In reply to the question "Should it be compulsory for each national delegation to include a minimum of 30% of each sex?", 19 of the 31 delegations (that is, 61%) said they supported the proposal, nine were against it, and three others failed to agree a clear position.

6. Assembly [Doc. 12260](#), paragraph 5.

7. *Ibid.*

11. I note, moreover, that it is required that national delegations “*should* include the under-represented sex at least in the same percentage as is present in their parliament” (my italics), which is referred to as one of “the principles in Rule 6.2” (see paragraph 7.1.b of the Rules of Procedure), although it has never been relied on to challenge the credentials of a national delegation that fails to comply with this minimum requirement (as is currently the case with Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, among others)⁸ – unlike the requirement for all national delegations to include “at least one member of the under-represented sex”.

12. On the other hand, I do understand the small national delegations’ concern to avoid having greater demands placed on them through the introduction of a measure which would ultimately require them to appoint 50% of their members from the under-represented sex, hence subjecting them to a “strengthened” obligation. Accordingly, I suggest that it should be specified that only delegations with more than four members will be covered by the 30% rule. Four-member delegations already inevitably include 25% of the under-represented sex as they are required to appoint at least one Representative of the under-represented sex.

13. In my view, the aim of all the national delegations should be to include a minimum of 30% of the under-represented sex, bearing in mind that the threshold should be 40%, as is stated in [Resolution 1585 \(2007\)](#). This is why I propose that it should be stipulated in Rule 6.2 that each delegation should aim to include a minimum of 30% of the under-represented sex (Amendments B and C above) and also that each parliament should report on the progress it has made on reaching the threshold of 30% of the under-represented sex among the members of each national delegation (Amendment D).

2. Pending the achievement of this goal, ensure that each member of the under-represented sex is appointed as a Representative

14. The main measure proposed by the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs is for at least one member of the under-represented sex to be appointed as a Representative and not as a Substitute.

15. Bearing in mind the restrictive budgetary circumstances which the member states are currently experiencing, this measure is undoubtedly a step forward in the efforts to increase participation by women in the Assembly’s work.

16. Currently, however, the effect of such a measure would be relatively limited as only seven national delegations (Belgium, Cyprus, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, San Marino, Serbia) do not yet fulfil this condition.

17. Accordingly, I propose to enhance this measure, stating that, for delegations with more than four members (see paragraph 12 above), all members of the under-represented sex, and at the least one member, should be appointed as Representatives where the delegation does not include a minimum of 30% of the under-represented sex. This rule should be set out in Rule 7.1.b of the Rules of Procedure, to emphasise its binding nature (see Amendment E).

3. Enhance support measures

18. I agree entirely with the conclusions of the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs about the introduction of support measures such as “awareness-raising programmes for members of parliament, developing good practices in national parliaments based, for example, on closer co-ordination between their political groups when appointing delegations, and initiatives to encourage women to stand for election and encourage their active participation in parliamentary delegations”.⁹ These measures are entirely in keeping with the idea of the Parliamentary Assembly’s Gender Equality Prize, which the Assembly’s political groups and the national parliaments should be actively involved in (see Amendment G).

19. I would also like to emphasise the key role played by political parties, and the need to enhance gender equality within their structures as a preliminary and necessary step to enhance gender equality in the political system as a whole. To this end, I recall and commend the Code of Good Practice in the Field of Political Parties, adopted by the Venice Commission and strongly supported by the Assembly, which contains recommendations to this end.¹⁰

8. [Doc. 12260](#), paragraph 12.

9. [Doc. 12260](#), paragraph 7 of the draft resolution.

20. Lastly, it would be a good idea to promote positive measures at the Assembly and reward national delegations who make the effort to include at least 30% of the under-represented sex by allowing the members of “virtuous” delegations to be moved up three positions on the lists of speakers on which they have been placed – a measure that is already applied to the 10 members who, during the previous Assembly part-session, participated in the highest number of votes taken in plenary.¹¹ The Bureau of the Assembly should be invited to amend its guidelines to this effect (Amendment F).

4. Conclusions

21. The demand for a 30% representation threshold for members of the under-represented sex can be seen as a “new imperative” of the Assembly. This percentage seems to me to be entirely reasonable if there is a real desire to achieve the minimum participation of women in international organisations and politics. The Assembly must clearly show the way forward and propose progressive measures which will provide an impetus for national parliaments and convey a clear and distinctive political message.

22. In addition, the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men expresses its willingness to devise targeted, practical measures to raise awareness among national delegations which do not yet include 30% of the under-represented sex.

10. European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), Code of Good Practice in the Field of Political Parties, 2008; and Assembly [Resolution 1736 \(2010\)](#) on the Code of Good Practice in the Field of Political Parties.

11. Additional provisions relating to Assembly debates, adopted by the Bureau of the Assembly on 25 March 2002 and 17 December 2007 – organisation of debates, paragraph 9.6.