



Recommendation 1676 (2004)¹

Women's participation in elections

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Over the last century women have made great strides regarding their right to participate in elections. They fought hard for – and obtained – the right to vote and to be elected. These rights are no longer disputed. Women have also made other significant political advances but progress to full democratic participation has been uneven.

2. Today, women's effective participation in elections is threatened by two developments: as regards the right to vote, in a number of European countries, some women are being prevented from freely casting their own vote by such undemocratic practices as "family voting". As regards the right to be elected, in nearly all European countries, women continue to be under-represented in elected office.

3. "Family voting" occurs in three ways: in group voting, where a male family member accompanies one or more women relatives into a polling booth; in open voting, when family groups vote together in the open; and in proxy voting, where a male family member collects ballot papers belonging to one or more women relatives and marks those papers as he sees fit. "Family voting" is an undemocratic practice which disenfranchises women voters and should not be tolerated.

4. The under-representation of women in elected office hampers the full democratic development of most Council of Europe member states, as only one country (Sweden) has achieved the parity threshold set out in Recommendation Rec(2003)3 of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making, that is, 40% representation in parliament at national level. The presence of women in parliaments and other elected assemblies is a key component of democracy. Increasing the proportion of women in elected office would be a route to social and democratic change which would benefit men and women alike.

5. Council of Europe member states therefore have the duty to ensure that European standards within the democratic election process are met and that women are given a fair chance both to freely elect the candidate of their choice and to be elected themselves.

6. The Parliamentary Assembly thus recommends that the Committee of Ministers draw up a charter for electoral equality (if appropriate, asking the opinion of the Venice Commission) in which Council of Europe member states would subscribe to concerted action to guarantee women's electoral rights and to improve the electoral participation of women. This charter should:

- 6.1. include all measures necessary to outlaw and eliminate "family voting", in particular by:
 - a. organising awareness-raising campaigns during pre-election periods emphasising that "family voting" is a serious violation of electoral rights;
 - b. enabling sub-literate voters to make an individual decision by designing ballot papers sensitive to voters' needs (including for example dual-language ballot papers, using party symbols and/or photographs);
 - c. training electoral commission officials in the conduct of democratic polling, with particular attention to the prevention of family voting;

1. Assembly debate on 5 October 2004 (27th Sitting) (see [Doc.10202](#), report of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, rapporteur: Mr Mooney). Text adopted by the Assembly on 5 October 2004 (27th Sitting).



- d. introducing sanctions against electoral commissions' officials in polling stations where family voting is detected and invalidating the results of voting in these polling stations;
 - e. outlawing proxy voting;
- 6.2. set the objective to increase the minimum representation of women in parliament and other elected assemblies to the level of at least 40% by the year 2020, in particular by:
- a. removing any constitutional or legal barriers to positive measures aiming at gender parity;
 - b. encouraging political parties to adopt positive measures to ensure increased representation of women candidates;
 - c. adopting legislative reforms to introduce parity thresholds for candidates in elections at local, regional, national and supranational levels;
 - d. inviting speakers of parliaments to ensure a discrimination- and harassment-free environment conducive to conciliation of private and political life;
 - e. where electoral systems are shown to have a negative impact on the political representation of women in elected bodies, by adjusting or reforming those systems to promote gender-balanced representation;
 - f. instituting gender-neutral quotas for required numbers of female and male candidates on party lists. Double quota (e.g. "zipping") systems are especially recommended because they ensure that women are sufficiently well placed to be elected. Quotas should be time-limited and proportionate to needs;
 - g. taking action through the public funding of political parties in order to encourage them to promote gender equality;
 - h. applying these measures to all elected posts, such as presidents and mayors where applicable, as well as to all bodies constituted as a result of elections, such as governments;
 - i. adopting appropriate legislative and/or administrative measures to ensure that there is gender-balanced representation in all national delegations to international organisations and fora;
 - j. developing specific training and publicity packages to encourage women candidates to contest elections;
 - k. ensuring equal access to the media by male and female candidates and encouraging media professionals to give equal visibility to female and male candidates and elected representatives in the media, especially during election periods.

7. The Assembly calls on all Council of Europe member states to undertake awareness-raising measures, including gender education, in order to bring about a lasting change of attitudes and traditions to ensure the full participation of women in elections at all levels and in all respects.

8. Finally, the Parliamentary Assembly recommends that national parliaments and international organisations which carry out election monitoring, including the Assembly itself, try to attain gender balance when appointing the members of election observation missions. In addition, the gender dimension of electoral participation should be appropriately monitored during such missions.