

A Reply to Mihai Ghimpu, interim President of the Republic of Moldova and President of the Moldovan Parliament: Professionalism is not directly proportional to one's sex or physical appearance

At the annual Conference "Cooperation between Parliament and Civil Society", Mihai Ghimpu made public his vision concerning equal opportunities between men and women in the functioning of political parties and in fulfilling public functions in state institutions. Mr. Ghimpu stated that for a female party member to be included on the list of candidates for a public function, she should give evidence of initiative, not just of an attractive appearance – giving us to understand that men are presumably placed on the lists for the simple fact that they are men, their outward aspect not being an object of public discussion.

Mr. Ghimpu's reference to women's beauty as being insufficient for fulfilling public functions is irrelevant and offensive. The affirmation reflects social prejudices according to which women are seen, first, as being beautiful, and only then, if they "give evidence of initiative", as being professionals. Such an attitude undermines the aspirations of women to occupy positions of leadership, and deprives them of the opportunity to exercise their right to contribute to the political development of the state. Women who are competent and expert

in their field should have the same opportunities to participate in political life that men enjoy. Any reference to their physical appearance can be seen as an attempt to diminish the importance and professionalism of women, and constitutes a form of indirect discrimination.

Such an affirmation on the part of the interim President of Moldova cannot be ignored, since it encourages discriminatory attitudes towards women in society, who frequently encounter unjustified obstacles in many spheres of activity, including the political sphere. Although women make up 51.9% of Moldova's population, they continue to be under-represented in political parties and in the decision-making process, where men predominate.

We find the interim president's affirmation regrettable, and we call upon Mr. Ghimpu to review his position on his reference to women's beauty whenever discussing women's participation in political life, and to ensure a 50/50 balance of male and female candidates for public functions based on their professionalism, not on their physical appearance or sex. Furthermore, when there are two equally competent candidates for a position, a woman and a man, the preference should be given to the woman to ensure the equal participation of men and women in the decision-making process in the public and political spheres. This constitutes affirmative action in correspondence with Recommendation 3 (2003) of the Committee of Ministers of the European Council of 12 March 2003, with Article 7(2) of the Law on Assuring Equal Opportunities between men and women, and with Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

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