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The code of good practices for political parties

Opinion¹
Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men
Rapporteur: Ms Gülsün BILGEHAN, Turkey, Socialist Group

I. Conclusions of the Committee

The Committee fully supports the draft resolution presented by the Political Affairs Committee. In particular, it welcomes the inclusion of a chapter on good practices for increasing the equality between men and women in political parties, as a fundamental cornerstone of a truly participative and representative democracy. It wishes, however, to propose a few amendments to further strengthen the text of the draft resolution in this regard.

II. Proposed amendments to the draft resolution

Amendment A:

Replace sub-paragraph 12.2.1. with the following sub-paragraph:

“Putting into place mechanisms which allow women to stand for election, by drawing inspiration from the experience of other political parties which have introduced quotas or other forms of positive action for women not only for parliamentary elections but also for elections to decision-making posts, both inside the party (chairmanships, vice-chairmanships, steering committees, etc) and outside the party (posts in government, on parliamentary committees, etc.);”

Amendment B:

Add the following new sub-paragraph after sub-paragraph 12.2.1.:

“Set the target for female participation rates in political party leaderships at 40% to be attained by 2020.”

Amendment C:

Add the following at the end of sub-paragraph 12.2.2.:

“, such as ensuring that the way the party functions allows both men and women to better combine professional life and family responsibilities with responsibilities in political parties;”

¹ See Doc. 11210 tabled by the Political Affairs Committee.

Amendment D:

Add the following new sub-paragraph after sub-paragraph 12.2.2.:

“Invite political parties to supply annual indicators measuring the advances made in equality between women and men.”

Amendment E:

Add the following new paragraph after paragraph 12.2. (becomes paragraph 12.3.):

“Good practices for increasing the participation of members from under-represented groups:”
and group sub-paragraphs 12.1.2, 12.1.3 and 12.1.4. under this heading.

Amendment F:

Add the following at the end of sub-paragraph 12.7.4.:

“, in particular of young girls.”

Amendment G:

Add the following at the end of sub-paragraph 12.10.4.:

“which respect human dignity and gender equality.”

III. Explanatory memorandum by the Rapporteur, Ms Gülsün Bilgehan

1. The committee welcomes the report presented by Mr Van den Brande on behalf of the Political Affairs Committee. It commends and fully supports the proposal to prepare a code of good practice for political parties which would make it possible “to reinforce parties’ internal democracy and increase their credibility in the eyes of citizens, thus contributing to their greater participation in political life” (para.10 of the draft Resolution).

2. The Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men has repeatedly deplored women’s under-representation in elected offices (half the parliaments of the Council of Europe member states number less than 20% of women)². In fact balanced participation by women and men in political life is an essential component of democracy and is to be regarded as a political goal of the Council of Europe, valid in all Council of Europe member states. No cultural contextualisation may be invoked to justify women’s absence from elected office in countries purportedly “less receptive to equality ideas” (paragraph 16 of the explanatory memorandum). Models may differ between countries, but the principle of equality between women and men, from which balanced participation by women and men follows, cannot be called into question or qualified with exceptions.

3. The rapporteur recalls that the committee has already worked on the question of women’s involvement in political life and their access to elected office³. It has analysed the various reasons that distance women from decision-making posts and elected office. For example, women are the victims of stereotypes which keep them away from power - or confine them to holding responsibilities in spheres viewed as “female” (health, education, social affairs). They must brave prejudices (“women lack experience”, “they are not interested in politics”), which are bolstered precisely by the absence or under-representation of women in politics. Having regard to the (unequal) apportionment of family responsibilities and domestic duties, a blend of working life, family responsibilities and a militant commitment and/or an elected representative’s responsibilities proves difficult to achieve – and this is increasingly becoming a concern for men as well. Women are also faced with the existence of a

² Doc. 11220, paragraph 4.

³ See Recommendation 1738 and Resolution 1489 (2006) on mechanisms to ensure women’s participation in decision making and Recommendation 1676 (2004) on women’s participation in elections.

“glass ceiling” that blocks their access to the highest responsibilities. Lastly, women may perceive politics as a “dirty job”, not meeting their aspirations and unsuited to their needs.

4. The rapporteur fully agrees with the opinion of the Political Affairs Committee as to the “particular responsibility” that political parties bear in women’s access to favourable positions for election and to actual elected office. While many militants are women, few senior party officers are. The rapporteur is gratified that the issue of equality between women and men in political parties has been specifically addressed by the Political Affairs Committee and is covered by a dedicated section in the draft resolution.

5. Aware of the key role performed by political parties in improving women’s access to elected office, the committee has suggested instituting an “Equality Prize” to give prominence to the good practices and the exemplary actions in which political parties or groups have engaged and which have allowed the percentage of women elected to political functions or decision-making posts in political parties to be increased through original awareness-raising efforts and transparent, sustainable mechanisms. This report, prepared by Jean-Guy Branger (France, EPP/CD), is being drawn up and will contribute to the pursuit of the goals of enhancing equality between women and men which should appear in a code of good practice for political parties.

6. The Political Affairs Committee rapporteur, Mr Van den Brande, discusses at length the application of quotas to increase women’s participation in politics. Our committee likewise feels that the quota system, despite its limitations, is “one of the most effective policy options for achieving short-term change” (para. 38 of the explanatory memorandum) – and for enabling women to make up a delay as regards representation in elected assemblies. Moreover, the Assembly earlier recommended, for compiling party lists, double quota systems (alternation of the “zipping” type for instance) “because they ensure that women are sufficiently well placed [on each list] to be elected”. The Assembly also specified that quotas should be “time-limited and proportionate”⁴. Let us recall that women represent half the population and cannot be regarded as a minority. Accordingly, I propose recommending that political parties establish machinery aiding women’s access to candidacies and elected offices, modelled on the best practice in respect of quotas.

7. I consider it necessary for supportive measures, capable of enhancing equality between women and men, to be strengthened within political parties, for instance creation of “networks” of women in politics, backing of women engaged in politics, establishment of mentoring arrangements, a high profile for exemplary women in political parties, and a better portrayal of women in the media. The financial side ought not to be neglected either: it is expensive to stage an election campaign, and women have fewer financial resources or less ready access to loans, making their entry into politics more problematic⁵.

8. I altogether support the clauses of the draft resolution stressing the need to pursue an active policy on recruitment and training of female party members who could run for office (para. 45 of the explanatory memorandum). At the same time, I am uncertain about bringing in the idea of the “quality” of representation and of the risk of electing “token women” – two issues that presumably arise in the same terms where men are concerned!

9. At a time when European political parties are going through a crisis of confidence, it would be fitting to ponder their functioning as such. The conduct of militants has changed – and the working culture within political parties must evolve too. Political parties must do something towards making the discharge of political and elected responsibility (for either sex) sufficiently attractive to enable young people to enter politics, and towards adaptation of their working methods. A very special effort should be directed at girls so that they may participate in political debate and in the activity of political parties as soon as they reach adulthood.

10. Whatever the methods adopted, it is important that political parties set themselves the objective of achieving, within their agencies, a critical mass of 40% of women. The parties should also

⁴ Recommendation 1676 (2004), *Ibid*, para. 6.ii.f.

⁵ The Labour Party supports an arrangement entitled EMILY (<http://www.emilyslist.org.uk>) under which financial support is granted to women wishing to run for election. Mentioned in Julie Ballington and Richard E. Matland, “Political parties and special measures: enhancing women’s participation in electoral processes”, United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues, EGM/ELEC/2004/EP.8 (16 January 2004).

evaluate the progress they achieve, and they should be invited to deliver the assessment regularly in order to determine the effectiveness of the measures taken. These indicators should make it possible to compute the number of women holding responsible posts in political parties, the number of women put up as candidates, and the number of women actually elected.

11. The committee commends the chapters of a code of good practice that deal with electoral processes, enhancement of equality between men and women in political parties as a distinct process, financing of political parties and of election campaigns, young people's participation in the political process and the media, all these being aspects that influence the participation of women and men. In the light of the arguments put forward, the committee would like to suggest making some amendments to the draft resolution, whereby women's participation in political parties could be increased with resultant improvement of their legitimacy and credibility.

12. The committee is convinced that fuller participation of women in political parties will allow a fresh impetus to be brought to political life. Political parties will gain in legitimacy and credibility. A genuine effort must be made by political parties to improve women's participation and responsibilities in their ranks. The adoption of a code of good practice explicitly referring to the enhancement of equality between women and men would constitute a positive development.

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Reporting committee: Political Affairs Committee

Committee seized for opinion: Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men

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Secretariat of the Committee: Ms Kleinsorge, Ms Affholder, Ms Devaux, Mr Diallo