

Is Quota a Solution for Political Empowerment of Women? Some Reflections Regarding the European Union States and Romania?

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Abstract

Falling of communism in Eastern European countries brought in to the front stage the issue of transition to democracy, of the nature and model of democracy and equality for all. Romania had the same will of building a democracy inspired from the western typology and with an electoral system based on proportional representative, but with no special provisions or stimulants for women.

This paper aims at analyzing the involving of women in politics, by studying, in a comparative approach, the legislation from Romania and the other members of the European Union, which succeeded the political empowerment of women, by introducing the "quota". In Romania, it's still in debate the change of electoral system, taking in to account a possible solution as "quota", so more women in parliament. We use the quantitative analyses and the qualitative indicators in a comparative mode from the official documents and data basis from the legislatives of the European member states, European law, and OECD.

We expect that the conclusions of this study to show us that "quota" is a constructive solution, especially for young democracy in transition such as Romania, which is still tribute to the old patriarchal culture and biases regarding the gender equality.

Keywords: Women; Quota; Political empowerment; Parliamentary elites

Introduction

The paper will try to introduce, in the first part, some theoretical concepts and definitions on the gender issues, generally, and the gender quota, specially, because, in spite of a very rich and diverse literature from all over the world in this field, mainly after the fall of communism in the Central and Easter Europe and in Romania, still there is a lot of unknown information and research, and often, persists a lot of confusion among both the promoters and the opponents of these items and the special measures of women political empowerment.

Romania, as a very new member state of the European Union, since 2007, inherited a strong antifeminist culture, in comparison with the European Union as a whole. In the first European Parliament, at the first direct European elections, in 1979, there were elected, by direct, equal and secret vote almost 17%. Simone Veil, a woman known for his efforts to legalize abortion, in1975, was the first president of this institution.

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As some author argues, citing a rich bibliography, studies focusing on representation levels of women in Western and non-Western states show fairly inconsistent results. Differences are explained by a set of factors including institutional variables such as the electoral system type, the district magnitude, and quotas, socio-economic factors (e.g., the GDP per capita, the percentage of women in the workforce, the year women gained the right to vote) and cultural indicators like religion [1].

In the second part of the paper we will present some relevant

information for a recent research, being an ongoing work, and finally we analyze the comparison situation of Romania and member states from European Union taking into account the different type of electoral systems (at national and European level) all these in correlation of fact that Romania is still in transition to democracy, is still shaping the democratic institutions, as many studies show, being a half-consolidated democracy [2].

Assumptions, Data and Results

We state that, primarily, the political culture in Romania is still a barrier in political promotion and empowerment of women, secondly, in Romania, women's representation will be higher under a more proportional electoral system than under a uninominal electoral one.

Thirdly, the analysis of Romanian deputies' perceptions on the possibility of introducing of *mandatory gender quotas*, shows that it could be accepted but only as a provisional measure. These queries are the novelties of this paper, being presented for a periods of 26 years of Romanian democratic transition and almost 10 years since its accession to European Union and now in the process of European integration.

The Political Culture in Romania is still a Barrier in Political Promotion and Empowerment of Women

We maintain and agree with the Hill's definition given by Stockemer

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that political culture may be described as the embodiment of the attitudes and values of a society, which define the roles an individual, may play in the political process [1].

In this respect, we discovered that the representative social role in the Romanian society is strongly related to women's perception in the public sphere as a family character rather than a political one that why the ideological positions related to the gender equality between men and women, gender social representation maintains a "masculine" definition of the Romanian political sphere in post communism. Before the fall of the Iron Curtain, the Marxist-Leninist-oriented governments of the Eastern European countries had high female representation in the national parliaments. Indeed, the right to vote for women and take part at the political life in the unique party in Romania was introduced by the Communist Constitution and, for example, in the late 1980s, on average 33% of the national deputies were women. Unfortunately, requests for equality and quota systems that gave women considerable numerical representation were strictly for symbolic purposes. An eloquent example in this respect is the model of Elena Ceausescu, the wife of the former communist dictator till 1989. Much more, on this historical background, in the new regime of building democracy, the gender quotas are rejected in the name of traditions that respect the Christian values and the "natural" differences between men and women.

Women's Representation will be Higher under a More Proportional Electoral System than under a Uninominal Electoral One

After the fall of communism, in Romania was introduced as an electoral system the Proportional representation (PR) and after 2008 it was changed with so called "uninominal" system (more exactly "the system of "uninominal" vote in a single constituency and PR) [3].

In 2008, after accession to EU, in Romania, the institutional changing of the electoral system was necessary in order to change the structure of the parliamentary élites perceived as a way of improving the quality of political elites and promotion of more women. A diachronic analysis of the results in the post-communist legislatures regarding the presence of women in the parliament indicates us the data presented in table below. As we can see, in the first three legislatures after the 90s there was a low representation of women and there appeared "a ceiling" around an average of 10% (Table 1) [4].

As the documents of European Commission explain, the "glass ceiling" describes the phenomenon whereby women can progress in their careers only to a certain point, without reaching higher positions. Social structures, prejudices and stereotypes are part of those invisible barriers. The invisibility of the "ceiling" makes it difficult to fully understand the impact it has on the career prospects of individual women leaders and women in general. The structural and consistent

under representation of women in positions of power across societies emphasizes the presence and effectiveness of these barriers [3].

As we can see in the November election it will be used, again the Proportional Representation (PR) because de political decision takers consider that it's more democratic, according to Constitution, Romania is a "representative democracy" and they predict a higher presence and success of women, by RP the citizens are voting the list not the person, and the party's leaders will offer more eligible seats to women. Actually that was one of the main reasons for the rejection of the legislative initiative proposed in 2015 by some women - deputies.

An important remark is that, on the one hand, Romania does not have a uninominal majority voting system but a hybrid, unique in the world, between a system of majority voting and proportional one, and on the other hand because, as can be seen in more countries with majority voting system, this system is not incompatible with measures such as quotas or affirmative reserved seats.

The Analysis of Romanian deputies' Perceptions on the Possibility of Introducing of Mandatory Gender Quotas

Candidate gender quotas have, in fact, taken on a variety of different forms across countries in every major region worldwide [5]. Candidate gender quotas, thus, have now been adopted by numerous political parties and national legislatures around the world.

As Krook wrote, the most common reforms, from a global perspective, have been provisions for the increased representation of women [6]. By one account, at least 103 countries today have experienced the proposal, the adoption, or the repeal of candidate gender quotas to increase the number of women in parliament, with the majority of these quotas being proposed after 1995 (Global Database of Quotas for Women). And as many studies show, the party quotas are the most common type of gender quota and in Romania the preferred solution is this.

In a recent study, in this field, named "Study on women empowerment in politics" [7], an important dimension of inquiry was focused on the analysis of the deputies' perception on the introduction of the mandatory gender quotas in the Romanian legislation. In this regard, empirical evidence from the pilot stage of the study reveals that, on this level of analysis, 58% of the interviewees (80% men of the total percentage) do not perceive the gender quotas as a useful political measure for enhancing women empowerment in the Romanian politics.

The most common arguments emphasized by our respondents, and that lie behind the lack of support for the mandatory gender quotas in the Romanian legislation are: (1) 'the fact that women are good enough in their professions and therefore, they should advocate for equal rights of representation'; (2) 'the women that want to join politics should be extremely well prepared so that nobody will contest their

Legislature	Mandate won by women (%)	The type of electoral system
1990-1992	4.9	PR
1992-1996	3.7	PR
1996-2000	4.7	PR
2000-2004	10.8	PR
2004-2008	10.2	PR
2008-2012	9.8	The system of "uninominal" vote (single constituency) and PR
2012-2016	11	The system of "uninominal" vote (single constituency) and PR
2016-2020	?	Proportional representation PR

PR: Proportional Representation.

Table 1: Legislations after 1990s.

leader skills, and promote them solely based on their competencies and not based on positive discrimination measures'; (3) 'the gender quotas could be another way of women promotion in politics based on subjective and nepotistic criteria, rather than on objective ones, such as professional experience and competence'; (4) 'the gender quotas in politics are perceived as an antagonistic measure between the gender due to the Romanians retrograde mentality when it comes to women empowerment in politics.'

An important observation on the above dimension of inquiry on the deputies' perception on the introduction of the mandatory gender quotas in the Romanian legislation is that even the other 42% of the interviewees (90% women of the total percentage) that were in the favour of the introduction of mandatory gender quotas in the Romanian legislation is that this strategy of promotion should be a provisional measure of both women promotion and empowerment in politics, only until a change in the patriarchal Romanian social, cultural and political system will be achieved.

The Representation of Women in the European Parliament

For the former communist countries the accession to EU and NATO was a goal and a guarantee of building a democratic regime with democratic institutions. The new Treaty of EU, the Treaty of Lisbon, puts the democratic and the European governance system on the double legitimacies, intergovernmental and civic [8].

An actor with a meaningful role becomes the European Parliament (EP), an institution with a democratic character, whose spectacular evolution meant also the evolution and the strengthening of the democratic process of EU from an elitist democracy to a representative democracy and today to a participatory democracy. According to the official data from EU website, is observed at European level, a decrease in participation rate from 61.99 in 1979 - the first elections - to 43.01% in 2014 - the last election - so, a significant increase in absenteeism. This low level of participation in European elections can be explained by the perception of limited powers of the European Parliament and the low knowledge of European political parties.

In this legislature of EP, 2014-2019, only 35.8% of MEPs are women, although women represent 52% of society at European level. In all 28 countries, the European elections are conducted under PR and it was a constant increasing trend from the 16.6% in 1979. However, actions aimed at gender equality in political processes, in particular, in the European Parliament elections were not sufficiently strong, equal representation of women and men remain dependent on national electoral laws. Now, there is no mandatory provisions regarding equal participation of women and men in decision making bodies of the EU, in spite of existing policy, reflected in strategic documents such as the European Pact for Gender Equality (2011-2020), Women's Charter adopted in 2010 by the European Commission, European Parliament resolution on women in positions of decision (March 2, 2000), which supports the use of quotas transition as a measure to bring more women into making decisions and strategy for equality between women and men (2010-2015), where equality in decision-making is one of the five main areas of intervention.

Thus, it acknowledges that "women are underrepresented in decision-making processes, both in national parliaments and governments and the boards of large companies" [9].

But Romania has a good position starting in the 2004-2009 legislation from 29% and today reaching at 36%.

With a percentage of 35.8 % women elected in the 7th term of the Parliament is almost double the average of women elected to national parliaments worldwide, which is currently 21.8 %, at the international level (IPU).

Conclusion

Many European and international forums have signaled that women are better represented by proportional voting systems on closed lists, and these are the finding of most studies addressing the relationship between electoral and political representation of women. And last but not least, is to note that, for instance, the Nordic countries have never adopted gender quotas at the legislative level, but only at parties.

The majority voting system is a system that disadvantages women because, without a quota system, there is less chance that they are nominated by parties in local battles. Women are already fewer at the top of the parties and are newer to politics than men. For uninominal constituencies, parties tend to nominate candidates well-known and authoritative, negatively affecting women's opportunities. So more these aspects should be considered for introduction measures in legislation that obliges all parties to have a balanced representation of women and men among the candidates.

In Romania, the European experience and tradition is a source of inspiration, and perhaps the return to the proportional representation system (RP) will be an opportunity for a better accession of women in politics and in position of power but the results of the study strengthen the idea that it need to pass time in order to change the patriarchal perceptions of the political leaders who decide the destiny of a country and in the top are still the men, therefore, we are talking about a male-dominated society.

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