

# Istanbul Declaration on Equality between Men and Women as a Fundamental Criterion of Democracy (1997)

4th European Ministerial Conference  
on equality between women and men  
(Istanbul, 13-14 November 1997)

## **DECLARATION ON EQUALITY BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN AS A FUNDAMENTAL CRITERION OF DEMOCRACY**

*The Ministers of the States participating in the 4th European Ministerial Conference on equality between women and men (Istanbul, 13-14 November 1997)*

- considering that the principles of pluralist democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights - which are the guiding principles of the Council of Europe - constitute the basis for their co-operation;
- bearing in mind the major political changes that have taken place in Europe during recent years, leading to the enlargement of the Council of Europe and to the profound transformation of European societies;
- noting that the Heads of State and Government of the member States of the Council of Europe, meeting in Strasbourg on 10 and 11 October 1997 for the Organisation's Second Summit, stressed "the importance of a more balanced representation of men and women in all sectors of society, including political life," and called for "continued progress with a view to achieving effective equality of opportunities between women and men";
- recalling the commitments entered into by the member States of the Council of Europe under the European Convention on Human Rights and in the Declaration on equality of women and men of 16 November 1988, reiterated in the message of the Committee of Ministers (11 July 1995) to the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, September 1995);
- reaffirming their commitment to the goals and recommendations set forward in the texts adopted by the international community at the United Nations World Conferences held during the 1990s, in particular

those contained in the strategic objectives of the Platform for Action adopted at the Beijing Conference, as well as in the strategic objectives of the Regional Platform for Action adopted at the High-Level Regional Preparatory meeting for the Fourth World Conference on Women (Vienna, October 1994);

- noting, however, with grave concern that, in spite of the significant changes in the status, the role and the contributions of women in society during the second half of this century, the distribution of power, responsibilities and access to resources between women and men is still very unequal;

- taking as their starting point the texts adopted at the 1st, 2nd and 3rd European Ministerial Conferences on equality between women and men (Strasbourg, 1986, Vienna, 1989 and Rome, 1993) as well as the results of the Conference "Equality and democracy: Utopia or challenge?" (Strasbourg, February 1995) and in general the work of the Council of Europe on the subject of equality and democracy;

- recalling the Recommendation No R (96) 5 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on reconciling work and family life;

- stressing that, as society is equally composed of women and men and that one of the most structural diversities of people is gender, the balanced representation of women and men in political decision-making would ensure a better functioning of a democratic society;

- emphasising that the work towards the achievement of equality between women and men should no longer be considered as a women's issue but involve all members of society, women and men, fully and become the concern of society as a whole;

- taking into consideration the need for men's greater contribution to the promotion of equality between women and men;

***AGREE ON THE FOLLOWING:***

The strengthening of democracy requires that its principles be deepened and clarified in a never-ending dynamic process of search for and commitment to the full promotion and protection of human rights - civil, political, economic, social and cultural - for all people;

The achievement of equality between women and men is an integral part of the process leading to a genuine democracy. As a prerequisite, the participation of all members of society, women and men, in all walks of life,

has to be fully secured. Democracy must become gender aware and gender sensitive;

This includes gender-balanced representation as a demand for justice and a necessity for attaining genuine democracy, which can no longer afford to ignore the competence, skills and creativity of women;

Some of the barriers which women face in connection with their participation and gender-balanced representation in political and public life are due to the structure and functioning of electoral systems and political institutions, mainly political parties. Change in this field can only come about through the empowerment of women and a constructive dialogue with men, leading them to understand the urgency of deep reform in the forms of political representation and decision-making which now show under-representation of women;

The marginalisation of women in public life and democracy is a structural factor that is linked to the unequal distribution of economic and political power between women and men and to attitudinal stereotypes regarding the social roles of women and men. These stereotyped social roles limit the scope for both women and men to realise their potential;

Equality requires a positive, dynamic challenge to the established power structures and to stereotyped sex roles so as to achieve structural change at all levels and, ultimately, a new social order;

Men have an important part to play in achieving equality between women and men, especially when they are decision-makers;

Greater participation by men in the sphere of private life, in caring responsibilities, especially the everyday care of children, family and home, as well as a more equal sharing of responsibilities for decision-making in political, public and professional life with women would improve the quality of life for all.

*The Ministers,*

1. AGREE that the goal must be to achieve a democracy in which women and men are equal, leading to a deeper realisation of justice and universal human rights, as well as to the enrichment of democracy through gender-balanced representation;

2. AGREE that this goal should be pursued through specific, multidisciplinary strategies, concerning political and public life and all other walks of life, through the empowerment of women and through partnerships of women and men working towards the common goal of equality;

3. AFFIRM that the realisation of equality between women and men is the task not just of governments, but also that of society as a whole;
4. EMPHASISE the need to mainstream a gender perspective into all policies and programmes at all levels, in order to identify the impact on women and men and to improve and develop decision-making;
5. UNDERLINE that the allocation of adequate human and financial resources for gender mainstreaming from all funding resources needs to be ensured for a successful translation of this concept into practice;
6. EMPHASISE, as an important prerequisite to mainstreaming, the need to improve knowledge on men and women in all their living conditions by promoting studies and statistics on men and women in a gender perspective;
7. UNDERLINE the role men have to play in the realisation of equality and agree that specific strategies for men are to be developed;
8. AGREE that new activities aiming at promoting the role of men in the realisation of equality should be complementary to current activities in the field of equality between women and men;
9. AGREE on the indicative list of multidisciplinary strategies aimed at equality between women and men as a fundamental criterion of democracy, which is appended to this Declaration;
10. ENCOURAGE governments, and all institutions and groups concerned, in particular the social partners and senior public officials, to implement, strengthen and support initiatives based on the appended strategies;
11. RECOMMEND the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to take all necessary measures for the achievement of the objectives set out in this Declaration, in particular:

in the field of intergovernmental co-operation:

- devise, launch and promote public campaigns to alert public opinion to the usefulness and advantages for society as a whole of gender balanced representation by women and men in decision-making;
- encourage and organise pooling of information and experience between member States of good practice and assessment of impact of measures taken to achieve a gender balanced representation of women and men in decision-making;

- promote and carry out research, including a gender impact assessment of electoral systems to identify measures to counter the under-representation of women in decision-making;
- organise meetings, seminars and conferences, at which men and women discuss together different subjects in an equality perspective, with a view to elaborate a vision for the future, a vision of a post-patriarchal society;
- in the framework of its work for combating violence against women, consider preparing a European legal instrument on this subject;
- invite the Council for Cultural Co-operation (CDCC) and its Education Committee (CC-ED) to set up a Joint Group of Specialists together with the Steering Committee for equality between women and men (CDEG) aimed at promoting gender equality education and non-stereotyped education at all levels of the education system;

within the Secretariat of the Council of Europe:

- promote a gender-balanced representation of women and men at all levels within the Council of Europe;
- encourage targets for the achievement of a critical mass of women in decision-making positions within the Council of Europe.

Furthermore, the Ministers recommend that the Committee of Ministers:

- promote the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in all Council of Europe bodies and activities and encourage all bodies which deal with programme and budgetary matters to ensure, in their work, the visible mainstreaming of a gender perspective;
- ensure that the realisation of equality between women and men is a part of the monitoring of member States' fulfilment of their democratic obligations.

## **APPENDIX TO THE DECLARATION**

### **MULTIDISCIPLINARY STRATEGIES AIMING AT PROMOTING EQUALITY BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN AS A FUNDAMENTAL CRITERION OF DEMOCRACY**

#### **A. EQUALITY IN POLITICAL AND PUBLIC LIFE**

Governments are invited to:

in order to inform and sensitise the public opinion:

- table a political statement explaining that the equal sharing of decision-making power between women and men strengthens and enriches democracy and commit themselves to the goal of gender balance;
- monitor and publish, on a regular basis, details of the proportions of women and men in elective and non-elective public positions;
- promote research on the obstacles which prevent women's access to the various decision-making bodies at the different levels and publish the results;
- promote analysis of and studies on the selection criteria used for public nomination procedures, with a view to detecting the elements which have a negative influence on the nomination of women and commit themselves to take measures aimed at removing those elements, e.g. by setting up a governmental body in charge of following the situation;
- promote public campaigns aimed at the general public as well as at specific groups, e.g. at those who decide upon nominations, in order to raise their awareness on the importance of a gender balanced representation in decision-making;
- undertake education and training activities aimed at informing people, and in particular young people, about the importance of political participation and of having a gender-balanced representation;

in order to prevent discrimination and ensure a gender-balance in political and public life:

- review the differential impact of electoral systems on the political representation of women in elected bodies and, where appropriate, adjust or reform those systems to promote gender-balanced representation;
- promote and support special measures to stimulate and empower women to participate in political and public life;
- take measures to encourage a gender-balanced representation in all public appointments made by the government, for example by proposing thresholds and target figures for women's appointments and by promoting open and accountable appointments and procedures;
- encourage governmental advisory committees and councils to have a gender-balanced representation in their decision-making bodies;

- promote a gender balance in all financial institutions funded by the government, for example, by nominating persons of the under-represented sex to Committees at all levels and encourage gender balance in all other financial institutions;
- ensure that there is gender-balanced representation in all appointments made by a minister or the government itself to all public committees, etc., by, for example, the adoption and implementation of appropriate legislative and/or administrative measures, the setting up a database of all women and men with special skills and knowledge (experts), publishing figures for male and female representation and encourage other nominating bodies to follow a similar policy;
- encourage employers to allow those participating in political life to have the right to take time off from their professional activity;
- support, by all appropriate measures, programmes to stimulate a gender-balance in political life, in governments, political parties and/or NGOs;
- aim at a gender balance in the list of national candidates nominated for elections by the Council of Europe, for example, to the European Court of Human Rights or other bodies of the Organisation;

Political parties are invited to:

- consider restrictions on the number of terms of office a person can spend in the same political function;
- consider restrictions on the number of political offices that can be held simultaneously;
- adopt and promote a gender balance policy within the party and the party's structures and identify measures to achieve this aim;
- consider adapting the status and working conditions of elected representatives so as to make politics more attractive to persons with family responsibilities;

Political parties, trade unions, employers organisations and other relevant organisations are invited to:

- remove discriminatory practices, incorporate gender perspectives into their platforms and ensure women's access to executive and decision-making bodies on an equal basis with men;

- put at the disposal of their members, when actively involved in their party/organisation's work, a system of necessary benefits for temporary child care and adjust their meeting hours to take account of the needs of families;
- review and adjust structures and policies, using gender impact assessment;
- set up specific policies aiming at promoting women to posts of responsibility;
- review their selection and nomination procedures in order to remove all barriers that directly or indirectly discriminate against the selection and nomination of women to these posts;
- undertake training initiatives aimed at favouring gender-balanced representation at all levels in the party/organisation;
- strengthening women's branches within their structure, in order to influence the policy of the party/organisation and to promote the nomination of women candidates;

NGOs are invited to:

- develop their activities as pressure groups working for equality in the political system and political institutions;
- initiate and/or develop activities aimed at informing women about their civil and political rights;
- organise all kinds of training for women and men aimed at a gender balanced representation in political and public life;
- set up networks of organisations working in favour of gender balanced representation in political and public life;
- carry out gender impact assessment of systems, structures and policies.

## **B. EQUALITY IN ECONOMIC AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE**

Governments are invited to:

in order to prevent discrimination and ensure gender balance:

- promote and strengthen women's full and active participation in the economy and in economic decision-making;
- encourage and promote an increase in the number of women working at management level in the media;



- enact and enforce legislation against discrimination based on the ground of sex and to guarantee equal treatment in the labour market;
- eliminate discriminatory practices against women related to their reproductive possibilities and functions, for example by prohibiting any reference to pregnancy during recruitment;
- serve as a role model to other employers by ensuring non-discriminatory structures and practices and, to this end, take measures to increase the number of women in the senior civil service through, inter alia, the adoption of transparent, non-discriminatory staff policies and practices, the balanced representation of women and men on recruitment and promotion boards and examination of work practices;
- encourage the social partners to adopt policies aimed at the increased presence of women in decision-making posts, for example, by setting up joint promotion plans for women between certain employers and women's institutions and organisations;
- encourage employers to adopt equal opportunities policies in their enterprises as an integral part of their human resources policy and provide the necessary budgetary and staff resources to implement these policies and to ensure their monitoring and assessment;

in order to ensure equal pay for work of equal value and equal treatment:

- enact and enforce legislation to guarantee the rights of women and men to equal pay for equal work and work of equal value;
- enact and enforce legislation to guarantee the right of women and men to equal treatment, opportunities and pay and ensure access to justice by providing legal aid and counselling, financial support and information on the functioning of judicial mechanisms;
- monitor the gender division of the labour market and the participation of women in high level positions, including economic decision-making;

in the field of training

- promote the improvement of women's skills, in particular in the fields of science, information and communication technologies, as well as in areas of potential expansion;
- encourage the social partners to provide education and training schemes, such as self-development and management courses for women; when one sex is under-represented, special training should be

provided to enable employees of the under-represented sex to take advantage of particular employment opportunities;

- provide assistance, counselling and training for people wishing to create their own enterprises, taking into account the specific difficulties with which women are confronted, including access to credit facilities;
- encourage women to participate actively in the labour market by counselling and training measures aimed especially at young women, at women re-entering the labour market and at unemployed women;

in the field of awareness raising

- encourage a gender-sensitive judicial system, for example by providing training courses for judges and lawyers;
- provide training courses for members of government, high level civil servants and other administrative officers when an active and visible policy of mainstreaming is implemented;
- raise the awareness of teachers about the roles of women and men in a democratic society and about their contribution to equality;
- include courses on equality between women and men in training programmes for civil servants;
- encourage the media to provide special awareness-raising and training courses on equality between women and men for their staff;

Social partners such as trade unions and employers, political parties and other relevant bodies are invited to:

- take initiatives to remove wage differences between traditionally female and male professions by re-evaluating jobs traditionally held by women; the re-evaluation process should be performed both by women and men;
- ensure a gender perspective in all wage negotiations by the balanced participation of both women and men and by respecting female qualifications;
- ensure training programmes for women and men employees on an equal basis;
- agree policies aimed at strengthening women's competencies, knowledge and skills, inter alia by special training courses;

- agree specific policies aimed at promoting women to decision-making posts where they are under-represented;
- incorporate equality of opportunity into their human resources policy by analysing and modifying, if necessary, documents and practices implemented in the framework of recruitment procedures, job offers, selection of applicants, training programmes and promotions;
- gather and update regularly gender-segregated statistical data concerning all indicators to be used in order to establish a permanent overview of the comparative situation of women and men in the company;
- raise awareness among and train the staff of the company in the field of equal opportunities, especially top management and persons in charge of management, selection and training;
- combat sexual harassment at the workplace by adopting legislative and administrative measures or collective agreements aiming at protecting the dignity of women and men at work (ref: article 26 of the European Social Charter (revised)) and promote actions for the implementation of these measures, such as awareness-raising campaigns for employers, incentives, counselling, support and, if necessary, to appear for plaintiffs;
- encourage the organisation of regular meetings between employers and employees on career expectations and the expectation of enterprises (discussion on career planning);
- ensure the implementation of mainstreaming in all their activities, which involves the (re)organisation, improvement and development of policy processes to incorporate a gender equality perspective by training all their officials in the consequences of the imbalances between women and men.

## **C. RECONCILIATION OF FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES WITH POLITICAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE**

Governments are invited to:

- promote harmonisation and partnerships of women and men in family and society, especially equal sharing of family rights and responsibilities and foster national policies that enable people to combine their work with family life;

- recognise that the sharing of work and family responsibilities between women and men constitutes a gain for society as a whole and promote this concept;
- adopt appropriate legislation, incentives and/or measures aimed at encouraging the equal sharing of parental responsibilities between women and men. These could include: flexible working patterns, suitable pension reforms, family friendly infrastructures, appropriate social services;
- support and encourage the provision of child care and facilities for dependent persons for women and men, or other services to help them meet their family responsibilities;
- adopt leave schemes applicable throughout working life for family and educational reasons and, where appropriate, encourage and provide for adequate maternity and paternity leave schemes, shared equally between fathers and mothers and organised with some flexibility, aiming at taking into account the interests of both women and men;
- adapt social security schemes and tax systems to the increasing diversity of working patterns and in particular, adopt policies to ensure the appropriate protection of labour law and social security for part-time, temporary, seasonal and home-based workers, especially as far as unemployment and pension schemes are concerned;

Employers are invited to:

- promote and develop flexible employment practices enabling the employees, both women and men, to meet the demands of their family responsibilities for example by facilitating access to part-time work for those who so wish, to "distance employment" - (telework, homework) provided that suitable protection is agreed;
- promote career development, including promotion possibilities, based on work conditions which harmonise work and parental responsibilities;
- contribute, financially or otherwise, to the provision of child care and family facilities for their employees;
- encourage organisation of work which facilitates flexibility for families, inter alia by holding meetings and training programmes within ordinary working hours;

Social partners are invited to:

- ensure that collective agreements include provisions to support the reconciliation of work and family life, e.g parental leave, part-time work and flexible employment practices.

## **D. PROMOTING EQUALITY IN A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY: THE ROLE OF MEN**

Governments are invited to:

In order to favour the mainstreaming of equality and the understanding of the fact that equality is an issue for society as a whole:

- encourage men to promote equality within their areas of responsibility by incorporating a gender perspective in their work;
- encourage men to assess the consequences and the impact of political initiatives on the balance between women and men within the area concerned;
- undertake activities aimed at heads of enterprise or administration, in order that they recognise that men's commitment to their role as fathers is a positive sign, including for their work;
- encourage high standards of conduct for all those engaged in public life and, in particular, promote non-discriminatory behaviour among members of government and high-level public officials;

In the field of awareness-raising among men on the equality issue:

- develop awareness among members of government and high-level public employees on equality between women and men, for example by organising training courses;
- integrate into training of administrative officers training courses on equality between women and men;
- highlight the changing role models for men and women so as to generate public acceptance and support for men who are following non-traditional role models;
- encourage activities, such as conferences and campaigns aimed at making equality between women and men a concern for men. This would include encouraging men to be aware of their role in the family, professional life and society with the goal of giving their own input into more equality and partnership and, for the same purpose, women to be aware of their new role in the family;

In the field of training and education:

- favour mixed-sex composition of education teams at all levels and of staff assisting families;
- support training and educational programmes already in Kindergartens and primary schools in order to develop and support new ways of socialising girls and boys and prevent stereotypes concerning the traditional roles of women and men;
- support training and educational programmes for men aimed at ensuring the sharing of responsibilities in the upbringing of children, and for women to accept the participation of men;
- reduce and aim to eliminate men's violence against women by initiating education ensuring respect of the other person and as concerns violent men, by supporting practical and therapeutic initiatives;

In the research field:

- improve knowledge on men and women in all their living conditions by promoting studies and statistics on men in a gender perspective;
- promote studies which examine the consequences for the identity of men of changes in women's careers, lives and aspirations.
- promote research on relationships between men and on the ways in which they perceive their masculine identity.

## **STATEMENT ON EQUALITY BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN IN THE CONTEXT OF THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

The Ministers of the States participating in the 4th European Ministerial Conference on equality between women and men, being held in Istanbul on 13 and 14 November 1997;

Noting that the Heads of State and Government of the member States of the Council of Europe, meeting in Strasbourg on 10 and 11 October 1997 for the Organisation's Second Summit, stressed "the importance of a more balanced representation of men and women in all sectors of society, including political life," and called for "continued progress with a view to achieving effective equality of opportunities between women and men",

Recalling the commitments made by the States participating in the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, as well as the Council of Europe's contribution to that Conference,

Noting that 1999 will mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Council of Europe,

AFFIRM the necessity to take stock of the progress made in member States and to multiply the efforts for implementing the Platform for Action adopted at the 4th World Conference on Women, and express the firm hope that this issue will be addressed in the context of the 50th anniversary of the Council of Europe in an appropriate form,

UNDERLINE the importance of strengthening the intergovernmental cooperation within the Council of Europe in the field of equality between women and men and in particular the role of men in this process.

Resolution expressing appreciation to the host authorities

The Ministers participating in the 4th European Ministerial Conference on equality between women and men, held in Istanbul on 13-14 November 1997;

Aware of the progress that equality between women and men will constitute for democracy and of the contribution that the Istanbul Conference has also made to such progress;

Express their warmest thanks to the Government of Turkey for the excellent organisation of this Conference in Istanbul and for its kind hospitality;

Take note of the invitation by the Government of "the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" to hold the 5th European Ministerial Conference on equality between women and men.