



The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality

Women in political decision-making
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Women in political decision making

The Case of Slovakia

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1. Relevant country context

The Slovak Republic addresses gender equality in its domestic legislation effectively. Equality between men and women is enshrined in the *Constitution of the Slovak Republic* and further elaborated in the country's specific legislation. The *Anti-Discrimination Act* is specifically relevant as it prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex/gender, while compliance with the principle of equal treatment is not fulfilled merely by refraining from discriminatory practices, it equally emphasises prevention of discrimination and the need for adoption of preventive measures.

The promotion of gender equality has been enshrined in strategic materials and documents, particularly the *National Strategy for Gender Equality in the Slovak Republic 2014-2019* and the related *National Action Plan for Gender Equality in the Slovak Republic 2014-2019*. Both documents simultaneously reflect the recommendations made by relevant international monitoring bodies as well as the commitments made by the Slovak republic itself as a response to these recommendations. Last but not least, the documents incorporate the tasks introduced in the *Partnership Agreement with Slovakia on using EU Structural and Investment Funds for growth and jobs in 2014* and the highlighted importance of equality between men and women as a horizontal principle.

Despite the formal equality (equality de jure) and adoption of important strategic and conceptual documents, it must be noted that inequalities between women and men persist in almost all areas of public and private life in Slovakia. For example: more than two decades of democracy did not deliver equal political representation for women and no legal measures in this area. Currently (2016) there are 31 women out of 150 members of parliament, 2 ministers out of 15 in government. One notable exception: between July 2010 and April 2012, the post of prime minister of Slovakia was the first time held by a woman, Ms. Iveta Radičová. The case of Iveta Radičová is very illustrative. She was used as a "political vehicle" for her party to increase the party gains and then neglected in decision making. Her story reinforced the popular image of politics as a "dirty" issue among women in Slovakia.

Since 1990, the proportion of women in parliament has varied between 14 and 19 percent. At all three levels of politics (national, regional, local) women's representation in Slovakia has not exceeded 25 %, with the exception of women's representation in the European Parliament.

In Slovakia, there is institutional framework that should be favourable for female candidates. The electoral system is highly proportional with single district and semi-open ballots (four preferential votes).

2. Policy debate in Slovakia

Over the years, both men and women have become more interested in elected posts in government and in parliament, which is reflected in an increasing number of male and female candidates in all types of elections. Yet, the percentage of successful women's candidates is generally lower than men's and as a result, women's involvement in public life is much lower.

What about political parties and public opinion discourse? Neither political parties nor public opinion in Slovakia is in favour of introducing voluntary or legislative quotas. None of 8 political parties represented in the parliament has voluntary quotas. Quotas and gender equality are not important issues for the party leaders, because the party strongly advocates in favour of economic issues.

A survey (Eurobarometer, March 2011) revealed that only 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 said yes. Idea of gender quotas is not supported by women. According to the survey, as many as 38 percent of Slovaks believe that the world of politics is ruled by men who don't sufficiently recognise women's qualities and experience.

CEDAW/C/SVK Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (July 2008) recommends to Slovakia "use affirmative action towards greater progress in reaching real equality for women, specifically in decision making".

In the framework of the Universal periodic evaluation ("UPE") the Slovak republic was repeatedly addressed with a recommendation to adopt affirmative action in favour of increasing the participation of women in decision making.

The Slovak labour market is among the most vertically segregated labour markets in Europe, meaning that women, despite their increasing participation in leadership and management, remain working in lower positions as opposed to men. Although the level of education in case of women is similarly high, it does not seem to reflect in earning promotions, unlike in the case of men. Poor utilisation of women's intellectual and political potential is not only a loss for the women themselves but for the entire society.

3. Transferability aspects of the good practices of Slovenia and France

The presented good practices/measures from France and Slovenia are very interesting and inspirational. As regards of transferability potential to Slovakia it must be noted that it is very limited:

Why are women in Slovakia still underrepresented? The constraints of women's political participation are structural, institutional, cultural attitudes, no effective reconciliation of family and work life, one-sided and no competent reporting in the media and lack of support, lack of political will provided by political parties.

The upcoming Presidency of the Slovak Republic in the EU Council in 2016 presents an important context for the implementation of the principle of equal treatment, including question of women in political decision-making. It is also an opportunity for the country to participate in shaping and implementing EU policies in this area ! The Slovak presidency will have an opportunity for introducing activities aimed and highlighting gender equality in all areas!

4. Conclusions and recommendations at national and European level

Gender inequalities in the political decision as well as in other areas are caused by a number of factors. Among the most prominent ones are the traditional division of gender roles, low awareness of one's rights and gender based inequalities, the absence of affirmative action.

Elimination of gender inequalities requires a comprehensive approach, one that takes many aspects into account. Existing changes in legislation and policies facilitated the creation of necessary conditions for implementation of systematic measures at the institutional level.

Promoting gender equality in political decision-making in Slovakia:

- improvement of the knowledge base on the impact of the gender dimension to the representation of women
- provide information and identify barriers and good practices in terms of decision-making positions
- the creation of tools to enhance gender equality in decision-making
- exchange of experiences and good practices and to support networking of key stakeholders on European level

- raising awareness and encouraging women to expand their political careers and become leading female candidates for the positions
- analysing the good practices in this field on European level
- creating methodological guide for women how to implement measures for balanced participation women and men in political life.

Research topics should be focus on the following areas:

- glass ceiling that hinders career women-its mechanism and identification of obstacles for women
- difficulties in reconciling work, private and family life
- stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination against women in the process building of a career in political positions
- the necessary supporting mechanisms and measures that would welcome women to overcome obstacles respectively glass ceiling