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Promoting diversity and equality in politics

Report¹

Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination

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Summary

Throughout Europe, large parts of the electorate lack trust in elected institutions. Parliaments are criticised for being distant, not understanding people's real concerns and not being representative of the population. Women, persons with disabilities, visible minorities, young women and men, people with an immigration background and LGBTI people still remain poorly represented in politics at local, regional, national and European levels. This representation deficit perpetuates the idea that political institutions are reserved for a specific group, composed mostly of over-fifty, white, heterosexual men.

Time has come to have a holistic approach and look at the issues of diversity, equality and inclusion across the board, in order to ensure that parliaments and other elected institutions fully reflect the complex diversity of European societies. More diversity in politics would be beneficial for the political system as a whole, enhancing its legitimacy and representativeness. It would also contribute to preventing and combating discrimination and negative stereotyping.

¹ Reference to Committee: Doc. 13981, Reference 4207 of 27 May 2016.

A. Draft resolution²

1. Diversity is an inherent part of European societies and contributes to their richness. However, all too often, elected institutions fail to mirror this diversity, reinforcing the stereotype that politics is the reserve of a certain category of persons, to the exclusion of others. Women, visible minorities, persons with an immigration background, national minorities, young people, LGBTI people and persons with disabilities remain under-represented in politics, at local, regional, national and European levels. This representation gap perpetuates the idea that politics is reserved for a selected group, composed mostly of over-fifty, white, heterosexual men.
2. The Assembly is convinced that promoting greater representativeness of elected institutions would strengthen their democratic character, enhance the quality and legitimacy of their decision-making and increase people's trust in the political system. It would also contribute to preventing and combating discrimination, sending out a powerful message in favour of equality and inclusion.
3. A wide range of measures are necessary to promote greater representativeness of the political system, some of which require legislative changes or imply the introduction of specific policies. Some could be better achieved through effective compliance with Council of Europe instruments, while others are within the remit of political parties who, to a large extent, act as gate-keepers to political institutions.
4. The Assembly has already adopted a wealth of resolutions laying down recommendations to improve the representativeness of elected bodies, focussing on aspects such as the balanced representation of women and men, the political participation and representation of national minorities, the political participation of young people, the political rights of persons with disabilities and the political participation of non-citizens.
5. This sectorial approach is important to identify specific measures targeting the situation of specific groups. However, the Assembly believes that the time has come to have a more holistic approach and look at the issue of diversity, equality and inclusion across the board, in order to ensure that parliaments and other elected institutions fully reflect the complex diversity of European societies.
6. In the light of these considerations, the Assembly calls on Council of Europe member States to lay down the conditions to improve the participation and representation of people from a diverse background in the political system and, to this end, to:
 - 6.1. implement Assembly resolution 2111 (2016) on "Assessing the impact of measures to improve women's political representation";
 - 6.2. implement Assembly resolution 2155 (2017) on "The political rights of persons with disabilities: a democratic issue";
 - 6.3. engage in a reflexion on limiting the number of elected mandates held by one person and consider introducing an eligibility age corresponding to the age of the majority, with a view to encouraging youth participation;
 - 6.4. sign and ratify the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and European Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level (ETS N. 144), if they have not yet done so, and effectively implement them, as well as the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life;
 - 6.5. provide civic education to all students, irrespective of the curriculum;
 - 6.6. disseminate information on participation in political life, including in the most common foreign languages;
 - 6.7. support the creation and functioning of civil society-led youth parliaments;
 - 6.8. launch awareness-raising campaigns on the benefits of diversity in politics and on deconstructing stereotypes with regard to the active participation of persons from diverse backgrounds in politics.

² Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the Committee on 23 April 2018.

7. The Assembly calls on national parliaments to ensure greater openness, transparency and inclusiveness in their work, while introducing internal measures to effectively tackle hate speech, and in particular to:

- 7.1. set up wide public consultations to take fully-informed policy decisions;
- 7.2. enhance co-operation and exchange of information with national equality bodies;
- 7.3. introduce, when they do not exist, codes of conduct for members of parliament equipped with effective disciplinary sanctions against hate speech, violence and incitement to violence;
- 7.4. organise training for new members of parliament to provide guidance in their new responsibilities;
- 7.5. set up internship programmes and ensure their beneficiaries come from a variety of backgrounds;
- 7.6. invite youth parliaments for regular exchanges on activities and cooperation.

8. Finally, the Assembly invites political parties to promote diversity and equality in their internal functioning and, to this end, to:

- 8.1. encourage the progression of persons from diverse backgrounds within party structures;
- 8.2. introduce mentorship programmes and ensure that their beneficiaries come from a variety of backgrounds;
- 8.3. support the creation of group-specific caucuses within their ranks;
- 8.4. ensure that equality across the board is mainstreamed in their political programmes and the public discourse of their leaders;
- 8.5. ensure diversity across the board in the composition of their electoral lists;
- 8.6. ensure that during electoral campaigns, candidates from a diverse background are given equivalent opportunities and means for visibility and campaigning;
- 8.7. refrain from using diversity as a tool of political instrumentalisation;
- 8.8. set up internal mechanisms, when they do not yet exist, to prevent and sanction hate speech, incitement to violence and recourse to violence by its members.

B. Explanatory memorandum

1. Introduction

1. In 2017, Leo Varadkar became Prime Minister at the age of 38. He is Ireland's youngest prime minister, the first Irish political leader of Indian descent and the first openly gay prime minister. "If somebody of my age, of my mixed race background and of all the things that make up my character can potentially become leader of our country, then I think that sends out a message to every child born today that there is no office in Ireland that they can't aspire to" Leo Varadkar told the media.³

2. Change is indeed on the way for the European political landscape, but it is slow. In 2018, women, persons with disabilities, visible minorities, young women and men, people with an immigration background and LGBTI people still remain poorly represented in politics at local, regional, national and European levels. This representation deficit perpetuates the idea that political institutions are the realm of a selected cast, composed mostly of over-fifty, white, heterosexual men.

3. Increasingly in recent times, parliaments have been criticised for being distant from the electorate and not understanding the real concerns of the people. This has contributed to reinforcing the lack of trust of large parts of the electorate in traditional elected institutions and to creating fertile ground for populist parties and movements, who portray themselves as the real expression of the people. As stressed by Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, populist parties "thrive most easily where people have lost trust in their governments, parliaments and courts, where critical journalism and NGOs already struggle to be heard, where minorities have not been integrated into wider society and where large numbers of citizens feel deprived of opportunities".⁴

4. If they want to continue to enjoy democratic legitimacy, parliaments need to open up and better reflect the societies they serve. Promoting higher participation and representation of women, youth, persons with an immigration background, persons with disabilities, visible minorities and LGBTI people in politics is a way not only to ensure that institutions are recognised as the mirrors of society, but also to ensure that their concerns are truly taken into account in the political decision-making process.

2. Scope of the report

5. The issue of diversity in politics is vast. With a concern for coming to grips with the systemic nature of discrimination against women and the consequences of their imbalanced representation in politics, the Assembly has repeatedly dealt with this matter, most recently in Assembly resolution 2111 (2016) on "Assessing the impact of measures to improve women's political representation".⁵ It stressed that the representation of women in politics was still largely disproportionate in most Council of Europe member States and explained how quotas were the most effective positive measures, when coupled with sanctions for non-compliance and specific accompanying measures.

6. Recently, the Assembly has also looked at the issue of the political rights of persons with disabilities, with resolution 2155 (2017).⁶ It underlined that many persons with disabilities still faced difficulties when trying to exercise their political rights. It analysed the challenges they encountered and also proposed concrete action to increase the political participation of persons with disabilities, such as removing the link between the right to vote and legal capacity, providing assistance with voting and ensuring the accessibility of public buildings and information about electoral processes, voting procedures and political programmes. It also stressed that it could contribute to breaking down stereotypes and combating discrimination against persons with disabilities.

7. In the present report, I do not intend to repeat the findings and recommendations of Resolution 2111 (2016) and Resolution 2155 (2017), which I fully share. Rather, I would like to look at the issue of diversity, equality and inclusion in politics across the board. I will focus my explanatory memorandum on the participation and representation in politics of visible minorities, women and men with an immigration background, youth and LGBTI people, in an attempt to cast a light on a little explored subject matter.

³ Leo Varadkar Set to Become Ireland's First Openly Gay Prime Minister, www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/leo-varadkar-set-become-ireland-s-first-openly-gay-prime-n767686, 2 June 2017.

⁴ State of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, Report by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe (2017).

⁵ For instance, Doc. 13571, Assembly resolution 2111 (2016).

⁶ Doc. 14268, Assembly resolution 2155 (2017) on "The political rights of persons with disabilities: a democratic issue".

3. Methodology

8. In the framework of the preparation of this report, I sent a questionnaire to the national parliaments of all 47 member States of the Council of Europe, asking a series of questions about diversity and equality in national parliaments and measures taken by political parties. I received information from 32 parliaments⁷ on measures taken to encourage the participation and representation of persons from diverse backgrounds in political life. While most of them could provide data on the numbers of women and men elected, and on the age of their members, hardly any of them could provide statistics broken down by ethnic origin of their members. I also received a few answers on the issue of sexual orientation.

9. In addition to desk research, I carried out a fact-finding visit to Brussels on 13 -14 June 2017 where I held bilateral meetings with a number of representatives from NGOs and the European Parliament secretariat, as well as a few political figures from Belgium.

10. I participated in a workshop of the OSCE/ODIHR Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues on Strengthening diverse leadership, participation and representation of Roma, including women and youth, in public and political life on 27 - 28 March 2017 at the European Parliament in Brussels. I also held a bilateral meeting with Mr Valeriu Nicolae, former Special Representative of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe for Roma Issues on 27 April 2017 in Strasbourg. A consultant worked on the preparation of an information memorandum on the participation of national minorities in politics in the Western Balkans.

4. Benefits of diversity and equality in politics

11. Increasing levels of diversity, equality and inclusion in politics is beneficial for the political system as a whole. It sends a powerful message to the whole population showing that diversity is not exceptional but part of today's Europe. It also contributes to preventing and combating discrimination and negative stereotyping.

12. In addition, more diversity, equality and inclusion in politics encourage more people to participate in elections and in political life⁸ and lead to a renewal of the political representatives in elected bodies.

13. Another important benefit is an impact on political programmes when more women and men from diverse backgrounds are able to participate in the preparation of programmes and campaigns directly from within political parties and movements.

14. The benefits of diversity and equality in politics can be important, provided that they are not promoted as a cosmetic measure to show diversity but which, in reality, changes nothing. There can be no long-lasting diversification of the backgrounds of candidates for elections if political parties do not promote diversity, equality and inclusion throughout their structures, from the local level to their decision-making bodies.

5. Diversity and equality in the political landscape: overview of the situation in Council of Europe member States

5.1. Emergence of role models

15. Presenting an overview of the situation in Council of Europe member States is not an easy task considering that we have limited information concerning the participation of visible minorities, women and men with an immigration background or LGBTI people in politics. This is why I would like to mention some concrete examples of elected officials who could be considered role models, encouraging persons from diverse backgrounds to be more engaged in political life.

16. Inspiring examples show that diversity is present on the European political stage. The election of Sadiq Khan, born in an English-Pakistani family, as Mayor of London, sent a positive and powerful message. I would also like to mention Khadija Arib, former member of our Assembly, born in Morocco, who became Speaker of the Dutch House of Representatives. However, too often, a political leader or elected official from a visible minority or who was not born in the country where he/she is making their political career is still seen as an exceptional event. In France, we can think of Rachida Dati, whose parents were born in Algeria and Morocco, and Christiane Taubira, born in French Guiana, former ministers of Justice, or Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, former minister of Education born in Morocco.

⁷ AS/Ega/Inf(2017)07 of 7 March 2017, 56p. The data was sent by national parliaments of 30 Council of Europe member States and two observer States (Canada and Israel) in January and February 2017.

⁸ Qui représentent les élus de la « diversité » ? Revue française de science politique, 2010/4 (Vol. 60), pp. 745-767.

17. The situation can be very different, depending on the group and the country concerned. For example, in some countries, there are a number of LGBTI politicians – who are and can be open about their LGBTI identity - while in other countries, speaking up about one's LGBTI identity means taking a political risk. In Ireland, the marriage equality referendum led to a lot of politicians coming out about their sexual orientation. There are currently two ministers who have publicly stated they are gay or lesbian, the Prime Minister and Ms Katherine Zappone, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and former member of this Committee. Xavier Bettel is the first openly gay prime minister in Luxembourg and the marriage with his partner was covered in the press. The appointment of Ana Brnabić, first openly lesbian minister in a Serbian government, first as minister for State administration and then as Prime Minister in June 2017, was welcomed by the LGBTI community and beyond as an important step.⁹ Having heads of government publicly stating their sexual orientation contributes to combating prejudice and discrimination against LGBTI people and to change mindsets.

18. With regard to the participation of young people, 2017 was a particular year with the emergence of several relatively young leaders in Europe. Sebastian Kurz, 31, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, became the Austrian Chancellor. Emmanuel Macron was elected President of the French Republic at 39. Jüri Ratas became Prime Minister of Estonia at 39.

19. According to Sophie Gaston, deputy director of the British think-tank Demos, the new young leaders "share an understanding of the modern forces at play in campaigning - particularly their grasp of digital and social media - and how to harness these to connect directly with voters".¹⁰ They have transformed what was previously a disadvantage into a force. They reach out rapidly, via social media such as Facebook or Instagram, to an audience which would in general not be very interested in politics. They shorten their communication, adapt it for social media and use the power of photographs to communicate quickly without going through traditional media. One may however wonder if youth, in its heterogeneity, feels represented by the new young leaders or if their election and access reflects a willingness to call for change by the population at large.

5.2. Youth participation and representation

20. Since I have received information from national parliaments with regard to the participation and representation of youth,¹¹ I can present more detailed information on this group. While some States have an eligibility age corresponding to the age of majority, others put in place a minimum age to stand for elections which is different. There can also be differences between types of elections, often with a higher minimum age for upper houses of parliament and presidential elections.

21. To mention a few examples, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Luxembourg, Norway, Slovenia and Sweden have an eligibility (right to be elected) age of 18 years for parliamentary elections which is the same as the majority. In Georgia, different ages are set for the different kinds of elections. A citizen needs to be 21 years old to stand for parliamentary elections, 25 to become a mayor and 35 to stand for presidential elections. In Portugal, 18 is the minimum age to run for parliamentary elections while it is 35 for the Presidency of the Republic. In Romania, candidates must be at least 23 years old to stand for elections to the Chamber of Deputies, 33 for the Senate and 35 for the Presidency of the Republic. Candidates to the Sejm (Poland) should be over 21 years old, 30 for the Senate and 35 for the Presidency of the Republic. In Turkey, candidates should be 25 years old to run for the office of mayor and 18 to stand for parliamentary elections.

22. Denmark, where one can vote and have the right to be elected at 18, has two members of parliament in the age category 20 to 24 years old,¹² and five in the age category 25 to 29 (following the 2015 parliamentary elections). In Lithuania, 16 members of parliament are under 35 years old. In Luxembourg, five members of parliament are between 31 and 35 years old. The Parliament of Montenegro has six members under 30. The Hellenic Parliament has three members under 30 (the minimum age to stand for parliamentary elections is 25), and 33 members in the 31 to 40 age category. Following the last elections in 2017, the average age in the National Assembly (France) came down to 48 instead of 54 during the previous mandate)

⁹ Serbia gets its first female – and gay – prime minister, The Guardian, 15 June 2017, www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/15/serbia-gains-its-first-female-and-gay-prime-minister-ana-brnabic.

¹⁰ Kurz and charisma: What propels young leaders to power? BBC News, 17 October 2017, www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-41640326.

¹¹ While there are several definitions of youth, I decided not to be too strict with regard to a specific age. Overall, one can consider that a person under 40 can be considered a young politician.

¹² The ages indicated are the ages of entry into Parliament following the last elections.

and the two youngest members of parliament are 23 and 24 years old respectively. The average age of senators also decreased from 64 to 60.¹³

23. In Poland, upon election, the youngest deputy was 23 years old and the oldest 77. 17 members of parliament were under 30. In Portugal, 14 members of parliament (out of 230) were aged from 21 to 30 (upon election), 44 aged from 31 to 40, 35 aged from 61 to 70 and 3 above 70. In the Slovak Republic, there are 3 members of parliament under 30 years old, 37 aged 31 to 40, 23 aged 61 to 70 and one above 71. In Switzerland, 14.6% members of Parliament (both chambers) are under 40 years old (36 members). 18 members of the Turkish National Assembly are under 36 years old and 125 are aged between 37 and 46 (total of 550 members).

24. Age itself can serve as a political platform. As an example, I would like to mention a specific political party dedicated to youth: the Youth Party of Slovenia, which was represented by 4 deputies in the National Assembly of Slovenia from 2004 to 2008.

25. Worldwide, less than 2% of members of parliament are under 30 years old.¹⁴ The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) notes that 12.3% of the members of the Swedish Parliament, 10.5% of the Finnish Parliament and 10% of the Norwegian Parliament are under 30 years old. The IPU also stresses that “about 30% of the single and lower houses of parliament in the world have no MPs (members of parliament) aged under 30. More than 80% of the world’s upper houses of parliament have no MPs aged under 30”.¹⁵

26. We are still a long way from having a systematic participation of youth in political life. I would however remain optimistic since political participation is not only a matter of running for elections, but also encompasses what we could call citizens’ participation, which is materialised through different means such as social media where young people are particularly active.

27. Encouraging active youth participation does not mean disregarding older age categories. Elderly people represent an important and active category of voters. They are interested in politics, participate in elections and their interests weigh in the preparation of political programmes. Pensioners’ parties run for elections in several Council of Europe member States.¹⁶ While I do not consider age as the main dividing factor in political life, we have to bear in mind that the interests of different age categories must be taken into account.¹⁷

28. Finally, I would like to mention a study¹⁸ by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, which found that the countries with the highest numbers of members under 30 are also the ones with the highest levels of women’s representation.

5.3. Women and men from an immigration background, visible minorities and Roma

29. In addition to the role models presented above, I would like to relay some information received in the replies sent by the national parliaments to my questionnaire. Most parliaments only collected data with regard to age, gender, professional background and education and therefore could not provide information with regard to ethnic origin or sexual orientation. Collecting this kind of information is even illegal in some States, such as France. The information I provide here is therefore only partial.

30. Nowadays in Europe, there are women and men who, despite having lived in the host country for generations, are not citizens because they do not meet the citizenship criteria. In this context, it is worth mentioning that the right to vote and be elected for non-citizens remains rare in Council of Europe member States. It depends on the type of election (local, regional, national) and the length of residence. European Union law allows any EU citizen to vote and run for elections at local level. Some countries have specific bilateral agreements and others go beyond and grant the right to vote and stand for elections at local level to all non-citizens.

¹³ Un tiers de femmes et de nouveaux, 60 ans de moyenne d’âge : un léger coup de jeune au Sénat, Le Monde, 25 September 2017, www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2017/09/25/un-tiers-de-femmes-et-de-nouveaux-60-ans-de-moyenne-d-age-un-leger-coup-de-jeune-au-senat_5191188_4355770.html

¹⁴ IPU report on Youth participation in national parliaments, 2016, <http://archive.ipu.org/pdf/publications/youthrep-e.pdf>.

¹⁵ Idem, Key findings, page 3.

¹⁶ As an example, the Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia has 11 deputies in the current term 2014-2018.

¹⁷ How will ageing populations affect politics? World Economic Forum, Hernan Winkler, 18 June 2015, www.weforum.org/agenda/authors/hernan-winkler.

¹⁸ IPU report on Youth participation in national parliaments, 2016.

31. As an example, in Finland, non-Finnish citizens have the right to vote and stand for elections in municipal elections, provided they have resided for two years in the municipality. In Norway, non-citizens can vote in local elections after three years of residence. In Luxembourg, non-citizens may stand for local elections if they have voting rights in their country of origin, and have lived in Luxembourg for a minimum of five years. A communication campaign was launched for the local elections of October 2011 so as to encourage foreign residents to register for the elections (www.jepeuxvoter.lu).

32. This report provides an opportunity to recall Assembly Recommendation 1500 (2001) on the participation of immigrants and foreign residents in political life in the Council of Europe member States, which stressed that their participation in the political decision-making process promoted their integration in general, and facilitated their harmonious co-existence which is in the interest of both citizens and non-citizens in the host society.

33. The Council of Europe has a specific instrument to this end: the Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level (ETS No.144).¹⁹ This Convention requires State parties to “grant to every foreign resident the right to vote and to stand for election in local authority elections, provided that he fulfils the same legal requirements as apply to nationals and furthermore has been a lawful and habitual resident in the State concerned for the five years preceding the elections”. It also requires State parties to ensure that information is available to foreign residents concerning their rights and obligations in relation to local public life.

34. Persons from an immigration background, who are citizens by birth or acquired citizenship via naturalisation, have the right to participate in elections and to be elected. I received information according to which in Sweden, 29 members of Parliament were born outside Sweden, 11 were born in Sweden but to parents born outside the country, 25 were born in Sweden but had one parent born abroad.

35. In Spain, 8 out of the 350 deputies elected in the December 2015 elections were born outside the country. Most of them were children or grandchildren of Spanish emigrants and arrived in Spain at a very young age. They had Spanish citizenship and came back to live in Spain with their families. There are also cases of non-citizens (notably from Uruguay and Equatorial Guinea) who acquired Spanish citizenship and won parliamentary elections.

36. I would further like to mention the specific situation of visible minorities, who are citizens and do not necessarily have an immigration background. The colour of their skin makes them stand out compared to the skin colour of the majority of the population. As highlighted earlier in the report, European politics are too often considered as “reserved” for white men. This is changing, albeit very slowly. As an example, in the United Kingdom, the 2017 parliamentary elections resulted in the most diverse parliament to date, with 52 non-white members of Parliament.²⁰

37. I also consider it important to give specific information with regard to the participation of Roma and Sinti, since they are among the most under-represented groups in political life and the most discriminated group in Europe. There have been a handful of high-profile Roma politicians at European level, and at national level in some countries. The first Roma member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe was Juan de Dios Ramirez Heredia, in 1983, and he had already been elected to the Spanish national parliament in 1977. During our bilateral meeting, Mr Nicolae pointed out that the highest position ever occupied by a Roma at state level was his, when he was the State Secretary at the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and Elderly, in Romania. Currently, there are two Roma members of Parliament in Romania and two Roma members of the European Parliament (from Hungary). In Slovenia, in addition to the general right to vote, Roma have a special right to vote at the local elections to elect a Roma councillor from a “special list of eligible Roma voters” in twenty municipalities.

38. In the case of *Sejdić and Finci v. Bosnia and Herzegovina*,²¹ the applicants complained of their ineligibility to stand for election to the House of Peoples and the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina on the ground of their Roma and Jewish origin. They submitted that difference in treatment based expressly on race or ethnicity was not capable of justification and amounted to direct discrimination. The European Court of Human Rights held that there had been a violation of Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

¹⁹ There have been nine ratifications to date (Albania, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden).

²⁰ UK general election delivers most diverse parliament in history, Financial Times, 11 June 2017.

²¹ Judgment by the European Court of Human Rights on 22 December 2009, Applications nos. 27996/06 and 34836/06.

5.4. Difficulties encountered by candidates from diverse backgrounds

39. While more diversity, equality and inclusion in politics is beneficial on many levels, I would nevertheless like to stress that it is not an easy path. Women and men from an immigration background, visible minorities, LGBTI people and Roma encounter difficulties when entering politics. They might not have developed the required networks during their studies or professional careers so as to progress within a party hierarchy as well as others.

40. Often, they find themselves exposed to criticism and hate speech during electoral campaigns and once elected, and cannot always count on the support of their party.

41. Sometimes they are put on electoral lists but not necessarily in eligible positions. Their participation within the political party does not always mean that a change has occurred throughout party structures but at times only reflects a will of the party leadership to show there is some diversity within the party, but not to fully include it.

42. By opening up to diversity and equality, political parties may gain more votes but can also be criticised by some parts of the population who would not approve of this policy and who would consider no longer voting for the party.

43. Last but not least, there is a risk that women and men from diverse backgrounds are expected to work mainly on specific issues relevant to their group. For example, a Roma parliamentarian will almost always be attributed tasks/issues related to Roma even though this may not be his/her first interest. Too often, there is an expectation for the elected person from an underrepresented group to be a kind of spokesperson of the group, although they might be willing to use their expertise in other fields.

6. General mechanisms to promote diversity and equality in politics

44. Different mechanisms exist so as to encourage diversity and equality in politics. They can be specific to one group, or general. I do not intend to present a model that would work in every context but wish to raise awareness of some good practices which have delivered good results and which could be adapted to different contexts.

6.1. The role of political parties

45. I would like first of all to stress that political parties are the game changers with regard to the promotion of diversity and equality in politics. I consider that they hold a special responsibility with regard to the entry into politics and progression of political careers of women and men from diverse backgrounds. Political parties should have the willingness and flexibility to reach out to under-represented groups. They choose the candidates and can encourage the progression of members within the party structures. They can ensure that programmes are diversity inclusive. Their commitment to the promotion of diversity and equality can make a difference.

46. Political parties can provide training, for example, on running an electoral campaign, political communication, speaking skills and developing political strategies. They can accompany young members in the development of their skills and organise mentoring sessions.

47. Considering the important role played by political parties, I am of the opinion that they should as much as possible encourage the creation of youth caucuses or fora, or similar internal structures such as LGBTI platforms or diversity fora. Parties should allocate sufficient funding for their functioning and not consider that participation should be confined to these specific structures, but on the contrary, allow for communication and exchanges between party structures.

48. I would like to stress that the existence of and support for youth-dedicated structures should not make us overlook the importance of having younger generations involved in traditional party structures and participating in elections, with a view to entering parliaments. Political parties, when preparing lists of candidates for elections, should not only consider the seniority of candidates within the parties but also the energy and added value that younger candidates can bring to political debate, and remember the slogan "If you are old enough to vote, you are not too young to run".²²

²² Outcome Document of the Fourth Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians, Young parliamentarians as drivers of inclusion, Ottawa, Canada, 17-18 November 2017.

49. The creation of advisory committees on minority issues within political parties, training and recruitment programmes focused on national minorities are considered good practice by the Venice Commission.²³

50. A strong party leadership can pro-actively promote diversity and equality in politics with nominations. Party leaders therefore hold a special responsibility to push for a diversity and equality-inclusive agenda. Often, a person would enter a political party following personal contacts or with the support of a network.²⁴ Parties need to reach out strategically so as to motivate women and men from diverse backgrounds to join. Party leadership also plays a crucial when defending candidates from diverse backgrounds who might be victims of racism and hate speech during electoral campaigns

51. Some measures can be taken by political parties so as to encourage participation and representation of one specific group. As an example, my political party, the Civic Platform, decided that for the elections to the parliament, one candidate should be less than 35 years old among the first five candidates.

52. A Committee member reported that the Czech Pirate Party made important efforts so as to reach out to the population and presented their concrete actions. Meetings were in general open to all and often with online streaming, encouraging wide participation. Members of this party, regardless of their age, position in the party or structure, can address issues they are interested in by using direct democracy tools.²⁵ Elected representatives use social media to report on activities. Main party events usually take place during the week-end so as to allow wider participation. Childcare can be offered when needed.

53. In the United Kingdom, the Equality Act 2010 (Section 104) allows registered political parties to make arrangements for selecting candidates for elections with a view to addressing inequality of representation. Political parties can reserve seats contested in by-elections to underrepresented groups.

6.2. Legislation

54. Proportional representation systems tend to allow for more diversity and equality in parliament according to the IPU. "Some countries have succeeded in electing high shares of young parliamentarians suggesting that favourable contextual factors such as proportional electoral systems, strong youth movements and more inclusive political environments may play a role in opening up opportunities for young people to participate".²⁶ These systems allow for more diverse participation and representation, either by young people or other groups. A reserved seat system can also be a way of ensuring the representation of minorities in parliament. Lower thresholds can also contribute to a more diverse representation. Dual voting systems can also be considered to enhance minority participation and representation.²⁷

55. Having an eligibility age corresponding to the age of majority, or a fairly low eligibility age, can contribute to encouraging youth participation. In its global campaign "Not too young to run",²⁸ the United Nations stresses that a low minimum age for standing as a candidate in elections is closely linked to youth participation. In its resolution 1874 (2012) on the promotion of active citizenship in Europe, the Assembly called on member States to "put in place, as far as possible, independent statutory or informal youth councils in connection with their local and national decision-making bodies, with a view to ensuring the possibility for young people to have a say in decisions affecting them." I would like to go beyond this call. Young people should not only express their interests and views in specific youth related structures but actively participate in the decision-making bodies themselves. Millennials might be less likely to follow traditional party structures, and could be disinterested by party life if it means following traditional schemes for progression within parties.

56. Quotas for some categories are a good way of diversifying the profile of members of parliament. I am, personally, not in favour of quotas, although they are recommended by the IPU in the case of young candidates.²⁹ In my view, conditions should be created so as to allow and actively encourage participation of visible minorities, young people, women and men from an immigration background or LGBTI people at the highest level but the imposition of quotas, even if only temporary, can send mixed messages. A candidate's election should be due to their successful campaigning, strong programmes, support from political parties

²³ Guidelines on political party regulation by OSCE/ODIHR and Venice Commission, adopted by the Venice Commission at its 84th Plenary Session, Venice, 15-16 October 2010.

²⁴ Diversity in political parties' programmes, organisation and representation, DIVPOL project, 2012-2014.

²⁵ Contribution by Mr František Kopřiva (Czech Republic, NR).

²⁶ IPU report on Youth participation in national parliaments, 2016, <http://archive.ipu.org/pdf/publications/youthrep-e.pdf>.

²⁷ See part 7 on special measures promoting the participation of national minorities in politics.

²⁸ www.nottooyoungtorun.org/about/.

²⁹ Youth participation in the democratic process, Resolution adopted by the 122nd IPU Assembly, Bangkok, 1 April 2010.

and their outreach to constituencies. More efforts should be made to encourage candidates from diverse backgrounds to run for elections, including at the local level.

57. The limitation of the number of mandates held by one person is also a way of allowing more persons to actively participate in political life and encouraging a political renewal.

58. In Finland, the Local Government Act foresees opportunities for young people, elderly people and persons with disabilities to participate in local decision-making. With a view to reaching out to an important part of the population, prior to every election, the Finnish Ministry of Justice produces and disseminates material on the elections in the 20 most commonly spoken foreign languages. It also sends a letter on the election procedure and the democratic system to all persons who can vote for the first time. In order to reach out to the highest numbers, it communicates via social media. Every four years, the Finnish Government appoints the Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations (ETNO), which is composed of representatives of ministries, members of political parties, minorities' representatives, municipalities and NGOs. It was established with a view to promoting dialogue between different groups, cooperation and participation. The Ministry of Justice and ETNO have organised several regional events to train "democracy ambassadors" tasked with spreading information about participation in the elections within their organisations and networks.

6.3. Education

59. Forming citizens is the first step towards ensuring more diversity and equality in politics in the long run. I cannot therefore stress enough the importance of education and the need to ensure that civic education is accessible to all, irrespective of the curriculum. According to the Revised European Charter on The Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life (2013) adopted by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, "it is essential that young people learn about participation and democracy while in school and that courses on democracy, participation and citizenship are available and properly resourced. However school must also be a place where young people experience democracy in action and where their participation in decision-making is supported, promoted and is seen as effective".

60. Opening parliaments for visits by youth groups and setting up internship programmes in parliaments where this has not yet been done can also contribute to, in the long-run, opening politics to diversity.³⁰ In France, the Paris Institute of Political Studies set up preparatory classes in less favoured urban areas for the preparation of the entry competition.

61. Youth parliaments set up by civil society organisations can allow young people to gain significant political experience so as to stand for elections at a later stage. They should be supported and have the opportunity to meet and exchange with parliaments.

7. Special measures to promote the participation and representation of national minorities in politics

62. The issue of political participation and representation of national minorities would deserve a report of its own. I will touch upon this issue in the present report, to highlight some basic principles and illustrate some mechanisms.

63. The participation of national minorities in politics requires targeted action. Article 15 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities provides that States parties "shall create the conditions necessary for the effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in cultural, social and economic life and in public affairs, in particular those affecting them". While there are limits to what an electoral system may provide in terms of representation of national minorities, States should nevertheless ensure that national minorities are provided with a genuine right to take part in the conduct of public affairs and are able to compete in the electoral process. In other words, if States are sovereign to decide on their electoral system, they are also bound to respect the right to vote and stand for office without discrimination.³¹

64. Opting for any given electoral system is not neutral as regards the representation of national minorities. Systems that are proportional or take into account the geographical concentration of minorities are generally considered more favourable to national minorities' representation. Specific arrangements can be made to enhance national minority participation: lower threshold for minorities, reserved seats or delimitation of the electoral districts.

³⁰ Enhancing youth political participation throughout the electoral cycle, A Good Practice Guide, United Nations Development Programme, January 2013.

³¹ See paragraph 7 of the Lund Recommendations.

65. Lower thresholds³² or exemption from threshold requirements for political parties to enter the Parliament may enhance the inclusion of national minorities in governance.³³

66. A reserved seat system whereby minority voters or special “minority districts” elect their representative candidates is usually a way to ensure that smaller communities or historical minorities are guaranteed representation in Parliament. I would like to stress that an over-representation of a national minority with regard to the size of the population might be needed so as to ensure its presence in parliament. However, a member of the Committee expressed concern with regard to the possible impact of an over-representation of a national or linguistic minority over the functioning of a parliament. He is of the opinion that an over-representation might not be justified from a democratic point of view.³⁴

67. In practice, reserved seats mechanisms may be efficient in ensuring formal descriptive representation but may also trigger debates or concerns with regard to the substantive representation of national minorities.³⁵ Free and fair competition between organisations representing national minorities needs to be ensured.

68. The drawing of electoral borders can be of critical importance for enhancing national minority participation. While States should not use such delimitation to change the balance of majority-minority populations in minority-populated areas (Article 16 of the Framework Convention), they may use such delimitation as a positive obligation to facilitate the equitable representation of national minorities.

69. Dual voting allows minority registered voters to vote for national political parties as well as vote for minority representatives for the same assembly. Dual voting raises issues of equality of suffrage and indeed proportionality of the means taken to facilitate the participation of national minorities. The Venice Commission regards dual voting as an exceptional measure, which is a measure that could be considered when no other less intrusive means could be used in order to achieve national minority representation. It is considered as a measure of transitional character and should only concern numerically small minorities.³⁶

70. Mechanisms of consultation can serve as channels for dialogue between governmental authorities and national minorities. They allow minority interests to be articulated and minority issues to be raised with decision-makers. They may be composed only of national minorities, or a selection of them, or focus on one minority group.³⁷ They may also be of mixed composition with government and minorities’ interests both being represented.

71. While the use of specific mechanisms for the participation of national minorities in politics should be welcome, I am of the opinion that we should also reflect on how diversity within minority communities is addressed.

8. Concluding remarks

72. With this report, I see an opportunity to raise awareness on the need to improve the representativeness of the political sphere and to ensure that parliaments and political parties reflect our increasingly diverse societies. Politics can no longer be the reserve of a certain category of persons.

73. Profound changes are needed not only to promote but also to mainstream diversity and equality in politics. This process requires a series of measures, accompanied by a change of mindsets from senior officials, elected members and the overall population towards candidates and elected officials from under-

³² For a discussion on thresholds, see the report of the Venice Commission on “Comparative Report on Thresholds and Other Features of Electoral Systems which Bars Parties from Access to Parliament”, CDL-AD (2008) 037, 15 December 2008.

³³ See paragraph 9 of the Lund Recommendations.

³⁴ Contribution by Mr Damien Thiéry (Belgium, ALDE).

³⁵ Descriptive representation is understood as representation of minority characteristics whereas substantive representation is understood as representation of minority interests. The underlying question being posed here is whether reserved seats may not focus too much on “who” is represented rather than on “how” the representation is carried out.

³⁶ See the Report of the Venice Commission on Dual Voting for Persons Belonging to National Minorities, CD-D (2008)013, 16 June 2008.

³⁷ See for example in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a Roma Board was established as an advisory body to the Council of Ministers at State level. The Roma Board is composed of equal numbers of representatives of Roma and of the government. In Slovenia, a Roma Community Council was established in 2007 as a consultative body for the Parliament, the government and other state authorities. Two-thirds of the seats are however reserved for one umbrella organisation, the Union of Roma of Slovenia, a situation that does not reflect the diversity within the Roma community.

represented groups. So far the Assembly has dealt with equality and non-discrimination issues relying on a sectoral approach. This sectoral approach is important to identify specific measures targeting the situation of specific groups. However, I feel time has come to develop a more holistic approach and look at the issue of diversity, equality and inclusion across the board, in order to ensure that parliaments and other elected institutions fully reflect the complex diversity of European societies.

74. Deconstructing the stereotypes according to which age, origin and competencies are interlinked will require a lot of effort. Overall, political parties are the gate openers to diversity and equality in politics and can take concrete actions. Young people, LGBTI people, visible minorities and women and men with an immigration background should no longer be overlooked as credible candidates for elections or leadership positions within political parties. Once elected, attention should be paid to support their empowerment. Solidarity from senior politicians, including against racist attacks and hate speech, and mentorship can be considered as essential elements of this support. The importance of role models cannot be stressed enough with regard to diversity in politics. The more women and men with diverse ages, experiences, backgrounds and origins stand for elections, the more diversity and equality will enter in the political landscape at the national and European levels.