

Exchange of good practices on gender equality

Women in economic decision making

Norway, 10-11 May 2012

Comments paper - Poland

Disclaimer:

The information contained in this publication
does not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission.

Women in economic decision making in Poland

Małgorzata Fuszara

Institute of Applied Social Sciences,
Gender Studies, University of Warsaw

1. Introduction. The transformation and women's rights

Before 1989 in Poland, just like in the other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the official ideology endorsed gender equality. The relevant provision was even introduced into the Polish Constitution of 1952. Nonetheless, there is an abundance of examples illustrating actual shortage of equality at the time. In the parliament, the proportion of women oscillated below 20%, reaching the top value of 23% only once, in the term of office 1980-1985. The gap between women's and men's earnings was about 20% too, to women's disadvantage. The transformation of 1989 radically changed the playing field, both for men and for women. The proportion of women MPs fell to 13% at first, and then in 1991 to less than 10%. Women were hit harder by unemployment and were more vulnerable to job loss. The women's movement was initially rather weak too. The principle of gender equality was invoked rarely, due to the perception that it belonged ideologically to the old system, and was therefore inauthentic (Fuszara 2006).

However, the new social and economic circumstances offered new opportunities to everyone, women included. The women's movement began its reorganisation following new democratic principles. The proportion of women in the parliament slowly began to rise. Women became also increasingly more active in business.

Currently, i.e. in 2012, women make up 24% of the Sejm and 13% of the Senate (Fuszara 2011). In 2009, in the total number of entrepreneurs – including the self-employed – women had a 35% representation. In the total number of employers – not including the self-employed – they had a 29.4% share, placing Poland at the first place in this category in the entire European Union (*Przedsiębiorczość kobiet w Polsce* 2011). Women's NGOs, of which there is quite a number and variety, strive actively to promote gender equality. The women's movement is also active and strong, and influential in politics in particular since the first Women's Congress in 2009.

2. Gender quotas and their perception in post-transformation Poland; quotas in politics

In Poland, again just like in the other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the notion of quotas was perceived negatively after 1989. It was believed to lead towards progress that was ostensible rather than real in the area of gender equality. No official quotas had previously functioned in Poland, be it in politics, on the labour market, or in education. However, preferential treatment measures had been in use. For instance, entrance exams to universities (where the number of students of each department was arbitrarily capped by the authorities at levels much below demand) favoured children from working-class and peasant families. In the 1980s, the Minister of Health

introduced for a short time preferential quotas for men to study medicine, in reaction to the fact that every year, women far outnumbered men among the successful candidates at entrance exams at medical universities. The ministerial system allocated 50% of medical university places to men. In practice, men who had passed the entrance exam with worse results were accepted as students in place of women who had passed the exam better. In 1987, the Constitutional Tribunal ruled that the system was unconstitutional, thus putting an end to its application (Fuszara, Zielińska 1994).

The women's movement lobbied for quotas in politics since the mid-1990s, with no success until 2011. Initially, there were suggestions that quotas should be introduced in the draft Act on the Equal Status of Men and Women. Despite a number of attempts, the Act was never adopted. In 2000, it was proposed that quotas should be implemented in the electoral law. This proposal was rejected by the Sejm at the time. As a consequence, for the first time ever, selected political parties (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej SLD – Democratic Left Alliance, Unia Pracy UP – the Labour Union, and Unia Wolności UW – The Freedom Union) adopted the rule that at least 30% of candidates on electoral lists in parliamentary elections had to be women. A few years later, before the 2007 elections, one political party adopted a resolution on 'soft quotas'. Without amending the party's official regulations, it was agreed that at least one woman had to be placed among the top three candidates on every list in parliamentary elections (Fuszara 2011).

The issue of quotas in politics was discussed again during the 1st Women's Congress in 2009. The key goal of the Congress was the adoption of a 'parity act', equalising the opportunities of women and men in election by ensuring that they were equally represented on electoral lists. The Congress has been an event and a movement of special importance. It is one of the most spectacular achievements of the women's movement. The Congress is organised by a group of women, some of whom are active NGO members, but other have never participated in NGO activism. Among them, there are women member of business organisations, academics, actors, directors, journalists, women active in politics (former and current ministers) – in other words, women from a very broad spectrum of backgrounds, professions and political beliefs. The Congress, preceded by a series of regional conferences, was a great success. In 2009, over 4000 women participated. In 2011, the 3rd Congress gathered over 6000 participants. The activism surrounding the Congress is clearly social movement-like in nature. After the 1st Congress, a decision was made to launch a citizens' draft of the act on parity on electoral lists. In Poland, for such a draft to be considered by the Parliament, 100,000 signatures must be collected in its endorsement. At the same time as the drive for signatures, lobbying efforts were made to convince politicians to approve of the parity idea. Meetings were held with the president, prime minister, leaders of all parliamentary groups and political parties, speakers of the Sejm and the Senate, leaders of the legislative committees in the Sejm and in the Senate, as well as with many other key players in the field.

The drive to collect signatures was highly successful. Over 150,000 signatures were obtained. The process became a wide-scale informational and promotional campaign, as the signatures were collected in shopping malls, cinemas, museums, etc. It provided an opportunity to engage in a debate on quotas and on women's political participation in general.

As the draft law was being debated in the parliament, the ruling party (Platforma Obywatelska PO – the Civic Platform) changed the parity provision (50/50%) to a quota provision stating that neither men nor women may account for less than 35% candidates on electoral lists. Thus amended, the Act was actually adopted. It contributed to a significant increase in the proportion of women on electoral lists (40%

total) and to a noticeable increase in the proportion of women MPs up to the record of 24%.

Public opinion polls conducted during the drive to collect signatures demonstrated that the public attitude to quotas in politics has changed. The notion is no longer perceived as negatively as it was just post-1989. On the contrary, the quota proposal gathered substantial public support (Fuszara 2011).

3. Women in positions of power in business

The success of the effort to introduce quotas in politics has encouraged the proposal to implement quotas in business too. Before the proposal was launched, other measures were implemented with the goal of ensuring equal opportunities for men and women to hold managerial positions in business. One of such measures was the implementation, in 2010, of a recommendation concerning the participation of women and men in management positions into the Code of Best Practice of the WSE (Warsaw Stock Exchange) Listed Companies. The recommendation is worded as follows: “The WSE recommends to public companies and their shareholders that they ensure a balanced proportion of women and men in management and supervisory functions in companies, thus reinforcing the creativity and innovation of the companies’ economic business.” The Code requires also that websites of the companies should list every year “information about the participation of women and men respectively in the Management Board and in the Supervisory Board of the company in the last two years”. Consequently, the information on women’s participation is public and broadly accessible. Analyses are therefore possible of the participation of women in the positions of power on the companies listed on the Warsaw Stock Exchange.

A research project including such an analysis (Adamska, Jarosz 2011) was conducted using two methods. Firstly, questionnaires were used, distributed among the companies listed on the Main List and in the NewConnect market. From among the 673 listed companies, 167 (25%) responded. The survey provided data on the proportion of men and women in the labour force and in management. Secondly, data from all the 673 listed companies’ websites were analysed in regard to supervisory boards, management boards and CEO positions.

Women in Warsaw Stock Exchange Listed Companies

Women in the labour force total (167 companies)	41.95 %
Women in the labour management (167 companies)	39.64 %
Women in supervisory boards (673 companies)	16.40 %
Women in management boards (673 companies)	12.23 %
Women CEOs (673 companies)	6.39 %

As illustrated by the table, the higher the position, the smaller the proportion of women working in this capacity. Analyses demonstrate also that women tend to hold the highest positions in smaller companies (16%) and in the industries where women generally prevail, e.g. financial services (18%). As far as key positions of power (CEO level) are concerned, where women are CEOs, women constitute 56% of the labour force. Where men are CEOs, there is a 40.4 % proportion of women in the labour force. In the companies where CEOs are female, there is a much greater proportion of female members of management boards (56%).

Interestingly, women tend to hold higher positions in companies where efforts are made to promote women's participation (12.5 %). It is however difficult to determine the direction of the process here: are the efforts so successful that women indeed thrive, or do women in the positions of power engage in action to promote other women?

The Warsaw Stock Exchange S.A., itself a listed company, was analysed too. It was portrayed in a very positive light: "In the last decade the participation of women in employment has been around 50%. Since 2006, the participation of the women in the board of directors has been 50% and the participation in managerial positions (directors and heads of teams) was 37% in 2011" (Adamska, Jarosz 2011, p. 81) According to the researchers, "[t]he results of last year's study have shown that the women's presence in management (even in small numbers) has a positive relation to the resilience to the financial crisis and the speed of improving the financial results of companies. One may consider this indirect proof of the positive influence of the participation of women in company management and an inspiration for further developments and research in this sphere" (Adamska, Jarosz 2011, p. 81).

4. Good practice and management quotas in Poland. Transferability of good practice from Norway, Great Britain and Denmark

The first initiative to introduce equal opportunity principles was the above-mentioned Code of Best Practice of the WSE (Warsaw Stock Exchange) Listed Companies. Besides the recommendation to ensure a balanced proportion of women and men in management and supervisory functions in companies, it requires also that websites of the companies should list information about the participation of women and men respectively in the Management Board and in the Supervisory Board. Since the obligation was only introduced recently (2 years ago), it is not yet possible to track the changes in these areas. In the future, such analyses will certainly be undertaken.

The next initiative is the promotion in Poland of the Diversity Charter. The Charter is a written, voluntary obligation not to discriminate and to promote diversity, including gender diversity, in the workplace. On 14 February 2012 the Charter was signed on government premises by the first companies, represented by their CEOs: Aviva, British American Tobacco Polska, Danone, Deloitte Polska, Grupa Orbis, Grupa TP, Grupa Żywiec, Kompania Piwowarska, L'Oreal, Nutricia, Provident Polska S.A., Totalizator Sportowy, Unilever. The project's honorary supervision is in the hands of Agnieszka Kozłowska-Rajewicz, Government Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment, and Irena Lipowicz, the Ombud (Human Right Defender).

There have also been initiatives aimed at implementing gender quotas in business. The issue has also become the key goal of the 3rd Women's Congress (2011). The work on the proposal has been finished recently. The proposal has been submitted to the prime minister in a meeting on 7 March 2012. The Congress proposes that gender quotas in business should be introduced gradually, starting with state-owned enterprises, and following with listed companies. The quotas should initially be set at 30%, and later raised to 40%. In state-owned companies, women should hold 30% of managerial positions by 2013, and in listed companies – by 2015. By 2017, women's participation in management should be raised to 40%, and the same should be achieved in listed companies by 2020.

The reasoning behind the introduction of quotas rests on the advantages that companies experience when they implement the principle of diversity in their management. Research demonstrates that companies that rely on diversity have better results, including particularly economic results. Arguments invoking equal opportunities do appear in the debate, but they are used only occasionally.

Many references are made both to strategies employed in other countries and to the efficiency of quota solutions implemented there. Solutions reported from Denmark, Norway and Great Britain are being introduced in Poland now. The general idea of quotas is similar to the option adopted in Norway, and the example of Norway is often cited in public debate. Unfortunately, press reports tend to be biased, suggesting for example to that in Norway, the problem of “golden skirts” is more severe and common than the problem of “golden suits”. Reliable reports from Norway suggest that the situation is quite different. There is therefore clearly a need to offer reliable information that could bolster the efforts aimed at implementing quotas in business in Poland.

The obligation for companies to make available information on the participation of men and women in management, introduced by the above-mentioned Code, as well as the introduction of the Diversity Charter, are somewhat modelled on steps taken previously in Denmark and Great Britain. Other ideas worth implementing in Poland include: further obligations to report women’s participation in management; recruitment oversight and reporting aimed at ensuring that barriers and preferential mechanisms are eliminated from recruitment.

Bibliography

Adamska, Lidia; Jarosz, Beata (2011): Women In Joint Stock Companies, In: Looking for Enlightenment? III European Congress of Women

Domański, Henryk (1992): Zadowolony niewolnik? Studium o nierównościach społecznych między mężczyznami i kobietami w Polsce. Warszawa, IFiS PAN

Fuszara, Małgorzata; Zielińska, Eleonora (1994): Progi i bariery czyli o potrzebie ustawy o równym statusie kobiet i mężczyzn. (Obstacles and Barriers to an Equal Status Act In Poland) w: Kobiety: Dawne i nowe role (Women: The Past and the New Roles) Biuletyn nr 1/94, Centrum Europejskie Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Ośrodek Informacji i Dokumentacji Rady Europy (Centre For Europe Warsaw University. Information and Documentation Unit on the Council of Europe)

Fuszara, Małgorzata (2006): Kobiety w polityce (Women in Politics) Warszawa TRIO

Fuszara, Małgorzata (2011): Kobiety w polityce (Women in Politics) w: Krystyna Slany, Justyna Struzik, Katarzyna Wojnicka, Kraków NOMOS

Przedsiębiorczość kobiet w Polsce. Raport (2011). Polska Agencja Rozwoju Przedsiębiorczości. Warszawa