

Preface

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), an intergovernmental organization with member states across all continents, seeks to support sustainable democracy in both new and long-established democracies. Drawing on comparative analysis and experience, IDEA works to bolster electoral processes, enhance political equality and participation and develop democratic institutions and practices. The inclusive and responsive nature of these institutions is considered to be of particular importance if there is to be effective governance, benefiting a wide spectrum of groups in society. In this context, IDEA is committed to promoting the participation and representation of women in political life.

The picture of Europe is very different today than it was 15 years ago. One-party authoritarian rule has given way to multi-party democracy in much of Central and Eastern Europe. The European Union (EU) has recently gone through the greatest enlargement in its history. Almost all non-EU states within Europe participate, in some manner, in the region's clubs including the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and institutions of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). But did the wave of democratic reforms, which swept Europe in the 1990's, result in an increased participation of women in European politics?

Although women's representation in older democracies in Europe has slowly been on the increase and the percentage of women Members of the European Parliament has increased from 19 percent in 1994 to 30 percent in 2004, the advent of multi-party democracy in post-communist Europe did not immediately put women in decision-making positions. In fact in many countries, the first multi-party elections brought a decline in women's representation in national parliaments. Although gender quotas are now increasingly viewed as an important policy measure for boosting women's access to decision-making bodies throughout the world, the legacy of communist-era quotas and token representation created a backlash in Central and Eastern Europe.

Even if the decline in women's participation has

recently reversed and women's political participation in most European parliaments is increasing, the quota debate remains heated and is by no means settled in many countries. The debate is kept alive by the many dedicated national women's groups and regional networks, many of whom contributed to this report, which work to mobilise political actors and push for positive measures so that more women can participate in, and contribute to, the political reforms which are fundamentally changing the face of Europe. During a workshop on Quotas in Europe participants revealed how international instruments, such as the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, and support from the International Community, have assisted their efforts to keep the debate relevant.

Since 2003, IDEA has been engaged in a global research project on the implementation and use of quotas worldwide in cooperation with the Department of Political Science at Stockholm University. Through the development of the Global Database on Electoral Quotas for Women (www.quotaproject.org), we have been able to compare the use of different types of gender quotas in different political contexts. These data have been supplemented by generating comparative information on quotas, collected through a series of regional workshops. The first three workshops were held in Asia, Latin America and Africa in 2002-2003. This regional report documents the findings of the fourth in the series, *The Implementation of Quotas: European Experiences*, in October 2004. It is followed by a final workshop in the Arab World.

Many individuals and organizations supported IDEA's work on quotas in Europe, and we are grateful for their enthusiasm and expertise. We thank our partner, the Central and Eastern European Network for Gender Issues, particularly Daša Silović and Márta Szigeti Bonifert, Erzsébet Kovárik, President of the Hungarian Office for Equal Opportunities, MEP Zita Gurmai and Sonja Lokar the Chair of the Gender Task Force of the Stability Pact. We also thank the speakers and authors of the case studies in this report, and particularly Denitza Bojinova, the rapporteur, and Richard Jones, the copy editor, who made this report possible.

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lena Hjelm-Wallén". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

LENA HJELM-WALLÉN
CHAIRPERSON OF THE BOARD
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