

Quota Systems: An Overview of Global Trends and Regional Analysis

Overview of the Session

This session provided an introductory overview of the use of quotas in a global context and looked at the types of quota in existence and the methods of quota implementation in Central and Eastern Europe.

'No Quota Fever in Europe?'

Professor Drude Dahlerup started by highlighting the very dynamic quota developments occurring in different regions of the world. In the past ten years, an astonishing number of countries have introduced gender quotas and analysts often describe the situation in terms of a 'quota fever'. However, this epidemic has not reached Europe, with the exception of Belgium, France and some Balkan nations.

In Europe, the Scandinavian countries have long been revered as the most successful examples of high representation of women, with women comprising between 35 and 45 percent of Members of Parliament (MPs). Yet, the Nordic states have never adopted legal quotas. Instead, the political parties of the centre and the left have used quotas voluntarily adopted by the party. In addition, party quotas were adopted only after women had already acquired around 25 percent of parliamentary seats. Here, Dahlerup makes a distinction between 'fast' and 'slow' tracks to women's increased presence in decision-making bodies. The 'slow track', typical of the Scandinavian model, is characterized by incremental changes in women's representation, preceded by increases in women's education, participation in the labour market and activism in civil society. In contrast to the Scandinavian model, the 'fast track' is characterized by major historical 'jumps' in the number of women's seats in national assemblies. In Costa Rica, for instance, women increased their

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It is better to use 'affirmative action' or 'equality measures', and to emphasize that quotas are not a form of discrimination but rather compensation for structural discrimination. The debate on quotas must shift away from the liberal notion of 'equality of opportunity' to the concept of 'equality of results'.

share of parliamentary seats from 19 to 35 percent in one election. The Scandinavian countries are therefore not necessarily the model for nations in other parts of the world.

Dahlerup drew attention to some of the frequent arguments levelled against quotas. Critics have often described them as a violation of the meritocratic and individualistic principles of liberal democracy, as well as being discriminatory against men. (Examples can be found in civil court cases in Egypt, England, France, Lesotho and Morocco.) There are several strategies for overcoming such criticism, such as avoiding use of the term 'positive discrimination', which seems to indicate that quotas discriminate against men, when in fact they should be considered as compensation for discrimination against women. Quotas do not challenge the rights of individuals—no one has the right to be nominated—rather, quotas challenge the prerogatives of the political parties in

their roles as gatekeepers. By introducing requirements for a minimum number of women on electoral lists, or gender balance, quotas give voters the 'real equality of opportunity' to choose among men and women. Thus, quotas are instrumental in overcoming the significant exclusionary barriers present in political parties, sustained by the power of party gatekeepers to nominate candidates.

Quotas in Central and Eastern Europe

In her regional analysis, Dr. Milica Antić-Gaber presented an overview of ten CEE states: Albania; Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH); Croatia; the Czech Republic; Hungary; The Republic of Macedonia; Poland; Serbia and Montenegro; Slovakia; and Slovenia.

For all countries, the socialist/communist past was characterized by 'state feminism or feminism from above', with the

issue of women's representation being treated as part of the class question. Independent promotion of the women's agenda was not deemed necessary. During the transition to democracy in the early 1990s, significant differences emerged in the region in terms of the peacefulness of the transition, the success of economic reforms, the development of the political system and the pace of the EU integration process. Antić-Gaber argued that there were certain commonalities in the region concerning gender equality. Women's political issues were limited to reproductive rights and attempts to limit (or abolish) abortion rights, violence against women and sexual abuse. Independent women's NGOs

were weak or absorbed into the peace movement in war-torn parts of the region. Society focused on the 'big' political and economic transition questions. A strong anti-feminist sentiment manifested itself due to people's fatigue with 'forced emancipation'.

The electoral and party systems that emerged during the transition had a significant impact on the political participation of women in Central and Eastern Europe. All countries in the region use some kind of proportional representation (PR) or a mixed electoral system, combining an element of PR with majoritarian/plurality elections. Much scholarly research shows that PR systems tend to promote women's representation more than majoritarian systems. In those countries that use PR, the electoral prospects of women highly depend on their position on the lists. In general, the proportion of women on party lists for national elections in Eastern Europe is low, averaging between 13 and 16 percent. However, the percentage of elected women indicates a relatively high success rate among nominated women. Regional research also reveals that more women are re-elected than men.

With regard to party systems, the region is still characterized by a high number of parties competing in elections and in parliament, internal party insta-

The implementation and scope of quotas differ greatly across the region. BiH, Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro utilize quotas in electoral legislation. Slovenia is considering a constitutional amendment to introduce positive gender equality measures and has established a quota for the European Parliament elections. In the remaining countries, voluntary political party quotas have been mostly used by left-wing and Green parties. Not all of the party quotas are statutory.

Some of them target the parties' electoral lists, others apply to elections to internal party bodies and still others focus on both candidate lists and party positions.

bility and electoral volatility. In terms of party organization, most party members are men, with the exception of some Christian-Democratic Parties, which claim that women make up one-half of their membership base. The participation of women in party governing bodies is even lower and not proportionate to their membership share, with the gap being smallest in Social-Democratic and Green Parties. Leftist parties are also more ideologically inclined to promote women's participation in politics. A common observation is that party platforms do not dedicate significant attention to women's issues. Finally, Antić-Gaber underscored the importance of party gatekeepers in deciding which candi-

dates the political party nominates for election. By dint of their control over nomination procedures and electoral lists, party gatekeepers have direct influence over women's access to political power.

Discussions from the floor

In the discussion, participants raised several issues, including the consequences of quotas in practice. Does an increase in the number of women in parliament result in substantive changes vis-à-vis policy outcomes? Are quotas temporary, becoming unnecessary when a 30 percent or 50 percent target of women in parliament is attained? Some argued that the 'equality of results', whereby quotas guarantee women's presence in parliament, is not sufficient, but should lead to a different way of doing politics. It is necessary to understand what normative responsibilities and formal institutional mechanisms are required to allow women MPs to alter policy outputs. It was also asserted that, simply because of their presence, a higher number of women in parliament might inspire cultural and 'psychological' changes in parliament.

However, the dangers of assuming that women will automatically make a lot of difference in parliament were also flagged. Quotas are important because they give women access to power structures

and the ability to participate in the agenda-setting process. But women in parliament need to be supported by the women's movement and civil society and to have a power base. It might also be important to forge alliances with men. Otherwise, there is a risk that women could be stigmatized (when elected via quotas) or perceived as 'token women' and thus left out of the political mainstream.

The discussion also addressed the role of international actors. International pressure to deal with gender equality issues was much stronger in the war-torn, failed states of the Balkans than in the rest of region. Hence, women's movements in the Balkans emerged more committed and with greater support than those in Central European countries. The participants also discussed the impact of the EU accession process and the importance of EU pressure in producing changes to gender-related legislation. For instance, in Slovenia, the EU harmonization process resulted in the 2002 Equal Opportunities Act for Men and Women, the first umbrella law to define special positive measures for gender equality and to recommend them to political parties and other actors. In addition, in February 2004, a 40 percent gender quota for candidate lists for the European Parliament elections was adopted. As a result, three women were among Slovenia's seven Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) elected in 2004. It was suggested that EU member states are often inconsistent when it comes to implementing gender-equality measures and that, occasionally, the women's agenda needs to be pushed for from outside by the applicant countries.

No Quota Fever in Europe?

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'Quota Fever'

In recent years, electoral gender quotas have been introduced in an amazing number of countries all over the world (see www.quotaproject.org). Today, one may even talk about a 'quota fever'. In Africa, the Balkans, Latin America and South Asia many different types of quota regimes have been introduced very recently.

A dramatic change has taken place in the global ranking of countries based on their level of women's political representation. As a result of quota provisions, Argentina, Costa Rica, Mozambique, Rwanda and South Africa are now placed very high in the world league of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.¹ The five Nordic states, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, which for a long time were virtually alone at the top of the table, are now being challenged. Although controversial, the electoral gender quota has proven to be a highly effective instrument for achieving equality, provided that it is implemented properly.

In Europe, however, quotas are rather unpopular, except in the Balkans. In Western Europe, quotas mainly take the form of voluntary party quotas, Belgium and France being the exceptions. In Central and Eastern Europe very few parties have approved quota regulations and no legal gender quota regulations for parliament are in place.

Analysis of quota discourse reveals that resistance to quotas in Western Europe is connected primarily to the belief that quotas are in conflict with the concept of liberal democracy and the principle of merit ('let the best man (sic!) win').

The present myth about Soviet quotas

In Central and Eastern Europe as well as in Russia, strong resistance to quota provisions is, also based on the understanding that quota regulations are a phenomenon of the Soviet past, an example of that period's 'forced emancipation'. It is often heard that under communism a quota system of 30 percent for women was installed. But is this true, or does present resistance to quota systems today partly rest on a myth of the past? The fact is that political institutions during the Soviet period were dominated by men, both in the East and in the West. Moreover, the systems of

nomination and election varied considerably between the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the level of women's representation was not stable, especially during the 1970s and 1980s.

Under communism, the level of representation of women in the powerful central committees of the communist parties was negligible, but somewhat higher in the mostly symbolic parliaments. A few figures may help to dispel the myth about a stable 30 percent quota provision for women. In the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, women's representation (as full members) was eight percent in 1981, increasing to 13 percent only in 1986, an historic high.² Women held 31 percent of seats in the Supreme Soviet of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), and as many as 48 percent of seats in the local Soviets in 1975.³ Women's representation in the parliaments of many Eastern European countries increased during the 1970s and 1980s, but the system of selection or appointment differed from country to country.⁴ Research from the 1980s does not indicate a stable and widespread 30 percent quota for women. Maybe it is time to rewrite the script in many countries.

Regional differences

Although in 2004 only 15.6 percent of members of parliament (MPs) around the world are women, significant differences exist between regions. The Nordic countries have the highest number of women parliamentarians (39.7 percent), while the Arab States have the lowest (six percent). Sub-Saharan Africa comes close to the world average (14.6 percent). However, there are considerable variations among nations within each region.

The Need for Cross-country Analyses

Throughout the world women's organizations and political parties are searching for methods to end male dominance in politics. In principle, most people and governments support the idea of gender balance in political life. Today, introducing quota provisions in politics is considered a legitimate equal opportunity measure in many countries, even if resistance is still strong in others.

Table 1: Women in National Parliaments (Lower Houses)—Regional Differences

Nordic countries	39.7%
Americas	18.5%
Europe/member states of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) (excluding the Nordic countries)	16.3%
Asia	15.1%
Sub-Saharan Africa	14.6%
Pacific	11.1%
Arab States	6.0%

Source: <http://www.ipu.org>, 30 September 2004

This calls for a new research agenda. What happens when electoral gender quotas are introduced in political environments as dissimilar as those of Argentina, France, India, Pakistan, South Africa, Sweden and Uganda? Under what conditions do quotas contribute to the empowerment of women? When do gender quotas lead to unintended negative consequences like stigmatization and marginalization? These are crucial questions that need to be addressed by feminist researchers, as well as by international institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Having gathered data on the employment of quotas globally, it is time to formulate this new research agenda to compare these different quota systems.⁵ Such cross-national research should examine the discourse that is taking place, decision-making processes, implementation processes and the effects of quotas.

While electoral statistics can provide information on the number of women elected, many countries, unfortunately, do not have data on the sex of nominated candidates, which must be obtained through other channels, such as the parties themselves. Quotas should also be assessed from a qualitative perspective, however, that is, the intended and the unintended ramifications, such as the real empowerment of women or specific groups of women versus the possibility of stigmatization and glass ceilings that prevent the number of women exceeding the quota requirement.

With some exceptions, until now, research on quotas has primarily been limited to one country. It is essential to widen the analysis and to conduct research that compares quota discourse and implementation processes and results under different electoral systems, different political cultures and different

gender regimes. Existing single-country studies seem to come up with quite different conclusions on the ability of quota systems to empower women. These differences, though, might be due to the chosen approach rather than to actual differences between nations.

The theoretical foundation of quota demands

Analyses of quota discourse reveal interesting variations among countries and regions. Quotas are highly controversial in some countries, whereas quota proposals have been passed with only little discussion in others. Yet the debate is often confused, and is only comprehensible if hidden assumptions about women and the position of women are scrutinized. Hence some consider quotas to be a form of discrimination and a violation of the principle of fairness, while others view them as compensation for structural barriers that prevent fair competition. Quotas are sometimes perceived as violating other principles like fairness, competence and individualism. Yet quotas are also seen as an efficient way of attaining ‘real’ equality, that is, ‘equality of results’.⁶

If we take the actual exclusion of women as the starting point, that is, if we recognize that many barriers exist that prevent women from entering the realm of politics, then quotas are not viewed as discriminating (towards men), but, instead, as compensation for all of the obstacles that women face. When all of these impediments are removed, quotas will no longer be necessary, it is argued. In this respect, quotas are a temporary measure. It may take decades, though, before all social, cultural and political barriers preventing equal representation of women are eradicated. Today, the very idea of linear progressive development towards gender equality is challenged.

The gatekeepers to the political scene used to be the political parties, because of their control over the nomination process. The role of voters is often not as decisive as one would think. Who will be elected is frequently decided by the nomination committees of the political parties—they select the candidates and place them in good or bad constituencies (in terms of likelihood of election). Prior to the polls, the political parties usually know which seats are ‘safe’. In all systems, it is important to examine who actually exercises control over the nomination process. In countries with a high level of women’s representation, women’s organizations have consistently asked: who controls the nomination process? In the Scandinavian countries women’s organizations shifted from

the more vague call for ‘more women in politics’ to the demand for 50 percent of seats on nomination committees and within the party leadership.

The decision as to whether or not to introduce a quota is increasingly influenced by the recommendations of international organizations and by developments in different national contexts. Electoral gender quotas are being introduced today in nations where women have been almost entirely excluded from politics, as well as in states with a long history of female involvement in the labour market and in political life, such as the countries of Scandinavia. In the Scandinavian countries, electoral quotas were not introduced in the latter until the 1980s, when women’s parliamentary representation already exceeded 25 percent.

The introduction of effective quota systems represents a shift in approach, from ‘equal opportunity’ to ‘equality of results’. However, since most quota systems specify the number of women and men to be presented to voters on electoral lists, and not the gender distribution following the election, one might prefer to see electoral gender quotas as an example of ‘real equal opportunity’. Women and men have an equal chance to present themselves to the voters and in open-list proportional representation (PR) systems, as well as in majority systems, voters have the option of voting for a female or male candidate. In general, a quota system represents a break with the widespread gradualism of equality policies. Viewed from this perspective, the Scandinavian countries can no longer be considered a model for ensuring equal political representation around the globe.

Why Scandinavia is no longer the model

For many years, feminist organizations worldwide have viewed the five Nordic countries as a model for achieving equality for women. A key factor has been the very high level of representation of women in parliament and on the local councils, especially since the 1970s.

How did women in Scandinavia come this far? What can we learn from the Scandinavian experience? As Nordic researchers we have tried to answer these questions by pointing to structural changes within these countries, such as secularization, the strength of social-democratic parties and the development of an extended welfare state, women’s entrance into the labour market in large numbers in the 1960s, the educational boom of the 1960s, and the type of electoral system (PR). Strategic factors are also seen as im-

Table 2: Percentage of Women in Scandinavian Parliaments Today

Sweden	45.3% (2002)
Denmark	38.0% (2001)
Finland	37.5% (2002)
Norway	36.46% (2001)
Iceland	30.2% (2003)

portant, especially the various approaches employed by women’s organizations to raise the level of women’s political representation.

The international research community has paid considerable attention to the results of Nordic research. The extraordinarily high rate of women’s representation in the region since the 1970s, by international standards, has sometimes been attributed to the introduction of quotas.⁷ However, this is not an accurate assessment: quotas were not introduced until women had already acquired around 25 percent of the seats in parliament. Women politicians then used this new power to consolidate the position of women in general by working for the introduction of quotas in their respective political parties. Quotas were never introduced by law in the Nordic countries, only as a result of internal party decisions. And not all Nordic political parties use quotas—those that do are mostly to be found in the centre and on the left of the political spectrum. The few Danish parties that introduced quotas abolished them after just a few years. Finally, the Swedish principle of ‘every second women’ is not even considered a quota system by the general public, even if, in fact, it is a radical quota system, demanding and, in most cases, leading to a 50 percent gender balance.

The Scandinavian experience cannot be considered a model for the twenty-first century because it took 80 years to get that far. Today, the women of the world are not willing to wait that long. Electoral quotas are a symbol of the impatience of modern women. A very good example is South Africa, where the introduction of quotas in the 1994 election (the first poll to be held following the demise of apartheid) by the African National Congress (ANC) resulted in women’s representation in the new democracy reaching 27 percent.⁸

Different Quota Systems

The electoral quota for women may be constitutional (like in Burkina Faso, Nepal, the Philippines and Uganda), legislative (as in many parts of Latin America, as well as, for example, in Belgium, Bosnia and Herze-

govina, Serbia and Sudan) or it may take the form of voluntary party quotas. In some countries, including Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Germany, Italy, Norway and Sweden, a number of political parties have some type of quota. In many others, though, only one or two parties have opted to use quotas. However, if the leading party in a country employs a quota, such as the ANC in South Africa, this may have a significant impact on the overall rate of women's representation. Yet most of the world's political parties do not use any kind of quota at all.

Even if constitutional amendments and new electoral laws providing for gender quotas may seem more commanding, it is not at all evident that these methods are more efficient than political party quotas when it comes to implementation. It all depends on the actual rules and the possible sanctions for non-compliance, as well as on the general opportunities that exist for quotas within a country. As for nomination rules, the crucial issue is whether there are any rules governing the rank order of candidates on the list. Are the nominated women placed in a position with a real chance of election? 'Reserved seats' are a different kind of quota, whereby a specific number of seats are set aside for women—as in Uganda, where a number of regional seats are reserved for women. The differences between the various systems should not be exaggerated. In a closed list system, quotas, in reality, determine which of the candidates will be elected, but the number of seats to be awarded to each party is still down to the electorate.

In some countries quotas pertain to minorities based on regional, ethnic, linguistic or religious cleavages. Almost all political systems utilize some kind of geographical quota to ensure a minimum level of representation for a densely-populated area, such as an island. That type of quota is usually not considered to be as controversial as a gender quota.

Quotas work differently under different electoral systems. Quotas are most easily introduced in proportional representation (PR) systems. But even in a PR system, because of the few elected candidates, small parties and parties in small constituencies experience difficulties in implementing quotas without interference by the central party organization.

Quotas may be introduced in democratic political systems, as well as in systems with limited democratic freedoms, or even in non-democratic or authoritarian political systems.

Gender-neutral quota provisions?

Most quotas aim to increase women's representation,

since, typically, the problem to be addressed is the under-representation of women. This is particularly relevant as women usually make up 50 percent of the population or more. An electoral gender quota regulation may, for example, require that at least 40 percent of the candidates on an electoral list are women. A minimum requirement for women implies a maximum number of men.

Some quota systems, however, are constructed on a gender-neutral basis, which establishes a maximum for both genders. The requirement may be that neither gender occupies more than 60 percent and no less than 40 percent of seats.

A 50–50 quota is, by nature, gender-neutral. It also sets a maximum for the representation of women, which a minimum female requirement does not.

A 'double quota' not only calls for a certain proportion of women on an electoral list, but it also prevents women candidates from being placed at the bottom of the list with little chance of election. Argentina and Belgium are examples of countries with a legal requirement for double quotas.

The Troublesome Matter of Quota Implementation

Quotas have often stimulated vehement political debate. To date, research on quotas has tended to concentrate on these debates and on the decision-making process. While these discursive controversies are an essential part of the Stockholm University research project, emphasis is also being placed on the frequently neglected and troublesome matter of quota implementation and on the consequences of introducing quotas. From single-country studies we know, for instance, that the introduction of a requirement demanding a minimum of 30 percent of each gender on an electoral list does not automatically result in women acquiring 30 percent of seats. Thus, by comparing the use of quotas in many similar (and different) political systems, it is possible to determine whether quotas are an equitable policy measure, contributing to the stated goal of equal political citizenship for women.

An unclear debate and lack of legitimacy with regard to the claim often leads to problems at the implementation stage. In a survey of political parties in the Nordic countries, and of women's organizations in the same parties, the Norwegian Labour Party reported that it takes three elections to implement a quota. Why? Because the party is not prepared to throw out an incumbent male parliamentarian in order to include a woman.

The results of past single-country studies vary to a

considerable extent: the partial failure of the attempt to introduce women's shortlists in a single majority electoral system, like that of England, which nevertheless produced some positive results;⁹ the success of the Scottish 'twinning system'; often 'minimalist' compliance with the rules by political parties in Latin America, resulting in small and uneven gains in women's representation, with Argentina and Costa Rica serving as outstanding positive examples;¹⁰ and the somewhat stigmatic consequences of the system of reserved seats for women in Uganda.¹¹

The 30 percent quota provision for local councils in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan amounts to a sort of revolution in the gender regime in this area. Research has shown, though, that the quota system requires that women's organizations develop capacity-building programmes for nominated and elected women candidates. If quotas are to lead to the empowerment of women, elected women must have the capacity to fulfil their new responsibilities; especially in a strong patriarchal society, capacity-building for women politicians is essential. At the same time, we may conclude that properly implemented quotas might contribute to a more gender balanced society.

International 'Translation'

A new international discourse on gender balance in institutional politics is an important factor behind the recent introduction of quotas all over the world. Today we see male-dominated parliaments passing quota laws. However, the fact that some countries have opened up to quotas, while others have not, and the fact that specific types of quota systems seem to manifest themselves in regional clusters, all point to the need for context based research on how this international discourse is translated in order to make it applicable in different individual and regional contexts. The women's movement appears to have a crucial role to play in this process.

Endnotes

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Overview of Quota Systems in the Region of Central and Eastern Europe

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This case study provides an overview of the application of quota systems in Central and Eastern Europe. In so doing, however, geo-political concerns arise. How do we define the region of “Central and Eastern Europe (CEE)”? It is problematic, since how can one speak of the CEE region when some countries have become members of the European Union (EU) and some remain outside of it? And how can one speak about the CEE countries and leave out the nations of the Balkans? Despite the fact that they were all former socialist countries the differences among these countries are great and they are even becoming bigger as development and transition processes proceed at different speeds. For the purpose of this case study, therefore, the region is assumed to include the following: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, as well as Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, The Republic of Macedonia, and Serbia and Montenegro.

The Position of Women: Commonalities and Differences

During the socialist (communist) period in the region a common understanding of the ‘women’s’ question prevailed: it was seen as part of the class question. It was going to be solved by the communist party led by self-organized workers and citizens (in the former Yugoslavia) or by the communist state and its agencies (in the other countries). Hence no independent organization of women was needed—this is why some of feminist writers have proclaimed that this was a period of state feminism or the imposition of feminism from above. One can really witness big changes during the socialist (communist) period in the position of women. Most notably, state feminists secured a ban on gender-based discrimination, as well as formal equality and the right to vote for women, the right to abortion, paid maternity leave for employed women, equal access to schooling and paid work, and a declaration calling for equal pay for equal work. In addition, a publicly subsidized network of childcare facilities was set up.

The transition away from communism occurred over a different timeframe in different countries, had a different intensity and shape, and produced different results. Furthermore, these countries have

enjoyed a different rate of economic development, plus there are big differences in their political systems and in the national, religious and cultural structures of their societies. Development was most rapid in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia and hence these countries acceded to the EU on 1 May 2004. Progress in the other countries is much slower. One of the most important reasons for this relates to the wars that took place in the Balkans. While Slovenia was ‘lucky’ only to endure ten days of clashes, the other parts of the former Yugoslavia suffered long and bloody conflicts.

During the first years of extensive political change, and especially during the conflicts, the concept of the woman/worker was reshaped by a number of big developments, the most important of which were the establishment of independent nation states, privatization and the creation of a market economy, political and religious pluralism, and state- and institution-building. The new mainstream political practices attempted to reduce women to a part of a national body—the reproductive part which assumes its own important role during such periods. The tactics were different in different countries, ranging from the assertion that women would prefer to leave their paid jobs and stay at home and take care of the family and efforts to legalize the sanctity of life from the outset in order to undermine the rights of women to abortion (Slovenia), to attempts to ban abortion outright (Croatia and Poland) and the rape of women of other nationalities during war (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo and Serbia).¹

Transitional or mainstream war politics did not provide much room for deliberations on questions connected to gender equality and the political participation of women in any of the respective countries. Conversely, disillusioned by the transition or by war, mainstream politics was more or less perceived by most women as a dirty business, time-consuming and as a highly corrupt activity.² Up to the mid-1990s, women’s non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in most of the countries were weak, powerless and received insufficient outside support (information, financial resources and moral backing)—if they existed at all—and were unable to press for a stronger presence of women in public life and the political

arena. Until the end of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1995, for example, women's NGOs there were mostly focussed on helping to deliver humanitarian assistance, achieving peace and on defending the human rights of women in war regionally and globally with the well-connected women's pacifists' movement. The most significant achievement of these bodies was that rape during war was finally declared a crime against humanity (at the United Nations (UN) World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, in 1995). Most of the women's NGOs in the Balkans during this time also concentrated on so-called social issues, including running SOS help-lines, providing support to rape victims, setting up safe houses for women victims of violence, and offering economic assistance. But, little by little, and at a different rate, the situation started to change. In the early 1990s, women started to organize themselves within political parties, trade unions and other entities.

Common Features Regarding Gender Equality and Political Culture

Concentration on big issues

The political agendas of the countries under consideration are focussed on big issues like stabilization of the national economy, integration into the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), and the preservation of the nation (more specifically, addressing the low birth rate). One of the key reasons, therefore, for the low level of political participation by women is a very narrow definition of 'political' and the lack of importance accorded to the issue of equality for women and men in the political sphere.

Misunderstandings of the concept of political equality

In this region, it is believed that women are in an equal position to men and hence that there is no need for special support, and that they are not discriminated against in the education and employment fields or with regard to rights of citizenship. It is also believed that liberal democracy (as a political regime) and the market economy ensure economic and political equality for all individuals, independent of gender. As already noted, a narrow definition of the 'political' has blocked initiatives to encourage greater political participation of women in post-socialist systems.³ Accordingly, demands for the introduction of mechanisms to guarantee the equal participation of women were often seen as illegitimate and unacceptable.⁴ Acceptance of a simplified liberal democratic agenda has ruled out

any rethinking of the structural relationships between public and private spheres.⁵ Women are faced with a political culture that strongly believes in the power of individual political rights and the market economy and does not support the argument that special positive measures are needed to guarantee greater political participation of women. This, among other things, explains why many attempts to introduce such measures have failed.

Strong anti-feminism

The majority of men and women in the countries of the region believes that feminism, feminist theory and the organized feminist movement are not appropriate instruments for improving the position of women in politics and society. Feminism is still seen in quite a negative light and, for the most part, is connected either with militant suffragettes or with strong women communist politicians. Opponents would say that the feminist politics are too encumbering and uncompromising and that all of the changes need more time—we cannot achieve change overnight, but only through a step-by-step process.⁶

Lack of a strong women's movement and collective action for new rights

Many people in this region, especially women, are used to receiving benefits from the state—due to state feminism during the socialist era. At the same time, people are not used to organizing themselves in order to acquire new rights. In Slovenia, for instance, it is easier to organize to preserve existing rights (the right to abortion) and much more difficult to organize to gain new ones (equal representation through quotas). As well, in some countries of the region, women (and men) stress that they are weary of compulsory political activity and forced emancipation from the previous regime and that they have a right to abstain from politics. This is why electoral turnout is now quite low, as witnessed in Slovenia, for example, during the last few referenda.

Systemic Factors

Electoral systems

The type of electoral system employed in a country has a crucial bearing on the success enjoyed by women at the polls. Many research projects have proved that systems based on proportional representation (PR) serve to ensure women a stronger presence in politics and thus offer a better chance to introduce different kinds of special measures, including quotas.

From research on politics in Western countries, we also know that list-PR systems have a more favourable impact on the electoral prospects of women than majority systems.⁷ The same studies show that women stand a better chance of being elected in multi-member districts (MMD) than if voters choose a small number of candidates or can select only one candidate. Some researchers have observed that women's chances of being elected increase with the raising of the electoral threshold, which qualifies parties to gain seats in a legislature. Unless the electoral rules provide for specific ranking order of men and women on party candidate lists, women often tend to be concentrated halfway down the list or lower, with slim chance of election. So, the larger the pool of elected candidates for one party within an electoral district, the

more likely parties are to reach the women candidates further down the party list.

None of the CEE countries under consideration here uses a plurality/majority system in parliamentary elections, but rather some variation of proportional representation, including mixed systems. Hungary, for example, employs a mixed-member proportional (MMP) system (single-seat constituencies, territorial and lists and national or compensatory seats), together with Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Macedonia, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia all have PR electoral systems, some with one nation-wide constituency and some using multi-member districts. Serbia and Montenegro uses PR for direct elections at the Republic level, while the state parliament is indirectly elected.

Table 1: Women's Representation in Parliaments in CEE, 2004

Country and year of last election	Electoral system	No. of parties in parliament	No. of women in parliament (of total seats)	Percentage of women in parliament	Type of Quota
Albania 2001	MMP (100 Single Member Districts plus 40 Multi Member Districts)	14	8/140	5.7	None
Bosnia-Herzegovina 2002	List PR (MMD)	8	7/42	16.7	National legislation Electoral law 2001
Croatia 2003	MMD (local constituencies filled by PR plus votes for diaspora and minorities)	15	27/152	27.0	Voluntary political party quota
Czech Republic 2002	MMD (local constituencies filled by PR)	6	34/200	17.0	Voluntary political party quota
Hungary 2002	Mixed (SMD with absolute majority plus MMD local constituencies filled by PR, plus nationwide MMD constituencies)	4	35/386	9.1	Voluntary political party quota
Macedonia 2002	Mixed (SMD with absolute majority plus nationwide MM constituencies filled by PR)	14	22/120	18.3	National legislation-33% quota for under-represented gender and voluntary political party quota
Poland 2001	PR (MMD—local constituencies filled by PR and nationwide MMD constituencies filled by PR)	15	93/460	20.2	Voluntary political party quota
Serbia & Montenegro	List PR (direct and indirect elections)	17	13/126	10.3	Electoral law quota of 30% in Serbia
Slovakia 2002	List PR	7	26/159	17.3	Voluntary political party quota
Slovenia 2004	List PR (MMD—local constituencies filled by PR, 2 SMD seats for ethnic minorities)	7	11/90	12.2	Voluntary political party quota

We can conclude, therefore, that none of these countries has an electoral system that is particularly unfavourable to women. Of these, however, the least conducive to women's election chances are the PR varieties used in Hungary and Slovenia. In Hungary, the reason for this is that roughly half of the parliamentary seats are filled from single-seat constituencies (176) and the remainder from territorial and national party lists. In Slovenia, the reason is that eight constituencies are further divided into 11 electoral districts, where parties nominate individual candidates who compete for votes with other parties' candidates and then with their own party colleagues—this has not benefited women candidates.⁸

As for elections in Hungary, Ilonszki states that, in the first elections to be held following the demise of communism, 'the consequences of the electoral system were more obvious and straightforward than in the second and third ones'.⁹ The proportion of women elected from national lists fell from one election to the next: 50 percent, 28 percent and 22 percent in 1990, 1994 and 1998, respectively.¹⁰

In Slovenia, the division of constituencies into voting districts radically affects the logic of proportional representation and diminishes women's chances of becoming party candidates. Consequently, parties act similar to those operating in a majority electoral system, where they have to select and propose one candidate for each voting district. This usually results in the presence of a significant number of male, middle class, locally well known MPs in parliament.¹¹

As for those countries that use the party-list PR system (Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia), it has been argued that the electoral prospects of women depend on their position on the list: the higher the ranking, the greater the chance of election. However, not many women occupy the top positions on the lists, so the percentage of women elected is low.¹² Although, a comparison of the 1993 and 1997 elections in Poland reveals that, in the latter, the two strongest parties, the Freedom Union (UW) and the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), nominated fewer women, but voters, in all districts, save for those with a small number of seats, 'exercised their preference to increase the number of women in parliament beyond that planned by the political parties'.¹³

In general, the number of women on party lists for national elections in these countries is small, averaging between 13 and 16 percent. One can conclude, therefore, that their election results are quite good, since the proportion of elected women compared to women candidates is lower by only a few percentage points. Moreover, an analysis of the electoral prospects of women that

focussed on concrete candidate lists revealed that, in the main, when women do appear on candidate lists they stand a good chance of being elected.¹⁴ Furthermore, studies have shown that women candidates are elected several times in succession and that the percentage of women who are re-elected is greater than that of men.¹⁵

In all countries the election results are additionally affected by setting a threshold for entry of parties into parliament. The threshold varies: in Slovenia it is four percent (changed from three seats in the 2000 elections), while in the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia it is five percent. In Hungary a provision exists stipulating that a national list may be presented by a party that has drawn up lists in at least seven territorial constituencies. These rules help to exclude smaller parties from the electoral competition, so their votes get distributed among the larger parties. According to some interpretations,¹⁶ the women members of larger parties thus stand a better chance of being elected—presuming that they are selected as candidates of course.

One can conclude, therefore, that the countries of Central and Eastern Europe do not utilize parliamentary electoral systems that are unfavourable to women, and hence that the reasons to explain the low proportion of women in the parliaments of the region should be sought elsewhere.

Party Systems

Research shows that political parties, as the guardians of the candidate nomination process, are important gatekeepers to the election of women for public office. Following are characteristics of the party systems in the region.

- **A relatively large number of parties:** In contrast to the other European countries, the political arena in CEE is characterized with many political parties. Between 20 and 30 parties compete in an election, and many more small parties are registered (for example, there were 200 parties in Poland in 1991 and 29 held seats in parliament).
- **Party fragmentation:** Of the numerous parties competing in elections, many are successful in gaining access to parliament. However, the number is decreasing. As noted above, there were 29 parties in parliament in Poland in 1991, but this figure fell to 15 in 2001. Among other things, the decline is due to the introduction, in 1993, of the five percent threshold for parties and the eight percent threshold for coalitions. In Slovenia,

the introduction of the four percent threshold resulted in 20 parties competing in the 2000 election (down from 28 in 1992) and the number of parties in parliament decreased from eight in 2000 to seven following the 2004 poll.

- **Unstable party systems:** The instability of the party system is due, in part, to the fact that new parties are continuing to appear (some of which are small, interest-based parties, such as the Youth Party in Slovenia and the Pensioners' Party in Poland and Slovenia). In addition, some small parties are continuing to merge (different green parties and groups in Slovenia), while like-minded parties are continuing to unite (such as the Christian Democrats and the People's Party in Slovenia). Hence the electorate's loyalties and preferences are not entrenched and shifts in public support occur.
- **Male domination of the parties:** In all of the countries under review party politics is still 'a man's job'. Party membership remains predominantly male. Christian democratic parties are the exception: around 50 percent of their membership is female or they are linked with strong women's groups. The Christian Democrats in Slovenia and Poland are reported to have 61 percent¹⁷ and 52.3 percent¹⁸ of women in their ranks, respectively, while the Christian Democrats in Hungary are said to have an 8,000-strong women's section.¹⁹ The data show that women's participation in important party bodies is not in proportion to their share of the membership. One finds it hard to identify, for instance, a woman at the deputy level within a party—usually one in every three or five deputies is a woman. With respect to those parties that are situated ideologically in the centre and left of centre, the smallest gap between share of membership and share of leading positions is found among liberal and social democrats and greens.
- **Party gatekeepers:** Parties exercise direct influence over women's access to political power. They often behave as gatekeepers. Researchers who focus on questions that relate to women's prospects of election agree that the party is an important obstacle that they must overcome in order to enter parliament.²⁰ Ilonszki asserts that parties are a more important factor governing women's chances of election than the electoral system.²¹ According to Siemeńska, women parliamentarians estimate that, in general, women are less likely to be included on an electoral list be-

cause this is a responsibility of party bodies in which they are heavily under-represented.²² She concludes that being placed on a list often depends 'on the gatekeeper's own sweet will'. In Slovenia, for instance, the electoral headquarters of political parties frequently work in complete secrecy and only a select few are made aware of their activities. They usually choose candidates from different circles. The first and most powerful circle, and the one from which most of the candidates are chosen, includes high-profile individuals, such as parliamentarians, ministers, state secretaries and mayors. There are extremely few women members.²³

- **Party ideology:** Some important characteristics of parties' impact on women's participation in politics, notably: organizational structure; ideology; and formal and informal rules.²⁴ It seems that, in particular, the party's ideology plays an important part in determining its perspective on women in the political arena.²⁵ Left of centre parties (such as liberals, socialists, social democrats and greens)²⁶ are more amenable to women entering politics than right of centre parties (for example, people's parties and Christian democrats). While the first group typically sees women as equal partners in politics (with men), often it does very little or nothing to make this a reality. The second group, by contrast, highlights, for the most part, the important role to be played by women in the private sphere. If women appear in the public domain it is often because they are engaged in charity work or are helping male colleagues. The latter group also does not support any special measures that could help women to gain access to politics.²⁷

As has already been noted, party programmes are still preoccupied with big issues (relating to the nation and the economy). Politicians do not attach much value to achieving equality between men and women, while political parties do not consider women to be serious political agents. Women are perceived as a relatively significant part of the electorate whose support only has to be garnered at decisive moments, particularly at election time. Partly because party programmes do not devote much attention to so-called women's issues, new parties have emerged that can be classified as women's parties (like the Women's Party and New Party in Slovenia). None, though, has attracted enough votes to surpass the threshold criterion.

The number of women on candidate lists for parliamentary elections in all of the countries of the region is low (less than one-quarter of the total). Thus

the representation of women on these lists does not correspond with either their strength within party memberships or populations as a whole. However, analysis of elections shows that women who have appeared on the candidate lists have a good record. Female candidates are receiving beyond average support from the electorate, which demonstrates that they are qualified and electable, contrary to claims of party officials. Research conducted on the situation in Hungary has revealed that more women are placed in positions on party lists with less prospect of election (that is, in single-member districts where the party has little hope of winning and less and less in winnable positions on national lists). The same applies to Slovenia, where strong parliamentary parties and parties, which aim to improve their results, nominate fewer women in winnable seats than small parties and parties which have less prospect of winning.²⁸ In the Czech Republic and Poland only a very small number of women are placed in the first three positions with a good chance of election. As for elections in Poland, Siemeńska assumes that, 'in parties with strong individualities and organized women's groups, slightly more women are placed on high positions on the lists'.

Attitudes to Quotas in the Region

In terms of strategies that enable parties to nominate more women in an election, it is widely recognized that quotas are among the most successful. Quotas are mechanisms that allow members of marginalized groups to be included on candidate lists for parliamentary elections. But the bad experiences of certain countries following the collapse of the socialist system led to the rejection of quotas on the grounds that they constituted an inappropriate means of ensuring the participation of women in politics.

The public perceives the quota mechanism as a means of forced participation, the establishment of inequality and/or the placing of one of the sexes (male) in an unequal position. Although discussions on quotas are not a total novelty, as a tool for ensuring more appropriate representation of women in politics they are still being rejected by most political parties in the region.

Quotas can be incorporated into the Constitution, as in France, established through national legislation (electoral law or a law on political parties), or introduced by internal party statutes law. With regard to the CEE region, only in Slovenia are the basis for quotas guaranteed in the constitution. In Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) the introduction of quo-

tas in the BiH Election Law came with the support from the international community. In the past ten years, Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro have passed national legislation introducing quotas. In all other cases, quotas have been introduced by some political parties.

The system of quotas was rejected by all parties in the Czech Republic; only the Party of the Democratic Left employs a kind of quota for elections to internal party bodies (25 percent).²⁹ The same thing happened in Poland; only the post-communist left wing Democratic Left Alliance is inclined to use the quota. The Parliamentary Group of Women in the Polish Sejm proposed a 30 percent quota, but its proposal did not gain sufficient support in parliament.³⁰ In Hungary, only the Hungarian Socialist Party uses a 20 percent quota, which applies to women and party members under 35 years of age.³¹ In Slovenia, quotas have been adopted by centre-left parties: the Liberal Democracy of Slovenia currently utilizes a 25 percent quota, which will be raised by three percentage points at each election—the ultimate objective is 40 percent representation of women. The Greens have introduced a provision calling for equal representation of both sexes, while the United List of Social Democrats does not have a statutory provision but observes a proviso that women should fill at least one-third of the positions on candidate lists.³²

Quotas alone, of course, cannot solve the problem of women's under-representation in politics. However, they may have a positive influence on the operation of parties and their endeavours with respect to the advancement of women in the political realm. They may also have a positive effect by encouraging women to aspire to participate in party politics.

A more specific survey in Slovenia³³ for example, reveals that there are several reasons why all previous proposals for the introduction of quotas through national legislation failed prior to the Act on Elections to the European Parliament:

- one of the most important is the low number of women in parliament and the insufficient political power that they wield within their respective parties;
- women parliamentarians only rarely participated in debates on quotas, mainly because the struggle for women's rights was often portrayed and interpreted negatively in Slovenia and elsewhere;
- insufficient knowledge about special measures and various equal opportunity policies; and

- the opposition of the government, which saw the proposals as amounting to indirect interference in the affairs of state and of political parties.

Two important developments led to a slight change in the situation. In 2001, a coalition was established that is seeking to achieve an equitable balance of women and men in public life. The coalition acts as a pressure group, occasionally publishing leaflets in order to focus the attention of the public and politicians on the low rate of women's political representation and presenting party politicians with written appeals calling for more women in parliament and demanding that they support special measures like quotas or zipper lists. By autumn 2002, two-thirds of the country's parliamentarians were backing constitutional change, intended to provide a legal basis for the introduction of the special measures, that is, quotas.

The Act on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, which entered into force in July 2002, was the first law to introduce and define special and positive measures and to lay the ground for their adoption in individual areas of social life where one gender is under-represented.³⁴ Via this law, positive measures to encourage gender equality became recommended measures—meaning that political or other actors are still not legally obliged to comply. The most promising development came in February 2004, when a 40 percent gender quota for candidate lists became a legal provision of the Act on Elections. This can serve as a precedent.

Conclusion

The leading countries in the region in terms of women in parliament are Poland (20.2 percent) and Croatia (21.7 percent). A number of factors can be observed in these two countries, which are anomalous to the relatively high percentages of women in parliament. These factors include: the strong influence of the Catholic Church; absent or weak state mechanisms to help women gain access to politics; the nuances of the PR electoral systems in each; and a large number of parties in parliament (15 in both). In the other countries of the region, one can discern stagnation or a slow rate of change with respect to the presence of women in parliament. The introduction of a strong and effective quota mechanism is, therefore, vital to strengthen the presence of women in politics in the short-term.

Endnotes

- 1 For more information, see Ramet, Sabrina Petra. ed. (afterword by Branka Magaš.) 1999. *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans*. University Park: Penn State Press.
- 2 See also Jalušič, V. and Antić, M.G. 2001. *Women – Politics – Equal Opportunities, Prospects For Gender Equality Politics in Central and Eastern Europe*. Ljubljana: Peace Institute.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 In the words of Marylin Reuschmeyer, gender equality is 'a term that most politicians, male and female alike, hesitate to use. Quotas for women in political representation are generally shunned because they are associated with the politics of the past. And women who came into politics then, it is said, were only tokens, less qualified and experienced than men'. Rueschmeyer, Marylin. 1998. *Women in the politics of Post-Communist Eastern Europe*, New York, London: M.E. Sharpe, Inc. p. 293.
- 5 Jalušič, Vlasta. 1999. "Socially Adapted, Politically Marginalized: Women in Post-Socialist Slovenia", Ramet Sabrina P. (ed.), *Women Society and Politics in Yugoslavia*, Pennsylvania State University Press, pp. 51-66.
- 6 See Butorova in Jalušič, V. and Antić, M.G. 2001. *Women – Politics – Equal Opportunities, Prospects For Gender Equality Politics in Central and Eastern Europe*. Ljubljana: Peace Institute. 6a Ibid.
- 7 This is dealt with in the papers by Richard E. Matland and Wilma Rule. For more on women's access to power in the region see Matland, Richard E. and Montgomery, Kathleen. eds. 2003. *Women's Access to Power in Post-Communist Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 8 For more on this, see Antić, Milica. 1998. *Ženske v parlamentu* (Women in the Parliament), Znanstveno in publicistično središče, Ljubljana.
- 9 Ilonszki, Gabriella. 2000. "Gloomy Present, Bright Future? A Gender Perspective for Party Politics in Hungary", paper presented at the international workshop "Perspectives for Gender Equality Politics in Central and Eastern Europe", The Peace Institute, Ljubljana, May 2000.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Antić, 1998, op. cit.
- 12 Filadelfiová and Gurán in Jalušič and Antić, op. cit.

- 13 Gibson, John. 1999. "Parties and Voters. The Effect of the Polish Electoral System on Women's Representation, paper presented at the international conference "Women's legislative Representation in Eastern Europe: Ten years After the Fall", Bergen.
- 14 Ilonszki, Siemienska, Havelková in Jalušič, V. and Antić, M.G. 2001. *Women – Politics – Equal Opportunities, Prospects For Gender Equality Politics in Central and Eastern Europe*. Ljubljana: Peace Institute.
- 14a Ibid.
- 15 Siemienska, Renata. 2000. "Political Representation of Women and Mechanisms of Its Creation in Poland", paper presented at the international workshop "Perspectives for Gender Equality Politics in Central and Eastern Europe", The Peace Institute, Ljubljana, May 2000.
- 16 Matland an Montgomery op.cit.
- 17 See Antić, Milica. 1999. «Slovene Political Parties and their Influence on the Electoral Prospects of Women» in Corrin, Cris. (ed), *Gender and Identity in Central and Eastern Europe*, London: Frank Cass, pp. 7- 30.
- 18 See Saxonberg, Steven. 1999.«Influence From Within? The Attempts of Czech Women's Organisations to Increase Female Representation in Political Parties», paper presented at the international conference "Women's legislative Representation in Eastern Europe: Ten years After the Fall", Bergen.
- 19 See Fodor, Eva. 1998. «The Political Woman» in Reusmeyer, op. cit.
- 20 Havelková, Siemeńska, Illonszki in Jalušič and Antić op. cit.
- 21 Illonszki, 2000. op. cit.
- 22 Siemeńska, 2000. op. cit.
- 23 Antić, 1999. op. cit.
- 24 Norris, Pippa and Lovenduski, Joni. 1993. *Gender and Party Politics*, Sage, London. and Illonszki. op. cit.
- 25 Illonszki, Siemeńska, Antić, Havelková in Jalušič and Antić, op. cit.
- 26 This no longer applies to the Scandinavian countries. While the breakthrough was made by leftist parties, others have followed their lead and now no party can afford to have a wide gender gap with respect to its electoral lists.
- 27 In 1996, in Slovenia, an attempt was made to introduce mechanisms to improve women's access to politics. This supra-party initiative failed because of the opposition of right of centre parties.
- 28 Antić. 1998. op. cit.
- 29 For more, see Havelková, Hanna. 2000. «Political Representation of Women in Czech Republic: Political Institutions, Public Pools and Intellectual Discourse», paper presented at the international workshop "Perspectives for Gender Equality Politics in Central and Eastern Europe", The pace Institute, Ljubljana, May 2000.
- 30 Siemeńska. op. cit.
- 31 Ilonszki. op. cit.
- 32 In 2000, their share exceeded 32 percent.
- 33 See Antić, G. Milica. 2004. Women in the Slovenian Parliament: Below Critical Mass in Antić G. Milica and Ilonszki Gabriella, Women in Parliamentary Politics, Hungarian and Slovene Cases Compared, Peace Institute, Ljubljana, pp. 81-116.
- 34 Meaning that representation is less than 40 percent.