

MONITORING AND ANALYSIS OF THE 2021 ELECTIONS TO THE PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY OF THE AUTONOMOUS TERRITORIAL UNIT GAGAUZIA FROM A GENDER EQUALITY PERSPECTIVE

PERIOD OF REVIEW: 23 AUGUST - 3 OCTOBER 2021



PILIGRIM-DEMO

PILIGRIM-DEMO
Pobedy str, 11, 3rd floor
MD-3805, Comrat
ATU Gagauzia, Moldova

All rights are protected. The content of the report may be used and reproduced for non-profit purposes and without prior consent of the Piligrim-Demo with condition that the source of the information is indicated accordingly.

The research and monitoring study was developed within the project "Monitoring and assessment from gender perspective of the 2021 People's Assembly elections and capacity building activities for women leaders from ATU Gagauzia" implemented by Piligrim-Demo and Center Contact in collaboration with United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women Moldova) and funded by Sweden.



ABOUT OF AUTHORS OF THE STUDY

Daria Paprocka, PhD - an electoral expert with almost 20 years of international experience. She worked, among others, in Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Ethiopia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Serbia and Ukraine. She works as Deputy Head of Mission or Political & Campaign Finance Analyst in election observation missions of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, as well as provides advisory support to election management bodies. She is a Senior Researcher at the European Centre for Electoral Support, specializing in electoral political economy and women participation in politics.

The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official policy or position of UN WOMEN or the donor.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acronyms.....	3
1. Executive Summary.....	4
2. Introduction and methodology	5
3. Legislative framework.....	6
3.1. Electoral system.....	6
3.2. Political parties' system	8
3.3. Other pertinent legislation.....	9
4. Women's participation in elections – electoral cycle perspective	10
4.1. Women in election administration and electoral process.....	10
4.2. Women candidates	12
4.3. Election campaign.....	15
4.4. Campaign and political financing	16
4.5. Gender equality in media coverage of elections	17
4.6. Complaints and appeals	18
4.7. Voting patterns and results.....	19
5. Recommendations	20
6. Annex.....	22

Acronyms

ATU	Autonomous Territorial Unit
BeCS	Block of Communists and Socialists
CEC	Central Election Commission
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CoE	Council of Europe
DEC	District Election Commission
GRT	Radio Television Gagauzia
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
LTO	Long Term Observer
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PACE	Party “Build Europe At Home”
PAG	People’s Assembly of the Gagauzia
PAS	Action and Solidarity Party
PEB	Precinct Electoral Bureau
STO	Short Term Observer

1. Executive Summary

In 2021 elections two women were elected to the 35-seat People's Assembly of Gagauzia (PAG). It is a 50 per cent decrease in the number of women in the Autonomy's legislative body in comparison with the 2016 PAG elections, and represents an outcome which does not meet Moldova's international commitments related to equal representation of women and men in the elected bodies. Also, with only 18 women out of 123 registered candidates, the number of women running in 2021 PAG election was also record low.

The majoritarian system applied for electing the PAG deputies is less advantageous for women and makes it difficult to apply affirmative measures that could improve the gender balance in the elected body. On the other hand, the political party system is not developed in Gagauzia, which does not allow for influencing political parties via voluntary or legislative commitments or via available public financing incentives to increase the number of women candidates. Moreover, tools such as the reserve fund, available to Gagauzia's deputies and spent mainly on social assistance in their respective constituencies, create patron-client relations, giving an undue advantage to the incumbents. The practice further aggravates women's chances to be elected to the male dominated PAG. The Moldovan legislation introduced in 2016, which endorsed **40 per cent gender quota for the electoral contestants does not apply to the PAG and *Bashkan* elections.**

Women are much better represented in the election administration and in other functions related to the electoral process, such as financial representatives or candidates' observers. In 2021 PAG, women constituted between 70 and 90 per cent of those positions. Based on the discussions conducted in the framework of the study, the prevailing opinion is that the stark difference between the number of women candidates and the number of women engaged in other areas of electoral process stem from the fact that women tend to be perceived more as implementers than political leaders.

The respondents interviewed during the research pointed at **the patriarchal stereotypes, 'double burden' as well as economic considerations as some of the reasons of the declining number of women candidates.** With the increasing number of independent candidates, and lack of public funding of election campaign, women are left with little financial support of their political aspirations. The respondents pointed also at the fact that in the course of the campaign the male candidates to the PAG often run the electoral agitation in an informal manner, in places that are culturally perceived as not appropriate for women candidates, e.g. in local bars, whereas the women candidates are expected to resort to more formal means of campaigning.

The campaign discourse lacked substantive discussion on gender issues. Some contestants outlined in their programs plans of improvements in the sphere of education, healthcare and social assistance, but they never related those issues explicitly to gender equality. Women were well represented among the participants of campaign events, but the gender balance was not preserved already at the stage of campaign strategizing. For instance, mostly male representative of the electoral Block of Communists and Socialists (BeCS) parliamentarians supported the Block's campaign events.

The alleged vote-buying was recognized as one of the key issues that severely impact the level playing field and affect especially the women candidates, who are generally less affluent. In the course of the PAG electoral campaign Pilgrim-Demo did not come across the

allegations of women candidates resorting to the vote buying. The respondents claimed also that offence is difficult to curb due to the difficulty in obtaining evidence; some also expressed doubts about the neutrality of the police. Moreover, none of the few complaints on vote buying, submitted to the Prosecutor's Office and to the police, was concluded before the certification of election results by the Appeal Court of Comrat, failing to produce a dissuasive effect.

No cases of promotion of gender stereotypes or hate speech towards women were noted in the monitored media outlets but at the same time the media did not bring up topics related to gender equality and women participation in politics in the ATU Gagauzia. **None of the monitored media published a material that would raise the issue of gender equality in the electoral context.**

The respondents were unanimous that the **public perception of the elected women politicians' performance impacts the Gagauz voters' willingness to support women candidates in subsequent elections.** According to the study, if a woman politician is perceived as performing poorly, the voters' willingness to support other women candidates decreases, as if the elected one was bearing responsibility and represented capacities of all women aspiring to join politics. **Interestingly, such a correlation is not applied to male candidates. Historically, the number of women elected to the PAG has not exceeded five, which constitutes 14.3 per cent of the Assembly, well below the international recommendations on balanced representation of women in publicly elected positions.**

2. Introduction and methodology

The People's Assembly of Gagauzia (PAG) elections took place on 19 September and 3 October 2021. Over the course of the electoral process the Pilgrim-Demo conducted monitoring and analysis of the content of the PAG electoral campaign from the gender equality perspective. The reports aims at capturing the drivers and trends, which determine the current level of women's participation in politics in Gagauzia as well as outline recommendations, which could lead to an increase of the currently low presence of women in the PAG.

The analysis presented in this report is based on qualitative and quantitative data gathered in the course of the electoral process. The quantitative analysis uses data provided by the Central Election Commission (CEC) of Gagauzia on the number of women using their voting rights and compares that with the previous PAG elections, with the aim of observing trends related to women's participation in politics in the Autonomous Territorial Unit (ATU) of Gagauzia. The qualitative analysis is based on in depth open interviews conducted with the women candidates, elected PAG deputies, representatives of the election administration and civil society. The interviews were based on a set of questions, but had an open character, allowing the respondents to express their opinions beyond the outlined issues (*See: Annex*). The Pilgrim-Demo would like to thank all its interlocutors for taking the time to meet and to share their views.

Report also includes the analysis of the gender equality in media in the electoral context. The analysis is based of media monitoring conducted from 23 August to 3 October 2021. The Pilgrim-Demo monitored seven media outlets in the region, i.e. the public TV of the regional public broadcaster Gagauzia Radio Television (GRT) and the public radio GRT FM, the information portals *Gagauzinfo.md* and *Gagauzyeri.md*, the radio station *Albena* and the newspapers *Vesti Gagauzii* and *Znamea*. Monitoring of the GRT TV channel and of the two radio stations included all materials directly or indirectly related to the topic of politics,

elections and candidacy for the PAG, which were broadcast in the evening hours with the largest audience/prime time (from 17:00 to 21:00 hours). In the online portals and in newspapers the monitoring focused on all editorial content of directly or indirectly related to elections, with the exception of electoral advertising, as stipulated in the Gagauzia electoral legal framework.

The data from the quantitative analysis, the monitoring and the interviews was triangulated with the analysis of the pertinent national legislation of the Republic of Moldova and local legislation of ATU Gagauz legislation, as well as with the international commitments and standards.

3. Legislative framework

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) enshrines the “equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all civil and political rights”.¹ The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) requires signatories to “take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country”.² The legislative framework regulating the elections to the PAG does not discriminate against women, but at the same time is void of provisions that would strive at achieving the *de facto* gender equality.

The CEDAW monitoring body, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, in its General Recommendation to interpret treaty’s provisions on political and public life states that “[t]he critical issue... is the gap between the *de jure* and *de facto*, or the right as against the reality of women's participation in politics and public life generally... These rights must be enjoyed both *de jure* and *de facto*”.³

OSCE commitments on gender equality, included in the 1991 Moscow Document and the 1999 Charter for European Security, commit participating States to promote equality between women and men at all levels.⁴ Paragraph 40 of the Moscow Document invites participating States to recognize that full and true equality between men and women is a fundamental aspect of a just and democratic society based on the rule of law.⁵ It also encourages participating States to comply with the CEDAW. Subsequently, paragraph 23 of the Charter for European Security commits participating States to make equality between men and women an integral part of policies, at the state-level and within the OSCE. Furthermore, the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers made a recommendation in 2003 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision- making.⁶

3.1. Electoral system

The electoral system has an important impact on the number of women candidates and elected officials. The PAG deputies are elected for four-year mandate in 35 single mandates constituencies, through a majoritarian system, where the winning candidate must receive more

¹ 1996 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ([ICCPR](#)), Art. 3.

² International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women ([CEDAW](#)).

³ CEDAW [General Recommendation 23](#), paragraphs 15, 16 and 18.

⁴ [1999 Charter for European Security](#).

⁵ [1991 OSCE Moscow Document](#).

⁶ Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers recommendation [Rec\(2003\)3](#) on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision- making.

than fifty per cent of valid votes cast. If no candidate obtains such a majority, a second round of election is held between the two leading candidates. Both in the first and in the second round at least a third of voters registered in a constituency need to cast their votes for elections to be considered valid. In the contrary case the elections need to be repeated in two weeks time. The repeat elections do not have to meet any turnout threshold.⁷

Comparative studies show that women participation in national parliaments is the lowest in countries using majoritarian electoral systems, whereas more women are usually elected to office under proportional systems.⁸ Though the choice of electoral system is a sovereign decision of every country, the results it produces can be addressed via affirmative measures aiming at the gender equality.

International legislation clearly supports affirmative measures aimed at achieving gender equality. The CEDAW provides that adoption of “temporary special measures aimed at accelerating *de facto* equality between men and women shall not be considered discrimination” (Art. 4). The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action recommends to “take measures, including, where appropriate, in electoral systems that encourage political parties to integrate women in elective and non-elective public positions in the same proportion and at the same levels as men”.

In 2000, the Human Rights Committee, released an interpretation of article 3 of the ICCPR, which calls on treaty signatories “not only to adopt measures of protection, but also positive measures in all areas so as to achieve the effective and equal empowerment of women”.⁹ It also encourages them “to review their legislation and practices and take the lead in implementing all measures necessary to eliminate discrimination against women in all fields, for example by prohibiting discrimination... in areas such as... political activities”.

The Venice Commission Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters provides that “[l]egal rules requiring a minimum percentage of persons of each gender among candidates should not be considered as contrary to the principle of equal suffrage if they have a constitutional basis”.¹⁰

In 2016 the parliament of Moldova passed the Law on Ensuring the Gender Equality.¹¹ The law provided that men and women must each constitute a minimum of 40 per cent of political parties’ candidates.. The Law provisions required amendments of 15 national laws, including the Election Code of Moldova. The latter regulates presidential, parliamentary and local elections as well as referenda; hence the provisions aiming at the gender equality have not been applied to the Election Code of Gagauzia.

The affirmative measures aiming at the equal representation of men and women in elected bodies have been applied for the parliamentary and local elections. In the Moldovan parliamentary elections the proportional system with closed candidates’ lists allowed for introduction of 40 per cent gender quota, which was subsequently strengthened by a requirement that at least 4 out of every 10 candidates on the lists must be of the same gender.

⁷ In the PAG elections on 19 September 2021 the turnout requirement was not met in six constituencies and the repeat elections were held on 3 October.

⁸ Norris P., *Electoral Engineering*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2004, p. 6. and Norris P., [Electoral Engineering](#), Voting Rules and Political Behavior, Paper for the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, 31 August 2003, Philadelphia, p. 17.

⁹ [Human Rights Committee General Comment 28](#).

¹⁰ The Venice Commission, [Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters](#).

¹¹ The [Law No 71](#) from 14 April 2016.

These affirmative measures allowed for 40 women to be elected in the 11 July 2021 early parliamentary elections, which constitute nearly 40 per cent of the new parliament.¹² The 40 per cent gender quota applies also to the candidates' lists registered in elections to local and district councils.

Recommendation of the authors: In line with Moldova's international commitments and standards, the legal provisions on ensuring the gender equality should be extended to pertinent legislation of the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia.

Introducing the affirmative measures to women candidates for PAG encounters a number of obstacles that stem from the current electoral and political parties systems. The majoritarian system applied for the elections to the Assembly does not allow for introducing quotas to the lists of candidates. On contrary, in majoritarian systems political parties tend to look for 'most broadly acceptable candidate', which may affects the ability of women to be elected to legislative office because they are often less likely to be selected as candidates by male-dominated party structures.¹³ The electoral expert Drude Dahlerup assesses that "[i]n plurality-majority systems, the local party organization has only one candidate, and in anticipating the reaction of the voters of their constituency, the party prefers a safe candidate".¹⁴ The electoral bloc of Communists and Socialists (BeCS), one of the two parties that registered their candidates in PAG elections, confirmed that tendency. The BeCS informed that at the stage of choosing candidates they did not take into consideration the gender of the prospective contestants but their professional and private qualities, as the PAG elections are very much driven by personalities of the candidates.

3.2. Political parties' system

In majoritarian systems the affirmative measures can be applied through voluntary or mandatory quotas implemented by political parties, which field their candidates. Making public funding to political parties contingent on the number of women candidates fielded in elections is another manner to achieve an increased number of women running in elections. Neither of these measures can be applied in the context of the PAG elections for Gagauzia's political landscape is not developed.

Affirmative measures were applied in the framework of majoritarian system in 2019 elections to the Moldovan Parliament, held under the mixed electoral system, in which 51 deputies were elected in the single mandate constituencies and 50 in proportional representation from closed party lists. Prospective women candidates willing to run in single mandate constituencies were required to gather less support signatures than men in order to be registered.¹⁵ In the course of the research done for this study only one respondent mentioned lowering the number of support signatures required of the prospective women candidates as an affirmative measure that could be introduced to the Gagauzia electoral legal framework. At the same time, none of the

¹² Previous parliament had 25 women MPs (24.75 per cent).

¹³ Reynolds A., Reilly B., [Ellis A., Electoral System Design: The New International IDEA Handbook](#), Stockholm 2008, page 37.

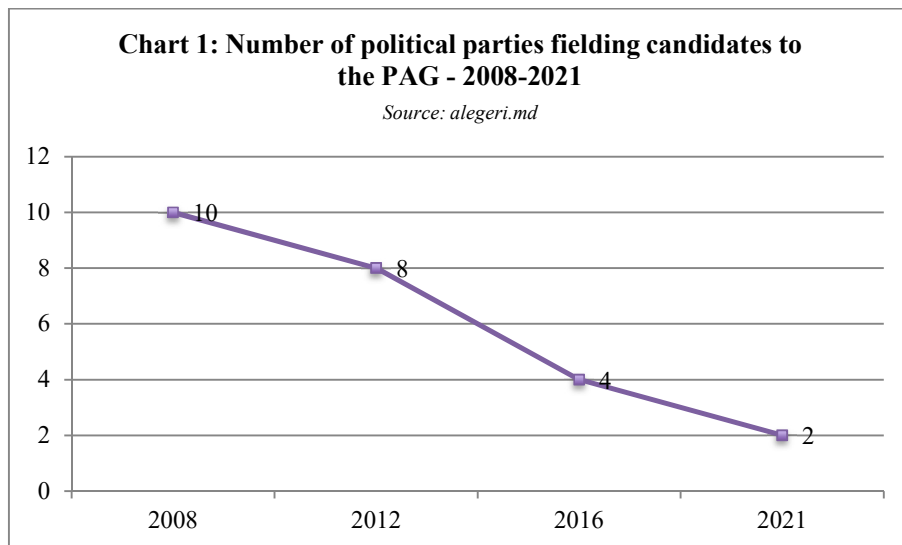
¹⁴ Drude Dahlerup, [Strategies to Enhance Women's Political Representation in Different Electoral Systems](#), Paper to the conference "Women Shaping Democracy". Progressive Politics Ten Years after the World Conference on Women in Beijing, 24-25 October 2005.

¹⁵ While prospective men candidates in single member constituencies needed to collect between 500 and 1,000 supporting signatures in their constituency, women needed between 250 and 500.

candidates Pilgrim-Demo spoke with, both men and women, considered the number of support signatures as too high.

Over years the ATU political leaders expressed their discontent over the fact that the political party legislation did not allow for registration of Gagauz parties. Indeed, the Moldovan Law on Political Parties provisions requiring for a political party registration 4,000 members and a territorial representations comprised of at least 120 members in each of at least half of Moldova’s 32 districts were making the establishment of Gagauz political parties impossible. However, in 2020 those provisions were found unconstitutional and subsequently amended, decreasing the required size of the membership to no less than 1,000 people and abrogating the requirement of territorial representation, allowing for registration of parties of regional character.¹⁶ Nevertheless, no regional party has been established on the territory of Gagauzia thus far. In the course of interviews conducted with candidates to the PAG few stated an intention to establish a Gagauz political party in an undefined future; there were also opinions that political parties are not needed in the Gagauz politics.

Gagauz electorate is fairly uniform when voting in countrywide elections, choosing political parties from the left wing of the Moldovan political spectrum, i.e. pro-Russian parties, espousing communist and socialist values. That led to the systematic decrease of the number of Moldovan political parties interested in fielding their candidates in the Gagauz elections. In 2021 PAG elections only the BeCS and the Party “Build Europe At Home” (PACE) registered their candidates. The current ruling party, the Action and Solidarity Party (PAS) did not field any candidates to the PAG, which was noted by number commentators of the Gagauz politics..



Recommendation of the authors: The measures supporting development of political parties system in Gagauzia could be considered.

3.3. Other pertinent legislation

¹⁶ [Constitutional Court Decision from 25 February 2020.](#)

None of the interviewees opined that the current electoral legal framework is discriminatory to women participation in politics. On contrary, they considered that the legal provisions ensure the gender equality, although introduction of affirmative measures to ensure the equal representation of men and women in elected bodies would have been welcome.

One of the respondents pointed however that the provisions on the Reserve Fund allow the incumbent deputies running for re-election to secure the votes of the economically vulnerable voters. According to the PAG Law on the Reserve Fund, a maximum of two per cent of the annual expenditures from the ATU Budget is divided in equal shares between the PAG and the Executive Committee.¹⁷ Among the issues that can be addressed through the Reserve Fund are “social and economic issues in the electoral districts” of the PAG deputies.¹⁸ Pursuant that provision, the PAG members reportedly spend the money mainly on the social assistance in their respective constituencies, creating mercantile relations with the electorate and hence taking an undue advantage of the incumbency.¹⁹ The PAG Law on the Reserve Fund provisions, combined with the disadvantages of the majoritarian system, the fact that direct candidates have higher chances of being re-elected than list-candidates, and the underrepresentation of women in the PAG produce a non-conducive electoral legal framework for achieving a balanced representation of women and men in the Gagauzia legislative organ.²⁰

Recommendation of the authors: Pertinence of the Reserve Fund distributed by the PAG deputies in the form of social assistance could be examined, so that the public funds are not misused for political gains of the incumbents.

4. Women’s participation in elections – electoral cycle perspective

4.1. Women in election administration and electoral process

Five out of the nine members of the CEC, including the chairperson, the deputy and the secretary are women. Women were well represented also in the lower levels of election administration, constituting 76 per cent of the District Election Commissions’ (DEC) members and 91.8 per cent of the Precinct Electoral Bureaus’ (PEB) members. None of the DEC members were chaired by women, although women constituted 76 per cent of DEC members. The situation is better at the lower level election administration bodies, where 56 of the 66 PEBs (85 per cent) were chaired by women. In the second round and repeat elections on 3 October, women comprised 87 per cent of PEB members and 81 per cent of bureaus were chaired by women.

Some of the respondents interviewed in the framework of this study opined that the high number of women in election administration, especially in comparison with number of men

¹⁷ [PAG Law No. 11 from 9 April 2013 on the Reserve Fund.](#)

¹⁸ The Law on the Reserve Fund provides that the money can be spent on, among others, elimination of consequences of natural disasters, payment of special services, or on financing of activities related to preservation of culture, languages and national traditions of Gagauzia.

¹⁹ The Article 3.1.h) of the Law on the Reserve Fund allows for the money to be used “to solve social and economic issues in the electoral districts of the deputies of the People's Assembly of Gagauzia”.

²⁰ In the 2021 PAG elections in 19 constituencies voters elected the incumbents, in 4 – the candidates who were the PAG deputies in before 2016 and in 12 constituencies the voters opted for new candidates, without previous experience in the PAG.

On the relations between the type of electoral system and re-election see for example: Manow P., [Electoral Rules and Legislative Turnover: Evidence from Germany's Mixed Electoral System](#), West European Politics 30(1), January 2007.

candidates, stems from the fact that women are traditionally perceived as implementers rather than (political) leaders.²¹

Table 1: Women in lower levels of election administration	
Source: CEC Gagauzia	
DEC Chairwomen	0
Women DEC members	76%
First round	
PEB Chairwomen	85%
Women PEB members	92%
Second round	
PEB Chairwomen	81%
Women PEB members	87%

According to the CEDAW Committee General Recommendation No. 23 “States parties should... [i]nclude statistical data, disaggregated by sex, showing the percentage of women relative to men who enjoy those rights [to vote in elections]”. The gender disaggregated data on registered voters and those who exercised their right to vote was not readily available, contrary to the international recommendations. The problem is related to the fact that the CEC Gagauzia does not have an access to the election administration resources available at the country level, such as the State Automated Information System “Elections” (SAISE) and the State Registry of Voters (SRV).²² The CEC Moldova does not grant the CEC Gagauzia the access to the SRV invoking the fact that the administration of the Register is regulated by the Election Code of the Republic of Moldova, which does not apply to the elections of the ATU authorities.

Recommendation of the authors: In order to fully implement the Moldova’s commitments under the CEDAW, the legislation should be amended accordingly to allow for the use of the State Automated Information System “Elections” (SAISE) and the State Registry of Voters in the framework of the Bashkan and the PAG elections.

Women were also well represented in other roles in the electoral process. The contestants in the PAG elections should open dedicated bank accounts, through which all donations and expenditures should be processed, submit weekly financial reports and register with the CEC their financial representatives. Out of 123 registered candidates 70 nominated their financial representatives, of which 52 were women, i.e. 74.3 per cent. Only five candidates registered their authorized representatives and of those three were women.

The candidates can register their election observers at the level for the DEC. Out of the three DEC – Comrat, Ceadir-Lunga, Vulkaneshti – the latter failed to give the number of registered candidates’ observers disaggregated by gender, providing just the total number of the candidates’ observers – 18. In Comrat DEC out of 60 registered observers 50 were women (83 per cent), and in Ceadir-Lunga out of 27 – 23 (85 per cent).

²¹ The high number of women in the Executive Committee was given as an example as well. 8 out of 21 members of the Executive Committee, including the bashkan, are women. Also, it was raised that 4 of 23 *primars* in Gagauzia are women.

²² The State Automated Information System “Elections” (SAISE) is an electronic tool used in national elections for voter registration, managing the data and documentation on election administration bodies, registration of candidates and observers, and submission of campaign finance reports by the contestants.

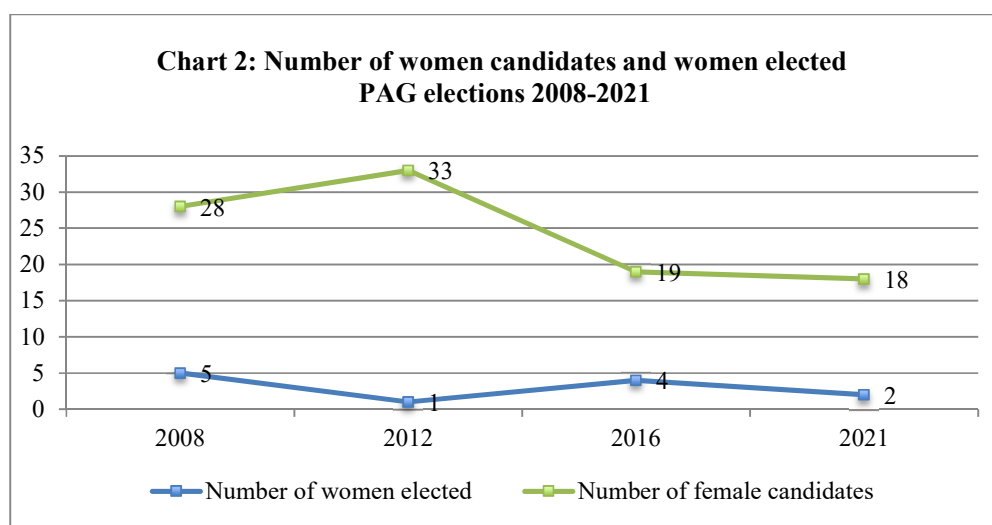
The civic election observation was done by the Pilgrim Demo, which deployed the Election Observation Mission with two out of three Long Term Observers (LTO) and 43 out of 65 Short Term Observers (STO) being women.

Table 2: Women in electoral process		
Source: CEC Gagauzia and DEC's of Comrat, Ceadir-Lunga and Vulcaneshti		
	Number of registered women out of the total	Percentage
Candidates' financial representatives	52 out of 72	74%
Candidates' observers		
DEC Comrat	50 out of 60	83%
DEC Ceadir-Lunga	23 out of 27	85%
DEC Vulcanesti	Gender disaggregated data not available	
Civic observers (LTOs and STOs)	45 out of 68	66%

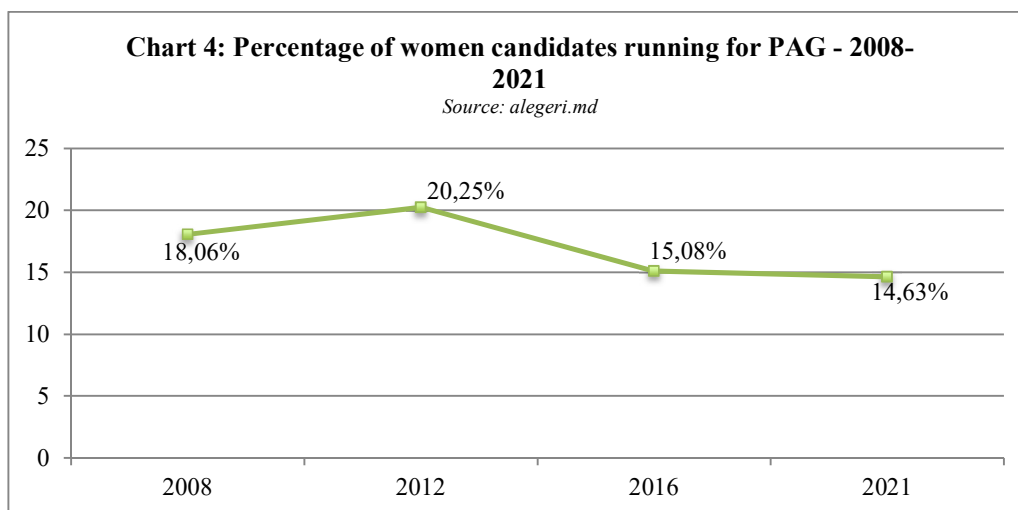
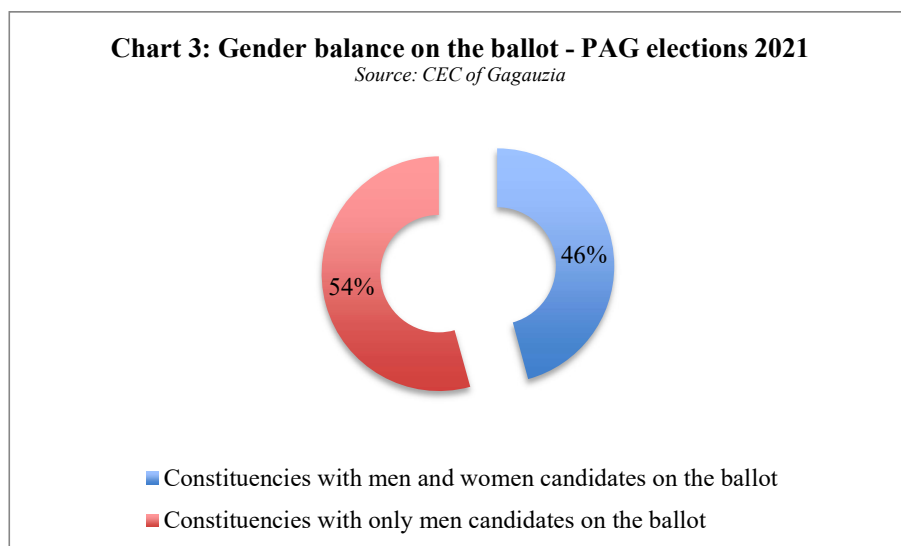
4.2. Women candidates

Candidates can nominate themselves (independent candidates) or be nominated by a political party, a civic organization, an electoral block or by an initiative group. To be registered, candidates must collect no less than 100 and no more than 150 support signatures and present a financial statement, listing properties and incomes obtained over the last two years.

The provisions are not perceived as posing any barriers for women candidates, but at the same time they do not provide any affirmative measures that could increase the number of women candidates. Over the period of 2008-2021 the number of women candidates has been decreasing. Moreover, little relation can be observed between the number of women candidates and the number of women elected. In 2008 elections, when the number of women running for the PAG was the highest, i.e. 33, only one was elected. (See Chart 2)



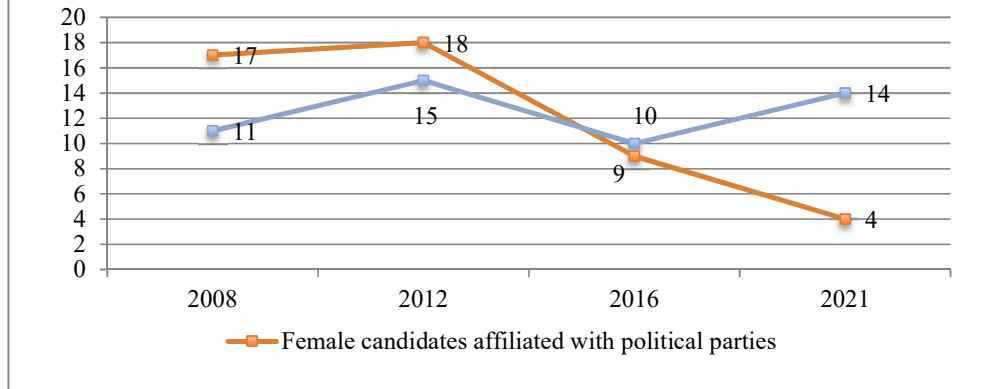
For the 2021 PAG elections the CEC registered 123 candidates, of whom 18 were women (14.6 per cent). There were solely men candidates on the ballot in 54 per cent of constituencies (19 out of 35). Over the last four election cycles, the percentage of women candidates has not exceeded 20 per cent. (See Chart 3 and 4 respectively)



There has been a notable increase of independent candidates in PAG elections in general (in 2021 PAG elections – 100 out of 123 registered run as independent) and the decrease of political parties fielding their candidates for the PAG. Those trends have a negative impact on women participation in elections, as the women candidates opt increasingly for running as independent. (See Chart 5) Only four women run as affiliated with a political party, the BeCS, while the rest registered as independent for 2021 elections.

Chart 5: Number of women candidates affiliated with political parties and independent women candidates, PAG elections 2008-2016

Source: *alegeri.md*



The women politicians Pilgrim-Demo spoke with admitted that however the success in PAG elections to great extent depends on personal capacities, experience and legacy of a candidate, nevertheless the support of a political party is a great asset. The head of the BeCS Ceadir-Lunga elected to the PAG, Elena Iurchenko, stated during the interview that a political party affiliation helps a candidate in a variety of manners. First, it allows for a better exposure to the public. Ms. Iurchenko for instance, before running in the PAG elections, participated actively in the presidential election campaign in November 2020 and run as a candidate in the early parliamentary elections in July 2021, which positioned her as an active politician in the region. Second, in 2021 PAG elections the BeCS supported its candidates by covering the costs of leaflets and fees for campaign activists. Moreover, the Block opened one campaign account and submitted joint weekly financial reports to the CEC. The party’s financial assistance relieved the candidates of the financial considerations related to running, and facilitated the campaign process allowing the BeCS contestants to focus solely on their relations with voters. However, the number of political parties fielding their candidates for the PAG systematically decreases. (See: 3.2. Political parties’ system)

Speaking of disadvantages to women’s candidacy the respondents pointed at the societal issues, especially the patriarchal model of Gagauz society. In the debate organized by Pilgrim-Demo, an independent candidate elected as the PAG member from Kongaz, Svetlana Djuvenji, stated that a woman’s decision of running as a candidate is taken by the whole family and “not every husband would agree his wife runs for PAG”. The ‘double-burden’ of performing both professional and family obligations also makes women reluctant to undertake yet another duty as a PAG deputy.

Recommendation of the authors: Conducting a comprehensive needs assessment of the available child- and elderly-care services as well as other state-support programs, which could ease the women’s ‘double burden’, could be considered.

Speaking of possibilities to overcome the patriarchal stereotypes the respondents spoke about the importance of systematic promotion of women in public sphere. According to a civic activist, Antonina Volkova, the advancement of gender equality would need to go beyond trainings of women in the pre-electoral period and would need to promote women models from different walks of life. Ms. Volkova mentioned, among others, the academic Svetlana Mironova, who researches the issues of women participation in politics at the Comrat State

University and the weightlifter Elena Kilchik, silver medallist at the 2021 European Weightlifting Championships.

Recommendation of the authors: The development partners and civil society communities could consider systematic implementation of projects aiming at promotion of gender equality and challenging the patriarchal stereotypes.

According to some of the Pilgrim-Demo interlocutors the COVID-19 pandemic left jobless many men who had worked in Russia, making women the sole breadwinners in the respective households. The work in the PAG does not appear as financially attractive. The PAG members receive only a per diem allowance for each session that is to cover the costs of public transportation and sustenance; the monthly remuneration is provided only to the chairperson, its two deputies and nine heads to the PAG commissions. Some of the candidates spoke about the idea of professionalization of the PAG, i.e. establishing a monthly remuneration for the PAG deputies. The proponents of the idea argue that the solution would allow for the greater professionalism of the Assembly and would attract people who currently dismiss the idea of running for PAG for economic reasons, including women.

4.3. Election campaign

In general, the 2021 PAG election campaign was low key, including the campaign of women candidates. The interviewed women candidates reported using door-to-door campaigning, meetings with voters and booklets/leaflets as the used forms of campaigning. In their campaigns they underlined their previous experience in politics and in public life, which demonstrated their ability to successfully perform the duties of the PAG member. **None of the interviewed women experienced electoral violence or hostility from the voters they approached.**

Some electoral contestants outlined in their programs plans of improvements in the sphere of education, healthcare and social assistance, but they never related those issues explicitly to gender equality or the issue of ‘double burden’ the women with professional career face. The topic of gender equality was not raised during the campaign events.

The alleged vote-buying was recognized as one of the key issues that severely impact the level playing field and affect especially the women candidates, who are generally less affluent. In the course of the PAG electoral campaign Pilgrim-Demo did not come across the allegations of women candidates resorting to the vote buying. The vote-buying is a criminal offence according to the Election Code, yet despite the widespread allegations there was only one complaint filed on the matter to the CEC and one directly to the Prosecutor’s Office in the course of the PAG elections. Inquired why there were so few complaints filed on the electoral offence, the respondents posited it is related with the difficulty to obtain evidence; some also expressed doubts about the neutrality of the police.

Recommendation of the authors: Law enforcement agencies should intensify efforts to identify, investigate and prosecute cases of vote-buying. A civic awareness campaign could address the issue, encouraging the citizens to report and provide evidence of any vote-buying or pressure.

In the context of women participation in election campaign the respondents pointed at the fact that the male candidates to the PAG often run the electoral agitation in an informal manner, in

places that are culturally perceived as not appropriate for women candidates, e.g. in local bars. The interviewed women concurred that the women candidates are expected to resort to more formal means of campaigning and even to apply a more formal dress code than it would be expected of male candidates.

The observations related to the women candidacy and campaign environment in the context of PAG elections do echo the comparative analysis of obstacles to women participation in politics. According to Pippa Norris and Joni Lovenduski research of women participation in politics, women have fewer resources (e.g. time, money and skills), are less motivated to run for office and have smaller political networks than men. While women have political ambitions, party gatekeepers and voters assess their abilities, qualifications and experiences differently than those of their male colleagues in candidate selection processes and elections.²³

Women were well represented among the participants of campaign events, but the gender balance was not preserved at the stage of campaign strategizing. For instance, mostly male BeCS MPs supported the Block's campaign events.

4.4. Campaign and political financing

The PAG candidates can finance their campaign with donations from private persons and legal entities as well as use their own funds. Comparative studies show the access of women candidates to party funding is dependent also upon the electoral system. In closed list proportional systems, where the voter chooses between political parties, which present predetermined lists of candidates, campaigning usually proceeds on a party basis. In candidate-centred systems, such as the majoritarian system applied in Gagauzia, candidates rely on private funding to campaign.²⁴

Typically, the private funding, which the candidates can secure is greater in case of male candidates. It is often argued that men are able to campaign more effectively outside the party structure because they are more likely to be linked to business and professional networks that can provide the financial resources and expertise necessary to mount successful campaigns. On the other hand, women tend not to be well integrated into occupational and social networks that often serve as a major source of campaign funds.²⁵ The disadvantage of the limited fundraising skills is compounded by the fact that women candidates require more money than men to reach the thresholds of both campaign viability and electoral success. Thus limited financial resources for the campaign diminish women's ability to participate in the electoral process.²⁶

Public funding of political parties, contingent on the number of women candidates fielded by the parties, or the reimbursement of campaign costs to candidates that pass a certain threshold of popular support are the affirmative measures that could be applied in the PAG elections and could lead to an increased number of women candidates.

²³ Norris, P. and Lovenduski, J., *Gender and Party Politics*, SAGE Publications Ltd., 1994.

²⁴ Julie Ballington, *Gender Equality in Political Party Funding*, Paper presented at the Workshop Is Financing an Obstacle to the Political Participation of Women? Inter-American Forum on Political Parties, OAS, Washington DC, USA, 16 December 2003

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Tovar M (2007) *Women and Campaign Finance: High Price of Politics*. Women's Environment and Development Organization.

In elections regulated by the Election Code of Moldova, i.e. presidential, parliamentary and local elections, campaigns are financed from public and private sources. Parties and blocks receive annual public funding based on past election performance and the number of women and youth elected.²⁷ However, those provisions apply only to the elections regulated by the Election Code of Moldova, thus are not an incentive for political parties to participate and put forward women candidates in the elections to the PAG. Moreover, contestants in presidential, parliamentary and local elections can receive a limited interest-free state loan. Electoral competitors that received less than three per cent of votes throughout the country or in a respective constituency, as well as independent candidates who were not elected, should return the state loan within two months from the election day.²⁸ Again, the possibility of state-funded loan is not extended to the PAG and *Bashkan* elections' contestants.

The lack of public financing for campaign and for political parties further aggravates the women participation in elected bodies. According to the anthropologist Marcela Tovar, unless women are relieved of the economic burden or the “economic threat” associated with political participation, they may not feel capable of and confident in their decisions to join politics.²⁹

Recommendation of the authors: Availability of public loans for electoral campaign and public funding for political parties should be extended to the electoral contestants running in the Bashkan and the PAG elections.

4.5. Gender equality in media coverage of elections

Overall, the media coverage of the election campaign lacked dynamism and creativity. Some editors limited themselves to broadcasting the official information provided by the CEC Gagauzia. In the seven media outlets monitored for the research, there were no editorial and analytical materials on campaign platforms presented by the candidates and the voters were not provided with additional information about candidates that would allow them making a well-informed choice.³⁰

Women participation in the electoral process was not actively promoted or emphasized in the monitored media outlets. As there were significantly more male than women candidates, consequently, the men appeared more often in the media materials related to the PAG elections.³¹ Women candidates were presented mostly in a neutral tone, with a number of materials showing them in a positive manner. In some materials related to the electoral process, *Bashkan* Irina Vlah was an object of criticism, mostly without granting her the right to reply.³² Ms. Vlah was not a candidate in the PAG elections, but a number of candidates, both men and women,

²⁷ Up to a total of 0.1 per cent of the state budget is provided to parties/blocs, with 20,707,070 MDL allocated for 2021.

²⁸ Art. 40.5. of the Election Code of Moldova.

²⁹ Tovar M (2007) Women and Campaign Finance..., *op.cit.*

³⁰ For the study Pilgrim–Demo monitored the following regional media outlets: GRT TV and GRT FM, the information portals *Gagauzinfo.md* and *Gagauzyeri.md*, the radio station *Albena* and the newspapers *Vesti Gagauzii* and *Znamea* newspapers.

³¹ A Council of Europe study on gender equality and elections show that “women’s presence significantly lags behind in the coverage of politics and that topics considered as “hard news” continue to be associated with men and perceived as such by public opinion and voters”. [Study on media coverage of elections with a specific focus on gender equality](#), Council of Europe study, DGI(2017)10, 2018.

³² See, for example, the [talk show](#) on the NTS (New Television of the South of Moldova), 2 September 2021.

were believed to enjoy her support, hence the criticisms towards the *Bashkan*, could have indirectly affected those candidates.

No cases of promotion of gender stereotypes and hate speech towards women were noted in the monitored media outlets, but at the same time there were no measures undertaken by the media to promote gender equality and women participation in politics in the ATU Gagauzia. Over the monitoring period, none of the seven media outlets published a material that would raise the topic of gender equality in the electoral context. With an exception of one women expert from the Pilgrim-Demo, media did not invite women in the capacity of electoral or political experts.

Pre-election debates on public television and radio were not sufficiently prepared, with the anchors asking superficial questions; moreover many candidates decided not to participate in the debates. The topic of gender equality was not raised during the pre-election debates, neither by the hosts nor by the candidates, men and women. The debates' participants also did not discuss such issues like domestic violence, or gender-based violence.

Quantitative analysis of the media coverage of PAG elections shows that women election commissioners were more visible in the electoral context, and presented in a neutral tone. It is related to the high women's representation in the election administration, which is the source of information for journalistic materials.

Some media outlets conducted street polls on elections-related issues, e.g. on expectations towards candidates, and on the situation in Budgeac village, where a large number of citizens registered in an apartment-house shortly before the elections, allegedly to secure the victory of a PAG candidate who owns the building in question³³. Equal representation of man and women respondents was not always ensured in those polls.

The published and broadcasted materials did not contribute in any way to a debate about equal representation of women and men in elected bodies, nor promoted gender responsive policies, which could have become a subject of deliberation of the newly elected PAG. Temporary special measures, as referred to in CEDAW, could include additional media support for women candidates and voters, particularly from public funded media.

Recommendation of the authors: The regional public broadcaster, the Gagauzia Radio Television, should consider making gender equality issues, including issues of women participation in politics, an inherent part of their content.

4.6. Complaints and appeals

The submission and adjudication of electoral complaints and appeals are subject to expedited timelines, in line with international good practice.³⁴ Yet, the criminal and administrative offence frameworks do not recognize the need for expedited procedures and the filed

³³ At the beginning of 2021 in five-story building in Budgeac belonging to one of the candidates from that constituency were registered up to 500 new residents. The new residents were, allegedly, the supporters of the building's owner. After including the voters with temporary residence to the constituency's voter list the number of registered voters increased from 1,095 to 1,824. For more details see the journalist investigation of [MoldovaCurata](#), 15 March 2021.

³⁴ Complaints on election administration organs as well as on candidates can be submitted within three calendar days. Complaints on PEBs and DEC's shall be considered within three calendar days, whereas complaints on CEC and candidates – within five calendar days.

complaints are examined within regular timelines. Hence the few complaints on alleged vote buying, which were addressed to the Prosecutor’s Office and to the police for investigation, were not concluded before the certification of election results by the Appeal Court of Comrat, failing to produce a dissuasive effect.

Recommendation of the authors: Expedited procedures for the investigation of electoral offenses should be provided.

4.7. Voting patterns and results

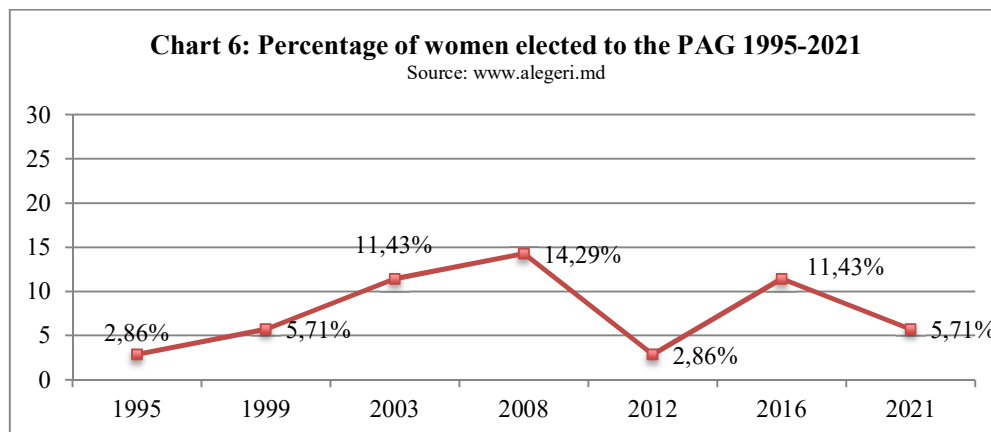
The respondents were unanimous that the public perception of the women politicians’ performance impacts the Gagauz voters’ willingness to support women candidates in subsequent elections. According to the study, if a woman politician is perceived as performing poorly, the voters’ willingness to support other women candidates decreases, as if the elected one was bearing responsibility and represented capacities of all women aspiring to join politics. Such a correlation is not applied to male candidates.³⁵

Table 3: Voters’ participation in 2021 PAG elections		
Source: CEC of Gagauzia		
	First round	Second round and repeat elections
Registered voters	113,762	66,929
Voted	47,163	25,565
Voter turnout	41.4 %	38.2 %

The electoral system determines the way in which the ballot is designed, i.e. whether the contesting parties or their candidates are listed. The fact determines the voting patterns. According to Pippa Norris, “women usually win office under party ballots than under candidate-ballots”.³⁶ In 2021 PAG elections, out of the 35 elected deputies, two are women, which amounts to 5.7 per cent of the PAG seats and is a 50 per cent decrease of women representation in comparison with the previous Assembly. Historically, the number of women elected to the PAG has never exceeded five (elected in 2008 PAG elections), which constituted 14.3 per cent of the Assembly, well below the international recommendations on balanced representation of women in publicly elected positions. (See Chart 6)

³⁵ According to the Council of Europe study „Some women politicians are criticised for assimilating their behaviour and/or features to those of their male counterparts; they are accused of trying to legitimise themselves by adhering to the more male oriented script or look.” [Study on media coverage of elections with a specific focus on gender equality](#), Council of Europe study, DGI (2017)10, 2018.

³⁶ Pippa Norris, [Electoral Engineering](#), Voting Rules and Political Behavior..., *op. cit.* p. 25.



The 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, endorsed by the UN General Assembly, recommends to “take measures, including, where appropriate, in electoral systems that encourage political parties to integrate women in elective and non-elective public positions in the same proportion and at the same levels as men”. The Platform also set the target of the 30% for women’s representation in positions at decision-making levels.³⁷ It has been assessed that the “critical mass” that enables women as a group to exert a meaningful presence in legislative bodies is 30 per cent.³⁸ The 2003 Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers recommendation on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making states that member states should “promote balanced participation, meaning that representation of either women or men in any decision-making body in political life should not fall below 40% and encourages taking “special measures to stimulate and support women to participate in political decision making”.³⁹

5. Recommendations of the authors

- In line with Moldova’s international commitments and standards, the legal provisions on ensuring the gender equality should be extended to pertinent legislation of the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia.
- The measures supporting development of political parties system in Gagauzia could be considered
- Pertinence of the Reserve Fund distributed by the People’s Assembly deputies in the form of social assistance could be examined, so that the public funds are not misused for political gains of the incumbents.
- In order to fully implement the Moldova’s commitments under the CEDAW, the legislation should be amended accordingly to allow for the use of the State Automated

³⁷ The 1995 [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#).

³⁸ Equal Participation of Women and Men in Decision-Making Processes, with Particular Emphasis on Political Participation and Leadership, UN Division for the Advancement of Women, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, [EGM/EPDM /2005/REPORT](#).

³⁹ The [2003 Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers recommendation](#) on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision- making.

Information System “Elections” (SAISE) and the State Registry of Voters in the framework of the *Bashkan* and the PAG elections.

- Conducting a comprehensive needs assessment of the available child- and elderly-care services as well as other state-support programs, which could ease the women’s ‘double burden’, could be considered.
- The development partners and civil society communities could consider systematic implementation of projects aiming at promotion of gender equality and challenging the patriarchal stereotypes.
- Law enforcement agencies should intensify efforts to identify, investigate and prosecute cases of vote-buying. A civic awareness campaign could address the issue, encouraging the citizens to report and provide evidence of any vote-buying or pressure.
- Availability of public loans for electoral campaign and public funding for political parties should be extended to the electoral contestants running in the *Bashkan* and the PAG elections.
- The regional public broadcaster, the Gagauzia Radio Television, should consider making gender equality issues, including issues of women participation in politics, an inherent part of their content.
- Expedited procedures for the investigation of electoral offenses should be provided.

6. Annex

**Questionnaire for the in-depth interviews on the topic:
“Legislative framework of ATU Gagauzia and the Republic of Moldova and their
enforcement in the field of gender equality in the context of the ATU Gagauzia
elections”.**

Categories of survey participants (sample): 5 most significant representatives of regional authorities, stakeholders and experts: representatives of the CEC of Gagauzia; The People's Assembly of Gagauzia; 1 political party; 1 civil society organizations active in the field of gender equality; 1 woman candidate.

The purpose of the survey: to reveal the opinion of the respondents about the legislative framework governing elections to the People's Assembly of Gagauzia, as well as its enforcement from the point of view of gender equality.

Questions:

- Do you think women are sufficiently represented in politics?
- How do you think women are provided with the opportunity to participate in elections as candidates?
- Does local legislation facilitate women's participation in elections?
- Do you think there are gaps or obstacles in the local electoral legislation of Gagauzia that restrict or de-motivate women to participate in elections?
- Are there any motivations in Gagauzia that allow women to join politics, for example, remuneration for elected positions; organization of the political process?
- It is believed that the Gagauz community is patriarchal. Are the traditions and culture of the Gagauz an obstacle to women's participation in politics?
- Should local / national authorities take any special measures to facilitate women's participation in politics and elections?
- Should political parties take any special measures to promote women in politics and in the electoral process?