



Prenatal sex selection

**Rapporteur Doris Stump
Switzerland, Socialist Group
Committee on Equal Opportunities
for Women and Men**



Introductory remarks



The Parliamentary Assembly is, together with the Committee of Ministers, one of the two principal statutory organs of the Council of Europe.

With delegations from 47 national parliaments, it is the largest truly European Assembly.

Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire
COUNCIL OF EUROPE CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

1949: the first European Assembly in the continent's history



47 MEMBER STATES

- Albania
- Andorra
- Armenia
- Austria
- Azerbaijan
- Belgium
- Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Bulgaria
- Croatia
- Cyprus
- Czech Republic
- Denmark
- Egypt
- Finland
- France
- Georgia
- Germany
- Greece
- Hungary
- Iceland
- Ireland
- Italy
- Lithuania
- Liechtenstein
- Luxembourg
- Malta
- Moldova
- Nazca
- Montenegro
- Netherlands
- Norway
- Poland
- Portugal
- Romania
- Russia
- San Marino
- Serbia
- Slovakia
- Slovenia
- Spain
- Sweden
- Switzerland
- "The former Yugoslav
Republic of
Macedonia"
- Turkey
- Ukraine
- United Kingdom

318
Representatives
+
318
Substitutes

2 to 18
Representatives
per delegation

Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire
COUNCIL OF EUROPE CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Ten specialised committees



- Political Affairs
- Legal Affairs and Human Rights
- Economic Affairs and Development
- Social, Health and Family Affairs
- Migration, Refugees and Population
- Culture, Science and Education
- Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs
- Equal Opportunities for Women and Men
- Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs
- Committee on the honouring of obligations and commitments by member states of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee)



The Parliamentary Assembly: **Europe's democratic conscience**

The 'motor' of the Organisation



3 types of adopted text:

- recommendations
- resolutions
- opinions

40% of Council of Europe treaties are adopted at the Assembly's initiative

Commitment to new rights

Raising awareness on controversial issues



Origin of the report on prenatal sex selection

- **Throughout the world, discrimination against women and son preference** are so widespread that millions of women spontaneously or under pressure, decide not to give birth to daughters, who are considered as human beings of less value than men;
- Choice to focus on the Council of Europe region in the report



Methodology

- Sex ratio at birth: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia had a departure from the natural sex ratio at birth, with 112 boys born for 100 girls (111 boys for 100 girls in Georgia);
- Questionnaires sent to the parliamentary delegations of these four countries;
- Fact-finding visit to Armenia and Georgia in June 2011.



Fact-finding visit to Armenia and Georgia

- Meetings with parliamentarians, government officials, doctors, researchers and non-governmental organisations;
- Data, figures, numbers and impressions from women who had given birth and talked about the pressure to give birth to sons, the attitudes of the doctors when telling the sex of the foetuses.



Methods of prenatal sex selection

The report takes stock of the existing methods of identification allowing for prenatal sex selection:

- amniocentesis
- identification in maternal plasma
- use of finger prick blood samples
- analysis of hormones in the urine
- use of the pre-fertilisation sperm sorting technology or the preimplementation genetic diagnosis.

All these methods are becoming increasingly available and affordable for the identification of the sex, male or female.



Reasons behind prenatal sex selection

- son preference;
- gender inequality;
- wish to have smaller families;
- wish to have more balanced families;
- medical reasons in cases when there is a risk of a hereditary sex-related disease.

Root cause

- Gender inequality is the root cause of prenatal sex selection;
- Limiting the right to abortion would have no impact on tackling this root cause;
- A combination of measures combating discrimination against women, raising the status of women in society and improving access to education for girls as done in South Korea can contribute to reducing the imbalance in the sex ratio.



Consequences of prenatal sex selection

- it could trigger a rise in criminality and social unrest;
- rise in human rights violations, including violence and discrimination against women;
- A contributing factor to trafficking in human beings;

Sex selection is a continuation of discrimination against girls and women by women themselves.



European Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine (ratified by 28 States)

- The European Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine forbids sex-selection in its Article 14:

"the use of techniques of medically assisted procreation shall not be allowed for the purpose of choosing a future child's sex except where serious hereditary sex-related disease is to be avoided".



Position of the Parliamentary Assembly

On 3 October 2011, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted a resolution and a recommendation, and took a stance against prenatal sex selection because of its potential social consequences and because it perpetuates **a culture of gender inequality which is contrary to human rights and the universal values upheld by the Council of Europe.**



In the resolution, the PACE called on all member States of the Council of Europe to :

- collect and monitor the sex ratio at birth and take prompt action to tackle possible imbalances;
- encourage research on sex ratios at birth amongst specific communities;
- collect data on sex selection in the context of the use of all techniques of medically assisted procreation;
- promote research on the causes of prenatal sex selection and its social consequences;



- encourage national ethics bodies to elaborate and introduce guidelines for medical staff, discouraging prenatal sex selection by whatever method, unless justified for the prevention of serious sex-linked genetic diseases;
- recommend that all relevant public authorities issue guidelines to all medical staff who work in this field so that when information is provided on the sex of the foetus – in line with existing legal regulations – such information is presented positively, irrespective of the sex of the foetus;
- introduce legislation with a view to prohibiting sex selection in the context of assisted reproduction technologies and legal abortion, except when it is justified to avoid a serious hereditary disease;
- report back to the Council of Europe in January 2015 on the effect of the measures.



The Assembly called on the authorities of Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia to:

- investigate the causes and reasons behind skewed sex ratios at birth;
- step up their efforts to raise the status of women in society and ensure effective implementation of laws and policies on gender equality and non-discrimination;
- ensure the collection of reliable data on sex ratios at birth, including in different geographical areas within the same country, and ensure monitoring of their evolution;



- organise and/or support the organisation of public awareness-raising initiatives and campaigns on prenatal sex selection and its harmful consequences, involving relevant international organisations including the Council of Europe;
- monitor and analyse the impact of campaigns, laws and policies and, first and foremost, the implementation of law and policies on gender equality;
- organise and support training for medical staff on prenatal sex selection and its harmful consequences.



In the recommendation, the PACE invited the Committee of Ministers to:

- bring to the attention of the Group of experts on action against violence against women and domestic violence (GREVIO) and the Committee of the Parties of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, once established, the issue of prenatal sex selection and its underlying causes, in light of its links with violence against women;
- instruct the Steering Committee on Bioethics to conduct a comparative study on prenatal sex selection and consider the elaboration of guidelines and good practices on prenatal sex selection in the context of Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine



- take the issue of prenatal sex selection into account in the framework of assistance and cooperation programmes with Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, in particular in the field of education, youth and dialogue with civil society;
- ask its structures working in the field of equality between women and men to organise or contribute to public awareness-raising campaigns on the equal value of girls and boys in these countries.



Follow-up

PACE will follow up on this issue through:

- the offices of the Council of Europe in concerned countries;
- the campaign for the ratification of the CoE Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence;
- the Bioethics Committee;
- Collect of information for an information report on progress.