

Low Participation of Women in Politics: the Case of Slovakia

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Outline of the Presentation

- I. Facts on parliamentary representation of women in Slovakia
- II. Explanations (structural, institutional, cultural, agency based approach)
- III. Conclusions

I. Facts:

The two decades of democracy in Slovakia, as in the remainder of CEE, did not deliver equal representation for women. In Slovakia, women's participation in parliament now stands at 16 percent, with women holding 24 out of 150 seats in the new parliament. As in other CEE, women's representation in Slovakia saw a steep decline after 1989: In 1990, women's representation in parliament fell from 29 to 12 percent. Since then, the proportion of women in parliament has varied between 14 and 19 percent, and 2010 saw the country's first woman prime minister.

Table 1: Women representation in Slovak Parliament (total number of MPs - 150)

Year	Number of women	Share in %	Validity of quota
1985	44	29.3 %	Yes
1990	18	12.0 %	No
1992	23	15.3 %	No
1994	22	14.7%	No
1998	19	12.7 %	No
2002	22	14.7 %	No
2006	24	16.0%	No
2010	23	15.3 %	No
2012	24	16.0%	No

At all three levels of politics (national, regional, local) the women's representation in Slovakia have not exceeded 25% level, with the exception of women's representation in the European Parliament. What does it say about the political parties in Slovakia? Do they want to get rid of women in politics, in case that some women reached the top position? The case of the former Prime Minister Iveta Radičová is very illustrative. She was used as a political vehicle for her

party to increase the party gains and than neglected in decision making. Her story reinforced the popular image of politics as a 'dirty' issue among women in Slovakia.

II. Explanations (structural, institutional, cultural, agency based approach)

1. Structural Explanations

Structural approaches focus on the level of a country's socio-economic development, particularly GDP per capita, women's participation in paid employment and their increased levels of education, linking these factors to increased levels of women's representation. Structural explanations tend to be good at highlighting statistical relationships, but poor at explaining the linkages between the level of economic development, measured by GDP, and gender egalitarianism. Structural theories often fail to provide explanations for variations within a given region where the levels of socio-economic development are comparable. Structural factors provide the foundations upon which the other factors play their roles. **Structural factors, therefore, are necessary, but by no means sufficient conditions to explain the level of women's representation.**

In Slovakia, the structural conditions are very similar to other CEE, therefore not sufficient to provide the explanation for one country maybe some explanation for the whole region. However, in some Western European countries (or the 'old' member states), even if structural factors indicate (much) higher GDP, the participation is/was also low before applying quotas for women.

2. Institutional Explanations

The focus on **institutional factors** became central to many explanations are the specificities of the country's **electoral system** including proportional/mixed/plurality systems, **district magnitude** and **preference voting**.

2.1. Several studies have shown that the level of women's representation is higher in countries with PR, as opposed to mixed or plurality electoral systems. Therefore, a conclusion was made that the proportional electoral system is in general more positive for women candidates. The system is a clear guide for selectors if they have to nominate one candidate for an election fight (majoritarian system) or can create a ballot where a female candidate can be accepted without fear of losing votes (proportional system, PR).

2.2. Pippa Norris adds district magnitude (the number of seats per district) as a conventional determinant for women's recruitment. Women tend to be more successful under an electoral system with multi-member constituencies than under systems with single-member districts.

2.3. The extent of openness of a ballot helps or derogates women candidates. The more open the ballot, i.e., that a voter can theoretically "create" the final constitution of the legislative body from the candidates across the parties, the more favorable is the system for a female candidate. This attribute of an electoral system is also connected with preferential voting.

2.4. Legislative quotas as the 'last resort' to increase women's representation. There are two options: either national (legislative) or party quotas (voluntary). Public discourse in CEE after the fall of communism

In Slovakia, **there is institutional framework that should be favorable for female candidates**. The Slovak electoral system is highly proportional with single district and semi-open ballots (four preferential votes). No legislative quotas are used and none of the Slovak political parties (considering relevant parliamentary parties) uses a quota system in its nomination process.

3. Cultural Explanations

In contrast to the structural accounts, Norris and Inglehart have stressed **culture**, which they regard as the ‘missing factor’. Their work identified strong correlations between women leaders and the proportion of women elected to national parliaments. Gender-egalitarian attitudes were most prevalent in post-industrial societies, especially amongst the younger ones. The role played by culture/political culture is a perennial debate in political science, however with limited possibility to base a (collective) political action on this factor. Political culture is very difficult to change.

In Slovakia, **gender-egalitarian attitudes and/or gender mainstreaming discourse is on the relatively low level**. On the one hand there is a general belief that women should have more say in politics, however this attitude is very formal, just on the level of declaration, because other questions, e.g. related to introduction of quotas are negative. Gender mainstreaming is considered as a politics coming from ‘the Brussels’, therefore nothing to be considered seriously by broader public. It ‘has to be done’ approach, however only in the formal way. It is enough.

Eurobarometer (March, 2011): Idea of gender quotas not supported by women. According to the survey, as many as 38 percent of Slovaks and 40 percent of Europeans believe that the world of politics is ruled by men who don’t sufficiently recognize women’s qualities and experience.

Around 44 percent of Europeans (and the same percentage of Slovaks) support the idea of equal opportunities and oppose conventional stereotyping.

4. Agency based approach.

What about political parties and public opinion discourse?

Neither political parties nor public opinion in Slovakia is in favor of introducing voluntary or legislative quotas.

Eurobarometer (March, 2011), measuring response to the 2011 Viviane Reding’s initiative (the European Union’s Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship) called on companies to sign a pledge to increase the number of women in top positions.

Only 19 percent (!) of Europeans believe that quotas for women in public positions are necessary. **In Slovakia**, the figure was even lower: **only 16 percent** said they believe quotas requiring that women be appointed to various administration bodies and supervisory boards should be adopted.

The survey also revealed that only 25 percent of Europeans and 28 percent of Slovaks support the idea of equality-based representation on the election lists of political parties. When asked

whether this should be required by law, **20 percent of Slovaks and 19 percent of EU citizens said yes**. Eight EU countries have or have had such quotas for parliamentarians.

None of six political parties represented in the parliament has voluntary quotas (in the past there were only three parties, which used them SDL, KSS and ANO. None of them is in the parliament.

SDL (Party of Democratic Left) merged with Smer-Social Democracy, however, quotas and gender mainstreaming are not the important issues for the party leaders, because the party strongly advocates in favor of ‘bread-and-butter’ issues and focuses on the negative impact of economic crisis.

Out of 83 MPs after the 2012 elections only 15 are women.

Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OĽaNO), which has 16 seats, will be represented by **four women MPs**.

Christian Democratic Movement (KDH), with 16 MPs, will have just **two women** in its caucus.

Two women MPs represent the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKÚ), out of its 11 MPs.

Freedom and Solidarity (SaS) has just **one woman** MP and **Most-Híd none**.

Attitudes of the Slovakia’s female EMPs

Katarina Neved’alová MEP (**Smer-SD, Smer-Social Democracy**) is the only one MEP in favor of the idea of quotas in businesses and politics. However, she argues that the attention should be paid more to the sexual and reproductive health of women.

Monika Flašíková-Beňová (Smer-SD, Smer-Social Democracy): rejects quota for politics supports quota in companies.

Edit Bauer (EES, SMK – Party of the Hungarian Coalition): does not support quotas; she kind of avoids this questions, in support of step-by-step strategy. She strongly favors the equal payment for women as the top issue in gender mainstreaming.

Anna Záborská (EES, KDH, Christian Democratic Movement): She considers the introduction of any quotas as inappropriate measure, because: “Those who propose them in politics, in fact, limit the rights of voters, therefore such solutions do not lead to equal rights.”

III. Conclusions

What are the challenges that women face when they want to enter the political arena? Why are women still underrepresented?

The constraints of women participation:

- cultural attitudes,

- balancing public and private responsibilities,
- biased reporting in the media,
- a lack of support provided by political parties,
- a shortage of financing and campaign support.

In Slovakia, there are very little (influential) actors, who stand for (and advocate) gender mainstreaming in general and the increase of women in politics.

Very few actors share a belief that when women participate in politics, the state is able to profit from all the skills, talent and contributions available in society. Majority do not see that any other alternative is the wasted social potential.

Parliaments have the power to back policies and laws that promote equality and make a difference in people's lives.