



No Modern European Democracy Without Gender Equality

European Women's Lobby 50/50 Campaign

FACT SHEET 2:

MEASURES TO ADVANCE WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING

Provisions at the International and European level

At the international level, the equal participation of women and men in decision is seen as a fundamental basis of democracy and social justice and has been strongly promoted. Gender balance in politics is one of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and is referred to in articles 7 and 8 of the legally binding Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

The Council of Europe has done some interesting work on women in decision-making and parity democracy. A Recommendation on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making was adopted in 2003¹. The recommendation on gender equality standards and mechanisms adopted in November 2007² lists elements which can be used to evaluate whether governments are committed in achieving equal participation of women and men. These are not binding pieces of legislation.

At the European Union level, there is no binding provision for the realisation of equality between women and men in political decision-making. However, the EU institutions have adopted non-binding texts relative to gender equality in decision-making for example recently:

- The European Pact for Gender Equality approved by the European Council of March 2006 urges the EU

and the member states to promote women's empowerment in political life

- The European Commission Roadmap for Gender Equality 2006-2010 states that "women's under-representation in civil society, business and politics is a democratic deficit"
- The European Parliament resolution on women in decision-making of 2 March 2000, endorses the use of transitional quotas as a measure to bring more women into decision-making.

National commitments to advance women in decision making

The great majority of the European Union Member states which have a written constitution include either a non-discrimination provision which includes discrimination on the grounds of sex, or specific provision on gender equality. This applies to 19 Member States. Seven Member States have a provision providing for active measures by the State to promote equality of women and men, and five countries have a clause to specifically introduce positive measures for promotion of women in decision making.³

Many countries have also introduced measures to reach equal representation of women and men in their electoral laws. The Quota Project database provides information on the various types of quotas in existence today, detailing the percentages and targets in countries worldwide.

Provision in constitution	EU Member States	Accession countries
Equality between sexes as part of general provision on equality or non-discrimination	Austria (art 7.1), Bulgaria (art. 6.2), Cyprus (art. 28), Estonia (art. 12), Finland (6.2), Italy (art.3.1); Lithuania (29.2), Portugal (13.2), Romania (art. 4.2), Slovakia (art. 12), Slovenia (art. 14) Spain (art. 14)	Croatia (art.14); Macedonia (art. 9)
Specific gender equality provision	Belgium (art. 10), Germany (art. 3.2), Greece (art. 4.2), Hungary (art. 66.1), Malta (section 14), Poland (art. 33), Sweden (art. 2.3 & 16)	Turkey (art. 10.2)
Clause on active measures by the State / positive actions for the promotion of equality	Finland (6.4), Germany (3.2), Greece (116.2); Hungary (70.A.3), Malta (section 14, section 45.11), Spain (art 9.2), Sweden (Chapter 1 art 2.3)	Turkey (art.10.2)
Clause on measures to promote parity / gender equality in politics	Belgium (art. 11bis), France (art. 3 & 4), Italy (art. 51 & 117.7), Portugal (art. 109), Slovenia (art. 43.4)	

General measures to increase the representation of women in politics

Increasing women's representation in political decision-making is linked to promoting better policies for the reconciliation of work and private life for both women and men and encouraging men to do more unpaid care work at home. Women still carry a disproportionate share of domestic and care work, and many may prefer not to run for an office considering that being an MP for example might turn the double work burden to a triple one. The working schedules in most elected assemblies are a proof of the assumption that those who participate in politics do not have family responsibilities, which is an obvious disadvantage for women. It would be therefore also important to change the internal rules of the parliamentary assemblies in order to make the schedules friendlier for those with caring responsibilities.

Women as a group also have fewer financial and other resources and women candidates have to campaign with much less financing

and media coverage. The political parties can help to break some of these socio-economic obstacles by actively supporting and encouraging women aspirants and candidates, giving them financial resources, training, and equal access to media and political networks.

Introduction of parity legislation or quotas

The most common way to implement the commitments to parity in practice has been the introduction of electoral quotas for women. These may be constitutional, legislative or a take the form of a voluntary political party quota. They may apply to the number of women candidates proposed by a party for election (nomination), or may take the form of reserved seats in the legislature (results-based quota).

Five European countries have stipulations in the electoral law or in the constitution which impose quotas on political parties in order to increase women's representation or to attain parity democracy: France, Belgium, Portugal, Spain and Slovenia. In addition

Italy has passed a law which introduces a provisory quota system for European Parliament elections⁴.

In most EU Member States some political parties have adopted voluntary party quotas⁵. However, while a system of non-legally binding quotas has proved effective in some political parties and in some countries, their partial success makes it all the more necessary that the EU member states would prove their commitment to combat inequalities between women and men through introducing binding legislation. Only legally binding quotas can be efficiently enforced and ensure continuity.

Reforms of the electoral system can have a significant effect on women's representation. Proportional representation systems are more favourable for women as well as for other discriminated social groups than plurality/majority systems. Also the size of the political parties and the size of the electoral districts have an impact on women's access to elected assemblies. The bigger the parties and the bigger the electoral districts, the more women are generally elected. Open lists are more favourable for women, but closed lists are better for the efficient introduction of rank order quotas (zipper system).⁶

How to recognize effective quota/parity provisions?

The success of a quota system depends first of all on the combination of the electoral system and the type of quota. Result-based quotas work in all electoral systems, but quotas applied in the nomination process are most likely to have a positive outcome in proportional representation systems. Also the size of the electoral district, the size of the party, the general attitude of the voters towards women, and the ballot structure

(whether the party or the voters decide the order of the elected candidates within the party) have impact on the representation of women.⁷ International IDEA has put together a useful country table on best-fit quota systems according to the national electoral system⁸.

Secondly; whether a quota/parity system reaches its objective depends largely on implementation, monitoring and effective sanctions. Constitutional amendments and electoral laws providing gender quotas may not be more efficient than voluntary political party quotas in increasing the number of women in parliament, if there are no sanctions for non-compliance. For example, the French election law only imposes a financial penalty in national assembly elections: the public funding that a party receives from the state will be reduced as soon as the deviation from parity reaches 2% among electoral candidates. On the other hand, at the municipal and European level, the parity system has had better results, as lists which do not comply with the parity requirements cannot be registered.⁹

If the quota or parity provision is imposed voluntarily by the political party, no sanctions will apply. In these cases it is of importance that there is high level political will within the party to reach the goal and that active policies to increase women's representation are implemented and the results monitored.

Crucial for the effectiveness of both legislative and voluntary quotas and parity provisions in countries which use closed lists is the introduction of rules concerning the rank order on the candidate list. A requirement of 50 percent women on the lists may not result in any women elected, if all women candidates are placed at the bottom of the list. The women nominated as candidates should be placed in positions

with a real chance to get elected, using the zipper system (one woman/one man).

Other measures to reach parity

Quotas and other above mentioned measures to increase women's participation may leave the elected women relatively powerless unless other factors are changed. Indeed, such measures may increase women's political presence in quantitative

terms, but other measures are needed to ensure that women have a voice and that they are considered as representatives of equal status than their male colleagues within the parties as well as within the elected assemblies. As standards and ways of working of political parties and elected assemblies have been organised around the male model, they need to be changed – this is something that can be achieved only by increasing women's presence.

¹ [REC \(2003\) 3](#)

² [CM/Rec \(2007\) 17](#)

³ The information is derived from the International Constitutional Law website <http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/>

⁴⁴ See Global Database for Quotas for Women with information on voluntary party quotas in each country. www.quotaproject.org

⁵ See Global Database for Quotas for Women with information on voluntary party quotas in each country. www.quotaproject.org

⁶ Matland, Richard E. 2005: "Enhancing women's participation: Legislative Recruitment and Electoral Systems". In *Women in Parliaments: Beyond Numbers. A revised edition*. International IDEA.

⁷ Stina Larren & Rita Taphorn 2007: Designing for Equality. Best-fit, medium fit and non-favourable combinations of electoral systems and gender quotas. International Institute for Democracy and electoral assistance, p.27

⁸ www.idea.int/publications/designing_for_equality/dyntable.cfm

⁹ Global Database of Quotas for Women, www.quotaproject.org