

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

RECOMMENDATION No. R (90) 4

OF THE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS TO MEMBER STATES

ON THE ELIMINATION OF SEXISM FROM LANGUAGE

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 21 February 1990
at the 434th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)*

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15.b of the Statute of the Council of Europe,

Considering that the aim of the Council of Europe is to achieve a greater unity between its members for the purpose of safeguarding and promoting the ideals and principles which are their common heritage;

Considering that equality between women and men falls within the scope of those ideals and principles;

Welcoming the fact that the principle of equality between the sexes is gradually becoming part of law and practice in Council of Europe member states;

Considering, however, that the achievement of real equality between women and men is still being hindered by social, cultural and other barriers;

Stressing the fundamental role of language in forming an individual's social identity, and the interaction which exists between language and social attitudes;

Convinced that the sexism characterising current linguistic usage in most Council of Europe member states — whereby the masculine prevails over the feminine — is hindering the establishment of equality between women and men, since it obscures the existence of women as half of humanity, while denying the equality of women and men;

Noting also that the use of the masculine gender to denote people of both sexes is, in today's social context, a source of uncertainty about the people — men or women — involved;

Aware of the importance of the role played by education and the media in shaping attitudes and behaviour;

Welcoming the initiatives already taken at national and international level to adapt language to the social and psychological trends towards equality between women and men;

Having regard to its Recommendation No. R (85) 2 on legal protection against sex discrimination;

Having regard also to the Resolution on policy and strategies for achieving equality in political life and in the decision-making process, and to the Resolution on policies to accelerate the achievement of real equality between women and men, adopted respectively by the 1st (Strasbourg, 4 March 1986) and the 2nd (Vienna, 4-5 July 1989) European Ministerial Conferences on Equality between Women and Men;

Bearing in mind its Declaration on equality of women and men, adopted on 16 November 1988,

Recommends that the governments of member states promote the use of language reflecting the principle of equality of women and men, and take any measures they consider appropriate with a view to :

1. encouraging the use, as far as possible, of non-sexist language to take account of the presence, status and role of women in society, as current linguistic practice does for men ;
2. bringing the terminology used in legal drafting, public administration and education into line with the principle of sex equality ;
3. encouraging the use of non-sexist language in the media.