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**EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR DEMOCRACY THROUGH LAW  
(VENICE COMMISSION)**

in co-operation with

**THE CENTRAL ELECTION COMMISSION OF GEORGIA**

**REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON GENDER EQUALITY  
IN ELECTORAL PROCESSES**

**Tbilisi (Georgia)  
25 – 26 November 2015**

**SYNOPSIS**

Programmatic Cooperation Framework for  
Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus

Funded  
by the European Union  
and the Council of Europe



COUNCIL OF EUROPE



Implemented  
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The Venice Commission of the Council of Europe organised in co-operation with **the Central Election Commission of Georgia** the first [Regional Conference on gender equality in electoral processes](#) in Tbilisi, Georgia, on **25-26 November 2015**.

**The topic of the Conference was “gender equality in electoral processes”**. The participants debated more specifically on four main issues:

- Gender Equality and elections: international standards and recommendations;
- Gender Equality, electoral processes and electoral systems;
- Gender Equality and political parties; and
- Gender Equality and electoral processes: best practices.

**Ms Khatuna Totladze**, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and **Ms Tamar Zhvania**, Chairperson of the Central Election Commission of Georgia, opened the Conference, followed by **Mr Cristian Urse**, Head of the Council of Europe Office in Georgia, **Ms Herdís Thorgeirsdóttir**, Vice-President of the Venice Commission, past President of the European Women Lawyers’ Association (EWLA), Iceland, and **Mr Shombi Sharp**, UNDP Deputy Resident Representative in Georgia.

50 participants attended the Conference, including rapporteurs from Azerbaijan, Georgia, Germany, Moldova, Iceland and Italy. The participants came from national electoral management bodies of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and other bodies involved in the electoral field as well as from Georgian State agencies and international organisations and non-governmental organisations active in the electoral field in Georgia.

The Prime Minister’s Office, the Public Defender’s Office and the Administration of the President participated in the Conference.

The Delegation of the European Union, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) participated in the Conference. The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR), the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI) also took part in the Conference. Representatives of the Council of Europe and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe also actively participated in the Conference.

The participants also took note that the President of Georgia declared 2015 Year of Women.

The participants emphasised the importance of implementing existing international obligations and standards, including soft-law, aimed at enhancing women’s participation in electoral processes.

The participants also emphasised the importance of attaining gender parity in electoral processes for achieving democratic sustainability.

Among other sources, the following international binding and non-binding documents were underlined as relevant documents in the field of gender equality in electoral processes:

- Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, 1950 ([CETS No.005](#)) and its Protocol No.12, 2000 ([CETS No.177](#));
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966 ([ICCPR](#));
- United Nations, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979 ([CEDAW](#));

- OSCE, [Moscow Document](#), 1991;
- Council of Europe, Committee of Ministers, [declaration](#) on equality between women and men, 1997;
- Council of Europe, Committee of Ministers, [Recommendation \(2003\)3](#) of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making, 2003;
- Council of Europe, [Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017](#), including the objective to achieve a balanced participation in political and public decision-making and gender mainstreaming in all policies and measures;
- OSCE/ODIHR and Venice Commission, Guidelines on political party regulation, 2010 ([CDL-AD\(2010\)024](#));
- The following Venice Commission documents:
  - o 2002, Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters ([CDL-AD\(2002\)023rev](#));
  - o 2006, Declaration on Women's Participation in Elections ([CDL-AD\(2006\)020](#));
  - o 2009, Report on the Impact of Electoral Systems on Women's Representation in Politics ([CDL-AD\(2009\)029](#));
  - o 2015, Report on Proportional Electoral Systems: the Allocation of Seats inside the Lists (open/closed lists) ([CDL-AD\(2015\)001](#));
  - o 2015, Report on the method of nomination of candidates within political parties ([CDL-AD\(2015\)020](#));
- OSCE/ODIHR, [Election Observation Handbook](#), sixth edition;
- International IDEA, [Atlas of Electoral Gender Quotas](#), 2014.

The participants underlined the necessity of a holistic approach and recognised the wide variety of socio-economic, cultural and political factors that can hamper or facilitate women's access to elected offices, at national, regional and local levels.

The participants deplored the continuous under-representation of women in politics and elected offices. A number of factors explain this continuous under-representation, including gender stereotyping, under-representation of women in media, violence against women, and challenges reconciling families and elected offices.

The participants also underlined that a strong political will and a wide support are required to reform laws and to adapt practice.

The participants agreed on the necessity to enhance legislative and infra-legislative measures aimed at improving representation of women in electoral processes. The participants discussed various solutions that would promote gender equality in electoral processes, in particular:

- Promoting temporary special measures in accordance with international standards;
- Involving women while addressing structural obstacles to gender equality; no decisions about women's representation without women substantive participation;
- Ensuring transparency and public debate through active and inclusive involvement of civil society;

- Reviewing impact of electoral systems on women's political participation as well as recommending binding or voluntary gender quotas on candidate lists of at least 40%, as recommended by the Council of Europe;
- Encouraging political parties to enhance women's participation, including through women's associations, capacity-building efforts, gender balanced candidate nomination boards and mechanisms to assist women in campaign financing;
- Using public funding and promoting financial incentives for better representation of women within political parties as well as for promoting female candidates;
- Ensuring transparency in the use of public funding aimed at enhancing gender equality;
- Recommending incentives to increase awareness of women in politics amongst media, both quantitatively and qualitatively and to ensure fair coverage of women in media;
- Promoting effective enforcement and monitoring mechanisms on gender quotas, in full respect of the principle of equality in elections;
- Recommending measures and promoting good practices among electoral management bodies to reach gender equality in election administration, including at senior level and in decision-making at all levels of election administrations;
- Involvement of electoral management bodies in applying provisions on gender equality and ensuring fair candidate competition;
- Providing external support to women candidates, such as training and campaigning;
- Encouraging electoral management bodies to ensure awareness raising campaigns on gender equality;
- Promoting electoral the role of electoral management bodies in monitoring and reporting whenever possible on women's participation in electoral processes;
- Encouraging international and non-governmental organisations involved in the electoral field to continuously monitor and report on women's participation in electoral processes;
- Encouraging gender-disaggregated statistical data to be collected by electoral management bodies and relevant administrations.

The participants took note with great interest of the five-year Strategic Plan of the Central Election Commission of Georgia, notably aimed at improving representativeness of women in election administration and in elections.

They also supported the creation of an international association of women in electoral management bodies.

The participants finally agreed that it would be beneficial for electoral management bodies to receive international expertise in implementing gender mainstreaming policies, including from the Council of Europe, the OSCE/ODIHR, UNDP, IFES and International IDEA.