

Women in Politics:

Opportunities and Challenges in European Context

Conference Proceedings



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Conference was organised by the Institute of European Democrats in cooperation with Fórum 50 % on 21st of May 2010 in Prague, Czech Republic.

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About the organisers:

Institute of European Democrats

The Institute of European Democrats (IED – IDE) was established in September 2007 as a new and independent Research Institute based in Brussels. Its primary goal is to promote a better understanding of the core aspects of the European integration process, and to play an active role in strengthening the confidence of European citizens and their direct participation with regards to European Institutions and policies and, above all, in favour of the idea of a united Europe. These fundamental objectives will be attained by the Institute of European Democrats through the balanced planning of activities that include the arrangement of studies and analysis, as well as the organisation of workshops and public conferences.

The institute serves also as an innovative European political and cultural Research Institute that can offer fresh political ideas as well as a strong and respected cultural background to the European Democratic Party (EDP) to whom it has been formally affiliated.

This strategic partnership is a guarantee of the fervent support of the Institute for the EU's shared and founding values.

Fórum 50 %

Forum 50 % was founded in 2004 and is the only NGO in the Czech republic focusing on women in decision making and public life generally.

Mission Statement: Forum 50 % strives for a society with equal representation of women and men in public life.

Forum 50 % addresses a situation in which insufficient representation of women in political life influences the quality of democracy and has a negative impact on the functioning of Czech society. We consider the low representation of women in politics to be a breach of democratic principles (equal representation of men and women is a basic condition of democracy – not its possible outcome) and we support discussion and measures leading to its solution.

Objectives: Our aim is to achieve equal representation of women and men in all decision-making positions, both elected and appointed. To reach this goal we support all women who want to enter into politics or who are already politically active. Our primary goal is to surpass the level of 30 %, which is the minimum representation any group needs to reach in order to be able to advance its interests and stop being a discriminated minority. Our long-term goal is to reach parity of men and women, which we consider to be a basic principle of a democratic, pluralistic society. The main principle of our undertakings is an apolitical approach – Forum 50 % is a strictly non-party association. We also work on changing the attitudes of Czech society towards women and men and their roles in public life. We further try to create equal and fair conditions for both women and men to participate in decision-making procedures. We are also realizing projects close to our main aim, such as the implementation of Gender Budgeting etc.

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Introduction

There is around fifty per cent of women within Czech population. It is only logical that they should actively participate on shaping the present and future environment of our lives and lives of our children. Being women we have the right to participate on decisions about future development of our society. In families, men and women have been cooperating for thousands of years on all important decisions. Hardly anybody will deny that their coexistence and mutual influencing means a benefit for both. This model simply works.

Situation in public decision making is not as balanced as in private sphere. The development of our democratic society is shaped by politicians and there is definitely not half of women among them. In the former Eastern Block countries we can find less female politicians today (around twenty per cent) than during the period of socialism. What is the reason? Very often we can hear the answer: women are not interested in politics! The participants of the conference have tried to answer this question. The answer is not simple and the ones to be blamed for the current state of affairs are both men and women. To increase the number of women engaged in politics, their

interest is particularly important. As a local politician I know that women are actually interested in what is happening around them. What discourages them from higher participation in politics is its aggressiveness which is typical for this predominantly male environment. Women need better training and encouragement to enter politics. Unfortunately they do not get enough of it nowadays.

I am convinced that it is necessary to increase the participation of women in positions of power, including political ones. Their presence is especially important in the time of large social changes related to current financial crisis. It's desirable to make use of their potential because women can bring new perspectives and useful solutions for all of us.

I hope this brochure will contribute a little bit to this change.

Pavla Brady

Vice-chair of The Party for Open Society

(since November 2010 First Deputy Mayor of the City of Opava)



Welcome address on behalf of the Institute of European Democrats

Flaminia Baffigo

It is my honour today to welcome you to this International Conference on Women in Politics organised with Forum 50 % on behalf of the Institute of European Democrats .

First of all, let me address my thanks to Forum 50 %, their director, Jana Smiggels Kavková, and to all of the colleagues that have been involved in organising this Conference and have allowed us to be here together today. My thanks to Pavla Brady who had the idea to propose this Conference at the General Assembly of the Institute of European Democrats last December in Brussels. Her proposal was adopted by the IED as one of the initiatives of the 2010 programme of the Foundation.

Let me say just a few words on the IED. The Institute of European Democrats is a European political foundation that was established in September 2007 as a non-profit association based in Brussels. The institute's primary goal is to promote a better understanding of the main aspects of the European integration process, to play a part in actively strengthening the confidence of European citizens towards European institutions and, above all, towards the idea

of a United Europe. IED wants to represent a special forum in the European panorama in which innovative ideas about the main policy challenges facing Europe in the coming years can be developed. IED's aim is to evolve pragmatic solutions to help to address these challenges.

Moreover, the Institute of European Democrats serves as an innovative European political and cultural Research Institute that could offer new political ideas. It also has the aim of offering a strong and respected cultural background to the European Democratic Party (EDP), to whom it is formally affiliated. Actually, I am the coordinator of the EDP to whom the institute is affiliated.

I therefore welcome representatives of EDP member parties from the Czech Republic, Poland, Cyprus and Slovakia. All these women are engaged directly in politics in different European member states, but they all have a common aim: engaging in politics for Europe. Engaging in politics for women in Europe.

I am glad that the Institute of European Democrats is organising this seminar today in Prague, on May 21st, 2010. Two anniversaries fall in this year:

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the 15th anniversary of the Beijing Conference and the centenary of International Women's day. These are two landmark events for women's emancipation.

Let me briefly mention these two events: One hundred years ago, in 1910, an International Conference of Working Women was held in Copenhagen that endorsed the idea of celebrating an International Women's Day. The objective was to enable working women to demonstrate support for their emancipation and universal suffrage. This marked the culmination of a growing protest movement in which women had been campaigning for better living and working conditions.

Many years were to pass, however, between the declaration of International Women's Day and its official establishment by the United Nations. Only in December 1972, did the General Assembly of the UN decide to declare an International Women's Day upon the request of the Commission on the Status of Women. Together with the decision to declare the UN Decade for Women (from 1975 to 1985), these events inspired action in every part of the world.

The Fourth Conference on Women was held in Beijing in 1995 and a final document entitled the "Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action for Equality, Development and Peace" was adopted.

For the year 2010, one hundred years since the International Women's day was first declared, the United Nations chose the theme of "equal rights, equal opportunities: progress for all.", the focus of attention being the Beijing + 15 review centering on "Equality, Development and Peace."

In the European Union, treaties have recognised gender equality as one of the EU's fundamental principles and as a universal human right. Even though several directives and many resolutions have been adopted over the years with the aim of combating discrimination, substantial inequalities can still be seen in political reality and in women's everyday lives. The current economic and social crisis is having a particularly severe impact on women, exacerbating inequalities and discrimination.

These are the themes that we are going to discuss today. I thank all of you for being here and participating actively in this Conference.



Hana Havelková

Sociologist lecturing on feminist and sociological theory at the Faculty of Humanities of Charles University in Prague. She publishes articles in English, German and Czech, primarily on structural changes in Czech society from a gender perspective in the era of communism and post-communist transformation; women in politics and science and the contemporary women's movement. She is currently the Head of the Department of Gender Studies and is also vice-president of the Government Committee for Equal Opportunities of Women and Men in Politics.

The factors decelerating a higher representation of women in politics

In my speech, I want to focus in particular on the concept of power, as this subject is often considered to be marginal, though it is the key issue when speaking about the barriers to women's political participation in the Czech Republic.

My main thesis is that it is a combination of problematic political and gender cultures that makes change to the status quo in politics so difficult. This combination is the fatal factor preventing change.

Vertical segregation is a major issue in the Czech Republic. The representation of women in party leaderships, as well as in the centres of power, in general is minimal. There is a ratio – the more money and power in a given post, the fewer women there are.

What gives rise to this situation? Which factors? I shall commence with the supply and demand criterion. There is a cliché that women (the supply part) are not interested in politics, and voters (the demand part) are not interested in the candidate's sex but only in the quality of a person. This cliché must be denied, as it does not apply. Research shows that women are interested in working in politics. It must be admitted that both the interests of voters and

women in politics are not manifested strongly. This manifestation of interests is weak and ineffective, although there are some groups of active women who are aware that something more should be done, and they make an effort to organize various seminars and conferences. Thanks to this the demand on the side of voters is rising.

The other three factors are well documented. The **socio-economic** factor, e.g. the entire quality, qualifications and competency of the female population, and the **institutional** and **cultural** factors. I want to stress the **socio-economic** factor, as it is still underestimated. The situation in this regard is not as favorable as some analysts assume. I think that we live under an illusion of gender and sex equality. Even though the Czech Republic has a fair professional structure in the female population, there is a strong vertical and horizontal segregation on the labour market. This is also relevant for the political sphere as it cannot be considered separately. The socio-economic situation, characterised by strong segregation, is a key social context for the position of women in politics. Because of this segregation, women politicians do not have the support of other “powerful” women from other social fields, above all from the economy and business. They cannot lobby in the way men can, or are unable to establish various networks that would retroactively strengthen their position in politics. Men, on the contrary, take advantage of the existing synergy of economic and political powers.

With regard to the cultural aspect, it seems to me that in the 70s and 80s cultural sedimentation (as it is termed by anthropologists) came into being. This means the stabilization of a certain model combining the emancipatory

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and traditional models, which sets a limited concept of women's emancipation, including rather low social ambitions of women, especially a weak openly-stated declaration of their ambitions. This is the decelerating factor regarding the political participation of women.

The **institutional** factors are well known. For instance, the type of electoral system or active measures for the higher participation of women in politics. These factors will be discussed in the workshops. Our electoral system is convenient for women only partially. There is a strong antipathy against active measures.

I would like to stress the **cultural** factor. In our political culture the untrustworthiness of the political parties is clear, notably in terms of support for the political participation of women, as the parties proclaim something that they have no intention of fulfilling. Intra-party democracy and effective cooperation of women in the political parties, together with a strong emphasis on transparent and fair nomination processes, are the key questions.

There is a lack of a clear and strong articulation of women's interest in higher positions inside the parties. This is the crux of the problem as it seems that there is no such articulation. There is not enough attention paid to the activity of women in the political parties.

As I mentioned earlier, I aim to focus on the concept of power relating to the political culture and gender culture. In terms of the political culture in general, we can cite non-transparent nomination processes, a lack of respect for proper electoral regulations and frequent interventions in the results of the primary elections by the leadership of the parties, together with manipulation and centralization. Without doubt this is a bad political culture.

Considering the gender culture, according to my own analyses I have discovered that a different perception of men and women in relation to power can be identified even in the discourse of speakers who support a higher participation of women in politics. Everyone avoids speaking about women and power, which signals an obvious helplessness. Of course, this is the key question for political involvement, since politics is based on the management of power according to existing rules. The unclear relation to power indirectly impeaches

women's legitimate involvement in politics. Instead, in these types of debate, the different characters of women and men are constructed and the debates support existing gender stereotypes. Such debates are double-edged and can be counterproductive. For example, emotionality is ascribed to women and is misused in arguments to suggest women cannot be fully-valued politicians. The need to have more women in politics is falsely legitimated as it refers to what women can bring to politics, not what they can bring to themselves and to other women, e.g. they can be an inspiration for other women, they can look at politics from their own experience as women and influence politics from this perspective etc.

The presence of women in politics is a question of justice. If we can prove that sex is the ground for discrimination and a structural handicap then this is a sufficient reason to take steps leading to the elimination of such discrimination. This is a question of fundamental democratic principles.

As I pointed out, the question of women's relation to power is unclear. But women must reach positions of power in order to enforce any change. They have to learn to openly declare their ambitions. They must call for transparent and fair nomination processes in intra-party politics, they must create strategies of mutual support in order to deal with all political issues and not only so-called women's issues such as the family and women etc. Last but not least, women should recognize and identify power tactics and techniques, especially those that lead to their political marginalization.



Marta Ruiz Minguez

Born in Zaragoza (Spain) in 1972. Bachelor of Law from the University of Zaragoza, since 2001 she has been a member of the Spanish diplomatic corps. Having been posted at the departments of the Middle East and Eastern Europe of the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, from 2005 to 2008 she was Deputy Head of Mission at the Spanish Embassy in Nouakchott (Mauritania). Since August 2008, she has been Deputy Head of Mission at the Spanish Embassy in Prague.

Spanish experience with promoting the equal opportunities of women and men

I am going to talk about the Spanish experience with promoting equal opportunities and especially about equality in politics. I think that the organizers of this event have chosen Spain for the conference because it can be considered as a very good example of promoting equal opportunities. About forty years ago the situation in Spain was comparable or rather even worse than in other European countries. Today, Spain can be proud of reaching one of the highest levels of equality in the world, and perhaps the best example is that our government is made up of seventeen members and nine of them are women.

But let me start by talking a bit about the Spanish Presidency of the European Union. As you probably know, Spain is currently presiding the European Union and the sensitivity of the Spanish government towards women's issues has been reflected in Spanish priorities during our presidency. There are three main issues regarding the promotion of equal opportunities. The first is the inclusion of the issue of equal opportunities in the Europe 2020 strategy. This strategy should include concrete measures aimed at creating equality between men

and women in the labour market. The second is the fight against gender-based violence, which is a very serious problem in all European societies. Spain is fostering a new directive in order to protect victims of gender-based violence in all European countries and also to create a single European telephone help-line for victims. There should also be a new European observatory on gender-based violence. The third is equal treatment in the fight against any discrimination based upon race, gender or sexual orientation. During our presidency we organized some important events, for example the European summit of women in power. But the main topic today is not our EU presidency but the Spanish experience with promoting equal opportunities.

As I have already told you, throughout our history women were excluded from the public sphere and their role was restricted to family, the household and children. The situation was comparable to other European countries at that time or even worse, since Spain is a Latin society and Latin societies are more traditional when it comes to gender roles. But there were some other important factors as well: for example, the specific development of Spanish society with its lack of a middle class and a lack of democracy. As you probably know, there was no democracy in Spain until 1975. There was a dictatorship, so it was impossible to talk about the participation of women in politics until the fall of the Franco regime.

In the 60s there were some changes, for example in the economic field: women got access to the labour market and their level of education has improved. Such changes, which took place little by little over the years, have helped to improve the position of women in Spain, especially since 1975, the year of the estab-

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lishment of a democratic government. One of the most important changes has been the entry of women to the labour market. Since 1983, nine million Spanish women have joined our labour market. 25 years ago the difference in the economic activity rate between men and women was more than 21 %, today it's only 10 %. The main reasons for these changes are economic: in a modern industrialized society it is often necessary that both partners work.

In spite of the achieved access to the labour market discrimination of women remains prevalent. Women are employed in positions requiring lower qualifications, many of them have only part-time jobs, there is a gender pay gap etc. So in spite of the massive entry of women to the labour market their position is far from equal.

Another factor that catalysed the improvement of the position of women was that their level of education improved a lot in recent decades. Today 54 % of university students are women. I think this is a crucial factor because now we have a new generation of better-educated women who are going to have better jobs in administration, in enterprises, and also in politics and this new generation of very well-educated women is going to push for a change in politics.

Regarding the participation of women in politics in Spain, the situation has also improved significantly since 1977, the year when democratic political parties were founded in Spain. In 1977 the representation of women in the Spanish Senate was only 2.4 %¹. During the elections held between 1979 and 1989 the participation of women in our Congress of Deputies rose only to 6 %, which is only a marginal change in those ten years. But one of the crucial turning points occurred in 1987. In this year the Spanish socialist party, which was in power at that time, made the decision to establish a quota of 25 % in the party regional organizations. Later the party also adopted a voluntary 25% quota for the electoral lists. The other major political parties copied the socialists and they also adopted positive measures for women. Thanks to these voluntary party quotas the representation of women candidates in the elections to the Congress of Deputies grew from 21 % to 30 % and in the elections for the Senate from 15 % to 23.9 % in 1989. One could say that there was a revolution in the political participation of women. The improvement in the Congress of Deputies has

¹ Note from the editors: the Spanish Parliament (The Cortes) has two chambers: the Senate, with 264 members, and the Congress of Deputies, with 350 members.

been especially very impressive. In 2004 women won 126 seats out of 350 and in the latest elections, which took place in 2008, there were 127 women MPs elected, which means that 36 % of the seats belong to women. It is still not 50 % or 40 % but when you compare 36 % in 2004 to 6 % in 1989 you can see that there has been a complete change in the composition of our Parliament.

The proportion of women in regional parliaments is even higher. Spain is composed of autonomous communities, which have their own governments and parliaments. The proportion of women in these parliaments was 41.6 % in 2008. The ratio in the Spanish government has been very similar. In 1993 there were only three women ministers, in 2003 only four women ministers. From 2004 the Spanish socialist party forced the election of women ministers and now there are seventeen ministers and nine of them are women, including two Deputy Prime Ministers and also the Minister of Defence. The government also established a Ministry for Equality for the first time, which is also led by a woman.

I want to point out that in Spain there was a strong political will to promote equal opportunities and our Prime Minister was especially very active in this field. He is the person who decides on the composition of the government, for example. But at the same time the changes were also catalysed by the development of Spanish society. This “women’s revolution” also took place in other sectors such as public administration (40 % of civil servants are women; although most of them work on the lowest levels and also in specific areas). Another example is the army. Since 1990 women have had access to the Spanish army and today the Spanish army has the highest representation of women of all the EU countries. These examples show there has been a clear improvement, but of course there is still a lot to be improved. The most problematic sectors are, for example, the constitutional organs, the constitutional court or the top management of large Spanish companies.

As I have already mentioned, these important changes were possible thanks to economic and social changes, such as the increase of the level of education of women, better access to universities etc. There is a new generation of women who want to be represented in the parliament and who also want to participate in an active way, to be a deputy or to be elected, to be part of a political party. This active engagement of women in politics was enabled by certain legal meas-

ures that have been adopted over the years. One of the most important of these was the repeal of the law on marital permission in 1977. Until then women needed the official permission of their husband in order to sign an employment contract, get a driving license, have a passport or even open a bank account.

In 1978 the new Spanish constitution was adopted, which guaranteed the principle of non-discrimination. In 2004 a law on the protection of women against gender-based violence was adopted. One of the most important laws was adopted in 2007: a law on the effective equality of men and women. This law aims to foster gender equality by using positive measures in different areas, such as the economy, public administration and others. This law also guarantees the equal participation of women in politics. It established balance in the electoral lists, which became compulsory. Within every five posts on an electoral list the candidates of both sexes cannot be represented by less than 40 %. That means that there must be at least two or three women out of every five candidates.

Let me conclude my speech by repeating that one of the key factors in fostering the political participation of women in Spain was the adoption of legislative measures, and especially the establishment of quotas. Economic and social development was important as well. But I would like to highlight that quotas have always been a controversial issue. On the one hand, quotas have a very positive effect and they are necessary in order to foster the participation of women. Without quotas it is impossible to achieve a higher participation of women in politics but, on the other hand, there is a negative aspect as well. Quotas might have a negative impact on the image of women in society. By using quotas to choose women for certain posts people might think that they were not the best candidates and have been chosen just for being women. Men in particular can be very critical towards women politicians: they are too young, they don't have enough experience etc. But perhaps they have the idea that women are not as capable as men in political work. In spite of these negative comments there is a clear, positive message: our society has begun to get used to the presence of women in politics. Spanish people do not find it unusual any more to see a woman minister, a woman leader of a political party, etc. And with all these changes there has also been a profound change in our way of our thinking.

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Pavla Brady

Vice-Chairwoman of the Open Society Party (Strana pro otevřenou společnost) responsible for international relations, especially with the European Democratic Party of which the SOS is a part. Member of the City Council in Opava, member of the Club of Czech Women Politicians actively promoting higher representation of women in politics. She graduated from the Faculty of Civil Engineering at the Technical University of Brno. Her civil profession was as a judicial expert for real estate appraisals and defects and failures of building structures; also an English translator and interpreter. Currently she is the vice-mayor of the City of Opava.

How to increase the representation of women in politics

There are still few women in Czech politics. In the table of representation of women in communal, regional and national politics, annually compiled by the World Economic Forum, the Czech Republic was only in 91st position from the 130 assessed countries. Presently the average is 17 % of Czech women in politics at various levels, while in Europe it is about 20 %. There are only 18 % of women in the lower chamber of the Czech parliament today, and after the elections at the end of May, their number will probably decrease even more thanks to the ordering of the candidate lists of our biggest parties (the Civic Democratic Party – ODS and the Czech Social Democratic Party – ČSSD).¹ Unfortunately, the percentage of women in Czech top politics has had decreasing tendencies since the elections in 2006 despite the fact that the representation of women in politics is a topic that has been discussed for a number of years at Czech and European levels and the public want to have more women in top politics.

¹ Author's note: Fortunately, this prediction was not fulfilled. In the parliamentary election on May 28th–29th, 2010 women got 22 % in the lower chamber, thanks to preferential voters' votes. We believe that our conference also contributed to this historically best result.

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According to the last public opinion survey carried out by the SANEP agency in March 2010, 45 % of respondents (from a representative sample of 10,763) consider the existing low representation of women in Czech top politics to be a fundamental social-political problem. So how is it possible that there are still so few women on the candidate lists of the political parties?

Women and political parties

It is obvious that citizens, thus voters, are interested in being represented by more women in elected offices than they are now. Logically, political parties should try to fulfil the wishes of their voters and promote women. Unfortunately in most cases, we witness only mere political declarations.

The obligatory reaction of political party representatives to the question of why they have so few women politicians, is usually the argument that there is a lack of women in their parties, despite the fact that women constitute 30 to 50 % of political parties' membership. Only very few women can be found in the leadership of the majority of political parties, both left- or right-wing. There are exclusively men on the executive boards of the two strongest parties (ODS, ČSSD). The party TOP 09 has only one woman in their eleven-member board as does the Christian Democratic Union (KDU-ČSL) with its seven-member board. The Czech Communist Party (KSČM) openly acknowledges the importance of equal opportunities but, nevertheless, there are only two women on its ten-member board. The highest number of women can be found in the leadership of the Green Party (SZ) and Public Matters (VV) (3 from 7 in both cases), the Open Society Party (SOS) follows with two women in its five-

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member board. There is no chairwoman in any of the mentioned parties. There is less than one-third of women on the candidate lists for this year's parliamentary elections and the majority of them are placed in unelectable positions. The fewest women run for the biggest political parties, ODS and ČSSD, the most for the Green Party and KSČM.

It is clear that there are enough women in the parties, but it is hard for them to get to the party leadership or even to some electable places on the candidate lists, even after many years of their involvement. Men do not like to give up their leadership positions, through which power and influence can be obtained. If some woman is successful, then it is only due to some at least partial adaptation to the masculine environment, a sufficiently strong motivation (a reason why to be in politics) and she must pursue her goal vigorously (which is considered to be something unfeminine) .

How to get more women in politics?

Positively, this can be done by placing women in electable positions on candidate lists. And if parties think they lack of women there are a number of possible ways to attract more prospective women-candidates to politics.

✓ **public education**

The majority of women do not see any practical use for politics and consider political work as waste of time. Usually, they change their opinion only when they find out how many matters are influenced by politicians' decisions and what impact their decisions have on society. It is therefore necessary to bring politics closer to people and explain its impacts on their everyday lives. From my own experience, I know that not only women, but Czech citizens in general, have very low political awareness.

✓ **The creation of conditions to harmonize party and family life**

If we want not only more women but also more parents of small children to get involved in political work, it is necessary to make it possible for them. The majority of women as well as men, parents, are not able to coordinate childcare with political work. If we do not want to continue to exclude these citizens from public life, it is necessary to create suitable conditions for them. When organizing party events, parties should automatically think about members

with small children and consider the possibility of attendance with children, adjust the time schedule to their needs or provide childcare during meetings or conferences. In the Open Society Party in the Moravian-Silesian Region, where I serve as a chairwoman, children's participation at our party events is welcome and we also provide childcare.

✓ **women's organizations and solidarity**

From time immemorial men have naturally formed their "boys' clubs" and tend to support one other. We women must keep learning to be supportive and show solidarity as we rather tend to compete with each other. To increase the number of women politicians it is necessary for women to mutually support one other within their parties and jointly promote topics that are important for women. Women's organizations and NGOs (such as Forum 50 % in the Czech Republic) focused on the support of women in politics are very good platforms which stand above the parties, where cooperation across the political spectrum can be established. Advancing women in the current climate of "male" politics is so demanding and essential that it cannot be solved independently in individual parties but only by working together.

✓ **role models**

Examples attract – this works in all areas of our life as well as in politics. A woman politician, who is sufficiently visible, can convince other women to consider political work merely through her good example. She is living proof that politics is not only a men's business and that women have an important role in it as well. After only four years of my personal political work at a local level, this year we were able to put together a zip candidate list (23 women and 22 men) while in 2006 we struggled to recruit at least 15 women candidates.

With an increasing number of women politicians who are still able to behave as women, the political environment, which is today too masculine and aggressive, must also naturally change. I believe that with a higher presence of women politics becomes more legitimate not only for us, women, but also for all citizens of our country. After all, we all want to make politics better as it influences our everyday lives. And I believe that even the parties will soon discover that if they want to succeed they must respect the law of supply and demand. Now it is only up to us, the voters, to strongly demonstrate our determination.



Sonja Lokar

Studied French and Sociology at the University of Ljubljana. Founder of the women's organisation within the social democratic party in Slovenia; in the first free elections in 1990 she was elected as a member of parliament.

Since 1998, she has been the head of the CEE Network for gender issues, co-operates with the organisations International IDEA and OSCE, and is one of the experts of the iKNOW Politics network. She has led training for women in political parties entitled 'Women can do it' in more than ten countries. She co-founded the Coalition for Parity, which managed to enforce quotas in Slovenia.

Empowerment of Women within Political Parties

Women in socialist and communist countries lived in a state, or party, patriarchy. They were more dependent on party ideology, party social engineering, and party strategy with regard to their chances in life, than on their family or their male partners. This state patriarchy was a huge step forward in comparison to the private patriarchy of the former period, but this was not a paradise of equality and full enjoyment of women's rights.

The moment the former communist and socialist countries changed into market economies with pluriparty parliamentary democracy was a lost window of opportunity for women. They naively took their already achieved economic, social, personal and even political rights for granted and they just expected a better life and more freedom in the democratic future.

Transitional change was mostly about elementary political human rights, new nation states and the restoration of a free market economy based on privatisation. The issue of gender equality was not an issue of democratic transformation in most of the former communist and socialist countries. Only in Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia can one see the blossoming of independent modern women's movements as early as the mid-eighties of last century. But even in these three countries, progressive women in civil society did not understand that they should have secured their fair share of the power within the newly

born political parties. Once again progressive women were prominent activists of the Singing, Velvet and similar revolutions, and diligent soldiers of the charismatic male leaders, only to wake up in crippled democracies without women after the first free elections.

TABLE 1 – The Percentage of Women in Parliament in European Countries where the Proportion of Women MPs Surpassed 20% in 1994

The world's best: Rwanda: 58.3 % WMPs

Country	% 1983 – 1986	% 1994	% 1999	% 2000 / 2001	% 2004	% 2010	% women EP
Austria	9,3	21	26,2	26,8	33,9	27,9	38,8
Denmark	26,3	33	37,4	37,4	38,0	38,0	35,7
Finland	30,5	39	33,5	36,5	37,5	40,0	35,7
Germany	9,8	21	30,9	30,9	32,2	22,8	31,3
Iceland	15	24	25,4	34,9	30,2	42,9	—
Luxemburg	11,7	20	20	16,7	20,0	20,0	50
Netherlands	20	31	36	36	36,7	42,0	44,4
Norway	34,4	39	36,4	36,4	36,4	39,6	—
Sweden	31,5	34	42,7	42,7	45,3	46,4	57,8

Source: IPU, Geneva December 15, 2000, July 31, 2004, and February 2010

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TABLE 2 – The Percentage of Women in Parliaments in Some Countries of the CEE Region

Country	W. Right to Vote	Best % of W. MPs Ever	% of W. MPs in 1990/1	% of W. MPs in 1992/4	% of W. MPs in 1996/8	% of W. MPs in 1999	% of W. MPs in 2001	% of W. MPs in 2004	% of W. MPs in 2010
Albania	1920	1974–33,2	3,6	5,7		6,4	6,4	5,7	16,4
Bulgaria	1944	1981–21,8	12,9	13,3		10,8	10,8	26,2	20,8
Czech R.	1920	1986–29,5	10	13,9		15	15	17	15,5
Estonia	1918		5,7	12,9	10,9	18	18	18,8	22,8
Hungary	1919	1980–30,1	7,3	11,4	8,3	8,3	8,3	9,8	11,1
Latvia	1918			15		17	17	21	22
Lithuania	1921		8,1	7,1	17,5	17,5	10,6	10,6	19,1
Poland	1918	1980–23	9,6	13	13	13	13	20,2	20
Romania	1946	1985–34,4	3,6	4,1	7,3	7,3	9	10,7	11,4
Russian F.	1918	1984–34,5		13,4		10,2	7,7	9,8	14
Slovakia	1920	1986–29,5	18,1	14,7	12,7	12,7	14	19,3	18
Slovenia	1943/6	1982–26	11	14	7,8	7,8	13,7	13,3	14,4
Croatia	1945	1982–17	4,4	5,8	7,8	7,8	21	17,8	23,8
B&H	1945	1982–23	5	3	26	26	20,5	16,7	19
Serbia	1945		3	?	?	5,5	12	7,9	21,6
Ukraine	1919		2,4	3,8	7,9	7,9	12	5,3	8

Source: CEE Network for Gender Issues, SP GTF, IPU, 15 January 2001, IPU July 31, 2004, IPU – February 28, 2010

In a few years, democracy-in-transition countries became patriarchal and the parties became the most powerful tool of the “boys’ networks” concentrated around autocratic male party leaders for the building up of the old-new economic and political elites. These parties, regardless of their ideological color or program, ended up following the same neo-liberal pattern of development. They could be differentiated only by their choice of approach: gradual reforms, shock therapies, stop and go transitions, or even transitions by wars. This pattern of development tacitly presumed the degradation of already developed economic and human resources. Excluded from power positions in political

parties and from the parliaments and governments, women, being the greatest human resource of these countries, were simply and swiftly transformed into the largest group of losers in the transitional period. The dismantling of the former socialist welfare states and their replacement by badly designed safety nets, massive industrial unemployment, the devaluation of feminized work in caring services and routine state administration, and fierce attacks by the conservative forces on their right to freedom of choice (abortion rights) started to transform the state patriarchy of the socialist times back into the private patriarchy of the “brave new world.”

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Women's reaction to this development went through three phases:

- ✓ Withdrawal into private strategies of survival – 1990–1992
- ✓ NGO-isation 1992–1995
- ✓ Movements for the political empowerment of women 1995–2010

Political parties also went through three phases:

- ✓ Women-hostile parties – the majority in 1990
- ✓ Pretending to be women-friendly – the majority around 2000
- ✓ Actually women-friendly – at least one in each of the countries I know

How has this transformation been brought about?

The transfer of the best practices from SIW (Socialist International Women) and the PESW (Party of European Socialists Women):

- the organization of women within political parties, internal party quotas – starting from 1990 in Slovenia
- Broad quota/parity coalitions – starting from Serbia and Macedonia in 2000
- Sandwich strategy – connected to the Beijing Platform for Action, reporting on CEDAW, peace process in the Balkans; EU integration process. This means pressure from above (from international institutions) and from below (the women's movement)
- Parallel electoral campaigns – support of women candidates in the elections, invention of the SP Gender Task Force, in practice from 2000
- Win-win strategy – getting male leaders on board – GTF invention, in practice from 2008

Results:

Equal Opportunities Acts were enacted everywhere and most of them started to include targets or general requests for a balanced gender representation in decision-making bodies. Quotas were enacted in Bosnia and Hercegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia and Albania. Parity movements are gaining momentum in Serbia, Slovenia, Poland, Ukraine and the Czech Republic.

In conclusion:

- ✓ Parties are gatekeepers.
- ✓ They can be changed.
- ✓ They change when they have to.
- ✓ They have to change when the pressure from the voters (the women's movement) and the international environment gets strong enough.
- ✓ International support for the women's parity movements is still too weak, which is why the progress is so slow.



Małgorzata Fuszara

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The Women's Congress: initiative for the equality of women in Polish politics

Poland regained independence in 1918 and the first legal regulation regarding elections recognized women's suffrage rights. The first article read: "Any citizen aged twenty-one or over by the day the election is announced, regardless of gender, may vote in the Sejm election." Article Seven gave women the right to run for office: "All and any citizens who are eligible to vote, regardless of their residence, and including military personnel, may be elected to the Sejm." But before World War II women constituted only about 2 % of members of the Sejm (the lower chamber) and the Senate. After World War II the number of women in Parliament increased, although they never accounted for more than 23 % of all deputies. It is noticeable that the number of women in the Sejm decreased rapidly in the years of political „thaw," i.e. when the communist regime was slightly less oppressive. In 1956, the percentage of female MPs in the Polish Sejm reached the exceptionally low level of 4 %. The percentage of women decreased from 20 % to 13 % after the first free elections in 1989, part of a decrease which occurred in all post-communist countries.

A debate on the introduction of a mechanism which would accelerate the process of achieving equality between men and women has been conducted

on and off since the early 1990s. The attempts to introduce it have centred around two strategies:

1. The introduction of a quota system as a part of the law on the equal status of women and men. The Parliamentary Women's Group, women's NGOs, and women experts created drafts of such a law jointly from the early 1990s. The bill was supposed to fully regulate the issue of equality of women and men. One of the most divisive issues in the bill was connected with a 40 % quota in all appointed or nominated authorities. The bill was submitted to the parliament many times and was rejected just as many times.
2. The introduction of a quota system as a part of the electoral statute. A legislative proposal clearly intending to give equal opportunity to both sexes in elections was submitted during the debates on the election law in 2001. During these debates the political party Unia Wolności (Freedom Union – UW) proposed a regulation that required parties and election committees to have a minimum quota of at least 30 % of the candidates of each gender among candidates running in the general election. The bill was rejected with almost no debate.

Before the 2001 election, three political parties – the Alliance of the Democratic Left (SLD), the Labour Party (Partia Pracy), and the Freedom Union (Unia Wolności) implemented a rule that the representation of each gender on the candidate list must be at least 30 %. In 2001, thanks to this rule, women constituted a bigger proportion of candidates of the Parliament than in previous elections: on the SLD list in the 1997 election women constituted only

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15 % of candidates, compared to the 2001 election, where the election lists of the coalition SLD-UP constituted 36 % women. The proportion of women on the Freedom Union's list rose from 18.5 % in 1997 to 31 % in 2001.

This increase was also translated into election results: the representation of women in the parliament rose from 13 % to 20 %.

There were a number of reasons for this shift:

- ✓ As mentioned earlier, three parties guaranteed women a minimum 30 % of places on their candidate lists.
- ✓ Electoral preferences in society have changed; very rightist parties that promoted traditional gender roles did not enter the Sejm at all, and the left-leaning parties had a majority and formed the governing coalition.
- ✓ The women's lobby was gaining strength. Before the elections in 2001, many initiatives aiming to increase women's participation in power were taken by women's organizations, women politicians, and women activists.
- ✓ The attitude regarding the presence of women in politics was slowly changing; more and more people shared the opinion that women should constitute a bigger proportion of elected seats.

Since the shift, women's participation has been stable – women constitute 20 % of the Sejm. As a result of the lack of progress, the women's movement proposed introducing an obligatory quota of 50% parity on the electoral lists. What is characteristic of Poland is the emergence of a broad women's movement in support of quotas and in support of this proposal. A public opinion survey shows¹ that over 60 % of people support fifty/fifty parity on electoral lists. Over 60 % of women declare that they want to vote for women in elections. The introduction of 50 % parity was the main proposal of the Women's Congress (Women for Poland, Poland for Women, twenty years of transformation 1989 – 2009) organized in June 2009. More than four thousand women from hugely varied backgrounds participated: government members, MPs and former MPs, women active in local politics, NGO leaders, journalists, academics, and students. The key demand articulated as a result of the Congress was that a gender quota

1 Public opinion survey on a representative sample from January 2010.

of 50 % should be introduced with regard to electoral lists. More than 150,000 signatures were collected all over the country to support the bill. Signatures were collected in a variety of places – in shopping malls, museums, theatres, streets, and universities. Many well-known persons (mainly women, but men as well) were very involved in the collection: actors, journalists, artists, singers, professors, and women activists. The citizens' bill was submitted to the Sejm in December 2009. The first reading took place in February 2010 in the Sejm by Małgorzata Fuszara, who presented it on behalf of the citizens' committee. The proposal is still in the Sejm commission². The Second Congress organized in 2010 proposed that 50 % parity should be submitted as a proposal for elections to the European Parliament in all EU countries.

2 Note from the editors: the Polish Sejm adopted the law regulating nominations to the candidate lists on 3.12.2010 by vast majority of 241 votes (154 against). The law introduces a minimal 35% representation of women or men on the lists. Unfortunately the regulation of the ranking of the candidates has not been included. Lists that do not comply with the rule will not be registered.



Miroslava Demková

Miroslava Demková is a Slovak politician. She studied Marketing Management at the Management Faculty of Prešov University, Slovakia and is currently the president of the Youth of the European Democratic Party of the Slovak Republic.

Women in Slovak Politics: A Short Overview

Although the European Democratic Party in Slovakia was founded only in September of last year and my age also tells you that I do not have long-term political experience, I would like to give you a brief overview of the position of women in Slovak politics based on statistics.

According to the statistics of the Inter-parliamentary Union, which compares the percentage share of women in parliaments in 186 world countries, Slovakia occupies the 68th place, together with Honduras and Indonesia. The right to be elected and to vote was given by the constitution to both men and women in 1920, immediately after the formation of the Czechoslovakian republic. However, the first woman was not elected to parliament until 1958.

A possible cause of the low representation of women in the public sector could be the lack of a quota system, which works, for example, in Rwanda or Sweden. Since 2008 Rwanda has been the only country with more than 50 % women in parliament. Sweden, with 46.4 %, takes second place. The quota system was applied in Slovakia before 1989 when 20 to 30 % of parliamentary seats were assigned to women. The share of women dropped to about 15 % in the first post-revolution elections in 1990. In October 2005, the Constitutional Court, through its decision about so-called positive discrimination, excluded any measures for the approval of the act on equalization of opportunities.

Since then the existence of the so-called glass ceiling has been significant: the representation of women is decreasing in higher positions in various working areas, and this is also the case with political parties. In the majority of political subjects in Slovakia, women are relatively strongly represented among members, but their number is noticeably lower in higher positions. At the moment there are 24 women out of 150 members of parliament, which represents 16 %¹.

Slovakia will soon have elections into the National Council, on June 12th. Unfortunately I must say that the current representation of women on the candidate lists of political parties has a decreasing trend compared to 2006 when there was a slight increase compared to the previous election period. Based on all these facts, we should talk about the gender gap not gender equality in Slovakia.

However, we must not forget to mention some positive facts as well, for example the representation of women on the candidate lists of newly-formed political subjects where the average share of women comprises 21 %. The European Democratic Party, with its share of 36 % of women, is definitely the best and I am therefore honoured to represent the Slovak Republic here.

It is unbelievable that even today there is a political subject in Slovakia with no women on its candidate list. The parliamentary parties nominated from 37 (25 %) to 22 women (15 %) on their lists. The non-parliamentary parties, already mentioned above, achieved better results – the EDP 36 %, and statistically the second political party is represented by 19 % of women.

¹ Note from the editors: After the elections in June 2010 the representation of women MPs in Slovak parliament dropped to 15.3 %; there are 23 women.

I ascribe the insufficient participation of women (despite their high education) particularly to the following:

- ✓ poor support and pressure from the public (in Slovakia, gender equality is generally taken as having been achieved and therefore is a non-existing problem, despite statistical data),
- ✓ the dilatory approach of political parties (many are not convinced of the importance of the gender agenda and their attitude is ambiguous),
- ✓ the myth of feminism (the majority of the population interprets it in different ways and connects it with negative extremism),
- ✓ prejudices and rooted stereotypes (man – breadwinner, woman – carer)
- ✓ and insufficient support and solidarity among women themselves (many women who got into parliament did not accept the women's agenda as theirs).

It is difficult for me to give any advice or instructions on how to strengthen the position of women in the public sector. But certainly we must remember the need for our own activity, we cannot expect that a chance will be given to us without having to fight for it. We must start from ourselves, actively get involved and stick together.



Marina Demetriou

Born in Nicosia, Cyprus in July 1962. She studied Economics at the University of Lausanne (Switzerland) and University of Strasbourg (France). Since her return to Cyprus from her studies, she has been working for the Finance Departments of international companies based in Cyprus. She joined the European Party at its founding in 2005. She is a member of the Political Bureau of the Party and in 2007 she was elected President of the Central Committee Women's Organisation of the European Party.

Women and Politics in Cyprus

Throughout the centuries the Aristotelian theory on the division of human life into two spheres, the **Private** and the **Public**, has greatly affected social structures with regard to political thought and the analysis of traditional matters and values such as freedom, equality and justice.

Although in modern society the balanced representation of men and women in decision making is widely recognised, women continue to be under-represented in politics and generally in decision-making procedures.

The situation in Cyprus today

What is the situation with regard to women in politics in Cyprus today? The principle of equality between men and women is legally safeguarded. Equality is no longer a matter of political choice and is not denied. The legal norms exist and are binding. There are mechanisms and institutions for coordination and monitoring at a national level and also mechanisms for supervision and implementation at a European Level.

However, the progress that has been noted in the participation of women in basic sectors, such as research and education, does not fully correspond with the position of women in the labour market or in political life.

The challenge is how to translate this legal and institutional framework into practice. Not only in Cyprus, but in the European Union as well.

Some key facts

Members of the House of Representatives – Out of 56 Deputies elected to the House of Representatives in 2006, 7 are women (12.5 %)

Council of Ministers – appointed directly by the President, out of 11 members only 2 are women

European elections – 2 women were elected from the total of 6 European MPs that Cyprus is entitled to return, a significant improvement in comparison with the previous term when there were no women at all.

The EU Commissioner – the move to appoint a woman as the EU Commissioner responsible for Education and Culture was considered a positive move.

The obstacles to strengthening the female presence in governance are attributed to **political and social causes and also psychological factors**. The excuse given with regard to the gap is the theory that voters do not trust women. This phenomenon is attributed to the conservative structures that continue to exist in Cyprus but also to the role of the educational system, the mass media and the family, who do not usually support the efforts of women to enter the political arena.

It is worth noting that the first women who entered political life in Cyprus were descendants of families with a political tradition (the daughters or wives of politicians) and usually persons from the upper middle class with a high level of education.

To a certain degree today, women are supported by initiatives of the National Machinery for Women's Rights that aim to promote their participation in poli-

tics, in public life and public awareness. The same initiative has been adopted by some non-governmental organisations, including women's organisations within political parties that participate in the Machinery.

I shall not go into the traditional role of these organisations, but I would like to point out that the parties that have adopted quotas have secured the entry of more women into politics.

Political Parties and Women

Despite all the efforts made, there are various factors that prevent women from pursuing posts in political party pyramids. Some of these factors are the following:

- Who looks after the children when mothers are at conferences, events or other party activities?
 - Women have multiple roles, they are professionally active, they are mothers, wives, they are responsible for looking after the family, the household etc. Do they have time to spare for party work?
 - Quotas – as successful, temporary, positive measures – are not widespread.
- Naturally, the political parties play an important role and can become facilitators for rapid change and the promotion of gender equality and gender mainstreaming. But they can also become gatekeepers, controlling change and reinforcing existing obstacles to women's equal participation in politics.

Change of attitudes needed

The question one must ask is: **Why is the change so slow despite the improvement in the legal and administrative framework and despite the awareness that promotion of gender equality is crucial for effective development?**

And the answer is: **Because of the negative attitudes and stereotypes which are institutionalised in society.** Prejudices held not only by men but also by women. Breaking down the discrimination on a daily basis requires tackling deeply-rooted values and attitudes which work against women.

In Cyprus traditional gender roles prevail. For example:

- ✓ A man is automatically expected to be competent and is not challenged a priori because of his sex.

- ✓ A woman in public life is faced with more scepticism and mistrust. A minor slip or bad handling of an issue is judged with irony, often with reference to her sex.

We need a change of attitudes and culture and this can come through education, training and of course the family. Unfortunately, despite the high standard of education in Cyprus, the educational system is not conducive to a gender-sensitive environment.

In my opinion, the starting point should be the younger generation. If we succeed in raising tomorrow's adults with gender awareness and sensitivity the rest will follow.

Women's organisations today

In mentioning the above, I tried to give you an image of how a woman in Cyprus is treated by politicians and the voters. There is, however, another aspect.

The political parties deal to a great extent with our National issue, with the invasion problem and the occupation of our country. The Turkish invasion led to the displacement of thousands of Cypriots and the establishment of a separate Turkish Cypriot political entity in the North. This event and the complex political situation are matters of ongoing dispute.

The preoccupation of male-dominated parties with the Cyprus problem encouraged women to exercise a strengthened social role, over and above the traditional philanthropic one. Women are actively involved in significant matters, which are set aside in mainstream politics.

The WOEP activities

The Women's Organisation of the European Party was established in 2006 and became a member of the **National Machinery for Women's rights** in 2007.

In the four years of our existence, in addition to the active support of our Party's positions on the National problem, we have dealt with various issues that preoccupy our society, such as: equality of the sexes and education, human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation (in particular of women and children), supporting vulnerable groups of women such as those of the third age and single-parent families. We have promoted policy motions to change the legislation on these issues.

Before concluding I would like to mention the issue of vulnerable groups in society, the majority of which are women.

Vulnerable Groups of Women and Poverty

The risk of poverty and impoverishment mainly strikes people over the age of 65, and two-thirds of the population in Europe over 65 are women. Women –

- ✓ Are affected by the weaknesses in the insurance and pension systems (they work fewer years, are paid less, or offered more work without remuneration).
- ✓ The number of single-parent families is on the increase and these run a greater risk of falling into poverty (85% of single-parent families are women).
- ✓ Domestic violence against women leads to disturbance of their mental well-being, social isolation and reduction in professional performance. (A large percentage of homeless women abandon their homes because of violence).

This problem is a challenge to each and every one of us and we must act today. Action against poverty must not only be aimed at assisting people who already live in impoverished conditions but also to prevent citizens falling into financial and social poverty.

In conclusion I would like to underline the significance of exchanging views and experiences between women's organisations from different countries.

Photogallery

Photographs: Václava Kosíková









