



Brussels, 11th of May 2023

To the President of the European Parliament,

Europe and the European Parliament have always been at the forefront of the fight to achieve gender equality. In the 21st century, conciliation policies have become increasingly important for achieving this goal. By providing support for employees' caregiving responsibilities, conciliation policies have helped women remain part of the workforce while also fulfilling their caregiving responsibilities. This has helped reduce the gender pay gap, increase female representation in leadership positions and promote male caregiving.

In this context, I write this letter to express the need to re-examine the role of the Parliament as an advocate for gender equality in the labour market. Under the current working conditions, MEPs who become mothers or fathers do not have access to maternity nor paternity leave. They also lose their right to vote, even telematically. This situation does not allow for conciliation between work and family life as a main channel to ensure gender equality in the labour market. It forces MEPs to choose between exercising their political role and taking care of their family, not contributing to the representation of women in the labour market and in this particular case in the European Parliament. Given the nominative nature of the vote, the deprivation of the right to vote resulting from the lack of flexible working conditions to exercise it telematically could be discriminatory in cases of maternity and paternity.

The European Commission proposed the new Work-Life Balance Directive with the goal of strengthening gender equality in the labour market. The European Parliament passed the Directive in April 2019, Council and Parliament adopted it on 13 June 2019 and it entered into force on 1 August 2019. As part of the European Pillar of Social Rights (Article 9), it aims to help women balance their work and family lives and to encourage a better sharing of caring responsibilities between women and men. As such, it adopts a broader approach to modernizing the existing EU legal framework in the area of family-related leave and flexible working arrangements, to take account of developments in society over the past decade.

Women's representation in the European Parliament has reached an all-time high. In the first direct elections in 1979 there were only 31 women MEPs, today the proportion of women stands at 39.3%. Representation is above the world average for national parliaments and also above the European Union average. We must be pioneers in Europe and in the world and recognize maternity leave. However, we must go further by guaranteeing the same rights also to future fathers with paternal leave. During this leave, the necessary mechanisms must be put in place to guarantee the right to telematic vote. Due to pandemic COVID-19 the European Parliament had to adapt the voting system to the health crisis in Europe. The Parliament's Bureau agreed on an alternative voting procedure, which was used for the first time during the plenary session of 26

March 2020. This decision was taken in order to allow members to debate and vote remotely in committees and plenary sessions and to continue with their parliamentary work despite the disruptive crisis.

Telematic voting is therefore possible, as was demonstrated during the pandemic. The great effort and financial investment that the European Parliament has made in digitalisation to establish telematic vote must be an effort that lasts so that, in justified cases, parliamentarians can exercise our right to vote remotely. We have the tools and the experience of having made use of remote vote in the past. Although it was due to an unprecedented global health crisis, we showed the world that Europe is capable of adapting to the new digital age, but we have to put it back on track.

With this letter, I call on the President of the European Parliament to recognise maternity and paternity leave as a right of Members of this Parliament and to establish a system of telematic voting in cases of justified grounds for maternity and paternity. In doing so, this letter calls for a review of the “Statute of the Members of the European Parliament”, amending the decision (2005/684/CE, Euratom: Decision of the European Parliament, of September 28 of 2005, on the adoption of the Statute of Members of the European Parliament (2005/684/CE, Euratom) which was last amended in 2005.

On 3 May 2022, the changes made to Parliament's Rules of Procedure on 20 December 2020 (2021/2107(DEC)) were approved in plenary, but there is no system in place to ensure that Members who are temporarily absent can continue to carry out their main duties:

35. Notes the fact that there is no system in place to ensure that Members, who are temporarily absent for a justified reason such as maternity and paternity leave, can continue to carry out their core duties; deems this problematic as it can negatively impact citizens' representation in Parliament; underlines that there is a risk of discrimination against Members and their voters when such arrangements are not provided for; emphasises that a vote for a female member of Parliament should not lead to a lack of representation, which is of concern given that younger, particularly female Members and their voters are disproportionately affected by the lack of maternity and parental leave arrangements in Parliament; recalls that the situation for national members of parliament in these same situations differs between Member States; calls on Parliament's Committee on Constitutional Affairs to provide for feasible, temporarily limited solutions for Members who are absent for justified reasons to speak in debates and vote or be temporarily substituted by revising Parliament's Rules of Procedure and the European Electoral Law; recalls that daily allowances remain linked to physical presence at Parliament's places of work;

The request is also in line with a paragraph introduced in the CONT report of 14 April 2023 (2022/2082(DEC)) on the discharge for the implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2021 (not yet finally adopted in plenary):

145. Deplores the fact that there is no system in place to ensure that Members can continue to perform their core duties, mainly speaking in debates and voting, when they are temporarily absent for a justified reason, such as parental leave, long-term sick leave or carer's leave; deems this problematic as it can negatively impact citizens' representation in Parliament and

particularly younger, particularly female, Members; takes note of the changes in Parliament's Rules of Procedure on 20 December 2020 allowing for remote voting but only on the condition that the President establishes extraordinary circumstances; reiterates its request, adopted at Plenary level on several occasions, to the Bureau to launch a revision of the Rules of Procedure in order to enable Members to exercise their duties during justified absences, thus capitalising on the great effort and financial investment that Parliament has made in technical solutions to allow remote voting;

In several EU Member States, members of national parliaments have access to parental leave. In **Germany**, members of the Bundestag, for example, may be granted maternity leave. Maternity leave is granted for a period of six weeks before and eight weeks after the woman gives birth to a child. During this period of time, the MP shall receive the monthly remuneration.¹ In **Latvia**, Members of the *Saeima* have the right to maternity and parental leave based on articles 154, 155 and 156 of the Labour Law. The Law on Remuneration of Officials and Employees of State and Local Government Authorities regulates the social and financial rights and obligations of Members of the *Saeima*.² Similarly, in accordance with the Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly (namely Article 95, which relates to the labour law), Members of Parliament in **Slovenia** have the right to parental leave. Parental leave in Slovenia includes maternity leave of 105 days, which can only be taken by the child's mother, and childcare leave of 260 days, which can be taken by either parent.³ The possibility to vote telematically during maternity and paternity leave has been implemented by many countries in the European Union. In **Spain**, for instance, Article 82.2 of the Standing Orders of the Congress of Deputies created the possibility for members on maternity or parental leave to vote through, the telematic procedure with identity identification, in plenary sessions in a voting which cannot be subject to fragmentation or modification. The Senate has a similar procedure in Article 92 of its Standing Orders. Senators on maternity or parental leave may be authorised to use telematics voting when the method and timing of such voting is foreseeable because it is not subject to fragmentation or modification.⁴

For this reason, the group of signatory MEPs wishes to bring this matter to your attention, which we consider to be a matter of concern, which has in fact already been denounced in the past by various MEPs, especially women.

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¹ German Bundestag, Members of the Bundestag and Members of the European Parliament Act: [https://www.bundestag.de/blob/189732/6e3095be7d1968201ca34bbca5\[c285d9/memlaw-data.pdf](https://www.bundestag.de/blob/189732/6e3095be7d1968201ca34bbca5[c285d9/memlaw-data.pdf) [last retrieved 2015-11-25]

² Saeima, Rules of Procedure, article 4 (1) <http://www.saeima.lv/en/legislation/rules-of-procedure>

³ 5 Regulation on Employment Relations and Health Insurance http://www.mddsz.gov.si/en/legislation/veljavni_predpisi/zdr_1/#c16981

⁴ Spanish Senate, Standing Orders of the Senate <http://www.senado.es/web/conocersenado/normas/reglamentoootrasnormassenado/detallesreglamentosenado/index.html#t3c7>

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