



No Modern European Democracy Without Gender Equality

## **EWL Lobbying Kit**

### **No Modern European Democracy without Gender Equality**

In **June 2009** the election of the European Parliament as well as the renewal of the European Commission will take place, and soon important nominations should be made for top jobs at European level.

**Women are still seriously under-represented** in decision-making in all European countries and in European Union institutions.

**Action is needed to achieve a real democracy** through implementing parity democracy, the equal representation of women and men in decision-making.

**Europe is you!** Important decisions are made at European level, which affects your everyday life. Women need to be equally represented when such decisions are made.

This Lobbying Kit will give you accessible **tools and arguments** to have more women in decision-making and make sure that women's views are represented in European debates and policies.

**Act now:**  
**Join the European Women's Lobby Campaign:**  
**[www.5050democracy.eu](http://www.5050democracy.eu)**

Original: English  
July 2008

EWL- LEF, 18 rue Hydraulique, B-1210 Bruxelles  
Tel. +32 2 217 90 20 – Fax: +32 2 219 84 51 - e-mail: [ewl@womenlobby.org](mailto:ewl@womenlobby.org)  
Website: <http://www.womenlobby.org>

# Table of Contents

## Introduction

### **I. Action Kit**

1. Europe is YOU.
2. Take Action to Advance Parity Democracy in Europe.
3. Model Lobbying Letters.
4. EWL Campaign: No Modern European Democracy without Parity

### **II. Arguments and information about parity democracy and women in decision-making**

1. What is Parity Democracy
2. Suggested Answers to arguments against Parity Democracy
3. Women in Political Decision Making in Europe in Numbers
4. Existing Provisions and Measures
5. Proposed Measures to Improve the Situation

## Introduction

In 2009, European voters will elect the new European Parliament (EP) and the new European Commission (EC) will be nominated. If Lisbon Treaty enters into force, the European Council will also nominate for the first time the European High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the President of the European Council<sup>1</sup>. This presents a real opportunity to reach parity democracy, the equal representation of women and men, within the European Union Institutions.

**At the moment, there is no binding provision to promote the equal participation of women in men in any of the EU decision-making bodies.** The European Women's Lobby (EWL) has been lobbying for many years for the introduction of such measures for all European institutions, including in the election procedure of the European Parliament and in the nomination process of the European Commission. As always, the **EWL is very much committed to act together with its member organisations throughout Europe to improve the situation for the 2009 European elections and nominations.** The aim of the EWL is to ensure that European women participate on an equal footing as men in the making of all decisions which affect their lives and in shaping the future of Europe.

This **Lobbying Kit** comprises of two sections. In the first section, you will find an Action Kit, which includes all the steps that you can take with us to make our voice stronger. The second section provides in-depth information and clarifies certain myths in relation to parity democracy and quotas. The Kit aims at helping women's non-governmental organisations and other interested actors to put pressure on political parties and decision-makers to introduce measures to advance parity in view of the EP elections and the nominations to be made for EU top jobs in 2009.

**Join our Action NOW!**  
**[www.5050democracy.eu](http://www.5050democracy.eu)**

---

<sup>1</sup> After the Irish "No" for the Lisbon Treaty on 12 June 2008 it is now unclear if and when the nominations for the top posts foreseen in the Treaty (the European High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the President of the European Council). The nominations were previously foreseen for the December 2008.

**Visit: [www.5050democracy.eu](http://www.5050democracy.eu)**

## I. Action Kit

### 1. Europe is YOU

The decisions made at the European Union (EU) level directly affect the everyday lives of all women and men living in European Union countries. Although the EU is often seen as an institution concerned mainly about finances and trade, EU is also an important actor in many other policy fields which are of immense importance for Europeans and people around the world, such as combating climate change, eradicating poverty worldwide, combating discrimination (sex, race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age and disability) and establishing a “social Europe”.

**The EU has the power to improve the lives of millions of people but this requires the active involvement of all women and men through and active involvement with politics at European level and the participation in the European elections. The European Union is not an abstract entity, it is made of people that make decisions and whose election or nomination can be influenced by European citizens.**

The EU has the competence of making legislation that binds Member States in many different policy fields. Laws are initiated by the European Commission, and amended and approved in general by a joint decision of the European Parliament and national ministers who work on the policy field in question. They are then implemented at the national level, which is why it is important to be informed about and involved as much as possible in European policy-making.

Regarding equality between women and men, there have been European commitments in this area since the initial stages of the formation of the EU in 1957. In fact, most national legislation on equality between women and men in employment actually comes from the European level. More recently, the EU has for example set targets for women’s employment and childcare services to be reached by 2010. **The realization of equality between women and men is an official goal of the EU.** While we know that this goal is still far from being attained in most Member States, European women need to use the EU and the commitments that have been made in order to ensure real action to fight violence against women or trafficking in women, to achieve equal pay for equal work or for the EU to play a stronger role in defence of women’s human rights in the world.

**Europe is you because your participation in the European elections and your action with decision-makers speaking up for more justice and democracy and working for the equal representation of women and men can help implementing policies at EU level that will improve the lives of millions of women and men in Europe and worldwide.**

**Visit: [www.5050democracy.eu](http://www.5050democracy.eu)**

## 2. Take action to advance parity democracy in Europe

### European Parliament Elections:

Women's representation within the **European Parliament** has been increasing steadily until the elections of the year 2004, in which the number of women remained at around 30% (level reached in the 1999 elections)<sup>2</sup>. The number of women elected reflects with the number and ranking<sup>3</sup> of women on lists of candidates. Decisions on the composition of the candidate lists for the European Parliament elections are made at national level within each political party.

**Action needed:** Put pressure right now on all national political parties to recognise their responsibility in shaping the political landscape and to ensure the equal representation and ranking of women and men on their electoral lists and to include gender equality as a priority in their programmes.

### Nomination of the European Commission:

Currently nine of the 27 **European Commissioners** are women (33%). Commissioners are proposed by national governments and then nominated by the designated president of the European Commission (EC). Governments therefore have an individual and collective responsibility in ensuring the equal representation of women and men in the European Commission.

**Action needed:** Ask national governments to propose a woman commissioner and support the parity system proposed by the EWL, whereby each Member State would propose a woman and a man as nominate commissioners and the President of the EC would choose among them with a view to achieve a gender balance.

### EU Top Jobs:

If the Lisbon Treaty enters into force, the **European High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the President of the European Council** will be nominated for the first time.

**Action needed:** Ask national governments to make sure that women are equally represented at the highest level of European decision-making when nominations are made.

---

<sup>2</sup> With considerable differences between Member States, see table 1 p.14

<sup>3</sup> This is the case in particular in proportional representation systems with closed lists, in which the voters vote for the party, which decides the order of the candidates.

## Join the European Women's Lobby Action:

What	When to act	Who to target	How
European elections June 2009	Summer 2008-June 2009	Political parties at national level; voters	Approach national political parties and ask them to ensure that 50% women are included in their lists (zipper system) at winnable places and ask them to prioritise gender equality issues in their programmes. You can use the enclosed model lobbying letter A; Disseminate information and encourage women to vote for parties that support gender equality.
Renewal of the European Commission: Nomination of the President of the Commission in June 2009, nomination of commissioner candidates in July 2009	Autumn 2008- Spring 2009	Heads of Governments; Members of the European Parliament	Approach national governments and ask them to propose a woman as commissioner and to ensure an equal representation of women and men in the EC. You can use the enclosed model lobbying letter B. Ask the MEPs to take gender balance into consideration, when the new Commission is approved by the EP.
Nominations to be made for the European High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the President of the European Council	2009 depending on the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty	Heads of Governments of all EU member states	Lobby governments so that they nominate women to these posts. You can use the enclosed model lobbying letter C.
Introduction of a parity system in the election procedure of the European Parliament	Ongoing – also the new EP	Members of the European Parliament	Lobby the MEPs to initiate a Resolution on the revision of the EP electoral procedure which would incorporate a parity system.
Introduction of a parity system for the nomination of the European Commission.	Ongoing	Heads of Governments, national parliaments	Lobby national governments and parliaments to suggest a parity system for the nomination of the European Commission. See the enclosed model lobbying letter B.

**Visit: [www.5050democracy.eu](http://www.5050democracy.eu)**

**The EWL will further pursue its efforts after the 2009 elections and nominations.**

**The EWL and its members will work with the new European Parliament and the new European Commission in order to raise awareness on parity democracy among the MEPs and European Commissioners and to lobby for the introduction of binding parity mechanisms in the European legislation.**

**Regarding the EP election procedure, the EWL suggests a provision which guarantees the equal representation and ranking of women and men on the candidate lists in the framework of a uniform electoral procedure for the European Parliament. If the uniform electoral procedure is not put in place, each European country should include binding parity provision in their electoral systems.**

**For the nomination of the Commission the EWL has proposed a parity system whereby each Member State would propose a woman and a man as nominate commissioners in 2009 and the designated President would choose members of the Commission among the persons proposed with a view to achieve a gender balance.**

### 3. Model lobbying letters

#### A. Model lobbying letter to be sent to national political parties in view of the European elections 2009

*Date*

To: \_\_\_\_\_, Head of (*name of political party*) \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Madam, Sir

#### **RE: Candidates' lists for the 2009 European elections and women's representation**

I am joining the campaign initiated by the European Women's Lobby (EWL)<sup>4</sup> to urge you to ensure that candidates' lists for the 2009 European elections and consequently elected members fully reflect the fact that women make up more than 50% of the European population.

Achieving the equal representation of men and women in political decision-making positions is an indispensable step in the realisation of true democracy. The current under-representation of women in most elected assemblies in Europe, including in the European Parliament is a serious democratic deficit threatening the legitimacy of European institutions and political parties. If the Lisbon Treaty enters into force, it will increase the powers of the European Parliament (EP). It is more important than ever that the decisions of the EP take into account the needs, interests and perspectives of all the women and men who are affected by European policies.

Political parties play an essential role in the selection of candidates for all elections, as the number of women elected in EP will reflect the number and placing of women on the lists of candidates. Choices made by political parties therefore have an enormous impact on the results of the elections in relation to achieving greater representativeness, justice and equality.

The European Union will also need a stronger presence of women in order to improve its policy making and to be able to fulfil its promises regarding gender equality. Therefore the EWL commits to mobilising European voters to give their votes to women candidates and to political parties who commit themselves to putting gender equality on the top of the EU agenda.

---

<sup>4</sup> The European Women's Lobby is the largest coalition of women's organisations in the EU present in 28 Member States and accession countries, representing over 2000 direct member organisation See: [www.womenlobby.org](http://www.womenlobby.org)

**As the head of your political party you therefore have the possibility, but also the responsibility to contribute to the legitimacy of European democracy and we** *(name of the organization)* calls upon the *(name of the party)* to introduce immediately measures to ensure women's equal presence on the lists for the European elections 2009, on the basis of the zip system (1 woman/1man) and to prioritise gender equality issues in your programme.

I am confident that you will do your utmost to ensure an equal representation of women and men in the next European Parliament.

Sincerely,

*Signature*

## **B. Model lobbying letter to be sent to EU governments in view of the nomination of European Commissioners in 2009**

*Date*

**To: Heads of State and governments of EU Member States**

Dear Madam, Sir,

**Re: Equal representation of women and men in the new European Commission 2009-2014**

I am writing to you in support of the European Women's Lobby<sup>5</sup> campaign to ensure an equal representation of women and men in the composition of the European Commission in 2009.

Despite many commitments to achieving gender equality in political decision-making at all levels, women are still under-represented in decision-making within the European institutions. If the European Union is to be accepted by all citizens, women and men, the process of ensuring the equal representation of both sexes among commissioners has to be given immediate and serious consideration.

I am aware that the final number of women in the new Commission will be the result of many negotiations and decisions at different levels and we therefore believe that **each government individually and the EU Member States collectively have a responsibility to ensure the equal representation of women and men in the EU executive body.**

I also believe that the current unequal representation of women within European institutions clearly indicates the need for institutional mechanisms that will ensure gender parity within all European decision-making bodies. In this respect, the European Women's Lobby recommends a nomination system whereby each Member State would propose a woman and a man as nominate commissioners in 2009 and the President would choose among them with a view to achieve a gender balance. We hope that you will support this idea when discussing European issues at the highest level.

Finally, I would like to add that the nomination of a woman as the President of the European Commission in 2009 would be a very welcome and powerful political symbol.

I am confident that you will do your utmost to ensure an equal representation of women and men in the next European Commission.

Sincerely,

*Signature*

---

<sup>5</sup> The European Women's Lobby is the largest coalition of women's organisations in the EU present in 28 Member States and accession countries, representing over 2000 direct member organisations. See: [www.womenlobby.org](http://www.womenlobby.org)

**C. Model lobbying letter to be sent to EU governments in view of the nomination of the European High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and of the President of the Council of Minister**

*Date*

**To: Heads of State and governments of EU Member States**

**Re: Representation of women among the highest European decision-makers**

I am writing to you in support of the European Women's Lobby<sup>6</sup> campaign to ensure an equal representation of women and men in decision-making among the highest European decision-makers.

*(Month/Year)* the European Council will for the first time nominate the European High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the President of the European Council. This presents a unique opportunity for the European Union to become more democratic by **ensuring the equal representation of women and men at the highest level of European decision-making when the nominations are made.**

I am aware that the nomination process will be subject to discussions and negotiations among governments' representatives. However, I would like to stress that it is the common responsibility of European governments to ensure that the final decisions reflect the fact that women represent half of the European population and that European policies at the highest level need to reflect the needs and aspirations of *all* Europeans.

In order to gain in legitimacy, European institutions and decision-makers need to mirror the diversity of the population and I therefore hope that you will, in your nomination, make sure that the new face of the European Union will reflect the European values of justice and equality.

I am confident that you will do your utmost to ensure the equal representation of women and men in the important nominations to be made.

Sincerely,

*Signature*

---

<sup>6</sup> The European Women's Lobby is the largest coalition of women's organisations in the EU present in 28 Member States and accession countries, representing over 2000 member organisations. See: [www.womenlobby.org](http://www.womenlobby.org)

#### 4. EWL Campaign: No Modern European Democracy Without Parity

The EWL is seizing the opportunity of the events taking place in 2008-2009 to launch a Campaign for the promotion of parity democracy in Europe. The key message of the EWL Campaign is that the equal representation of women and men in European decision-making should be at the heart of the ongoing debates about improving the democratic legitimacy of the EU: there can be no modern European democracy without parity.

The EWL Campaign on parity democracy will be launched in autumn 2008 through a press conference organised together with the European Commission Vice-President Wallström and gathering high ranking, cross party decision makers. This event will launch a website, to be used for the dissemination of information material and for gathering public support from high level personalities from all walks of life and countries for the EWL Call for Action on Parity Democracy. The Call for Action is a tool for decision-makers at European and national level to commit to concretely act for parity democracy.

#### European Women's Lobby 50/50 Campaign: No Modern European Democracy without Gender Equality

In 2009, Europeans will elect a new European Parliament. We will see a new European Commission led by its President, and a new president for the European Parliament. How many of the new Members of the European Parliament will be women, and will both of the top EU leaders wear a suit and tie?

Next year's scenario presents an excellent opportunity for the European Union to become more democratic. **A modern democracy requires gender equality; the equal representation of women and men in the making of decisions that affect their lives.**

Women represent more than half of the population of the EU. The current under-representation of women in decision-making at all levels in the EU institutions is a serious obstacle to the democratic legitimacy of the European Union. This inequality also undermines all attempts to promote a more inclusive and participatory democracy.

It is time for concrete action!

Establishing a just democracy in Europe must necessarily include the representation of all Europeans, both women and men.

Gender equality is a condition for modernising our political systems, so that women and men in their diversity equally share rights, responsibilities, and power. Gender equality should be at the heart of European initiatives to engage citizens in decision-making, to

**Visit: [www.5050democracy.eu](http://www.5050democracy.eu)**

increase the legitimacy of the European Union, and to progress towards policies that reflect the needs and aspirations of all Europeans.

**We call for all decision-makers, individuals and organisations interested in the promotion of democracy and justice to support this Campaign at all levels and across the boundaries of countries and political parties.**

**We call for immediate and long-term measures to ensure gender equality at both European and national levels to improve the functioning and quality of our political systems.**

**We therefore call upon:**

- **All European and national political parties** to act immediately to ensure the realisation of gender equality in their nomination procedure ahead of the election of the European Parliament in June 2009 – for example through their electoral lists and in the drafting of their programmes .
- **Women and men in Europe** to seize the current opportunity to speak up and cast their vote in 2009 with a view to advancing democracy, gender equality and justice.
- **The EU Member States** to fulfil their commitments to democracy and gender equality by ensuring the equal representation of women among the top jobs at EU level to be appointed in 2009.

**Civil society organisations and trade unions in Europe** to actively support this call within their networks by including a reference to gender equality in their manifestos for the European elections and in their contact with decision-makers.

## II. Arguments and information about parity democracy and women in decision-making

### 1. What is parity democracy?

**Parity democracy is a concept aiming at:**

- Acknowledging the equal dignity and value of persons of both sexes;
- Making our political system more democratic and just;
- Renewing the social organization in such a way that women and men equally share rights, responsibilities and power.

Parity democracy implies the equal representation of women and men in decision-making positions. Both sexes should be represented whenever decisions are made that affect their lives. **Even if women have the same formal political rights as men, and if *some* individual women hold high political positions, women *as a group* are too often excluded from decision-making positions on the political stage.** It is mostly men who set the political priorities and decide on the spending on public money, and the political culture continues to be male dominated.

Women's presence in politics is a standard indicator of the democracy of a society<sup>7</sup>. If more than half of the population is persistently under-represented, the legitimacy and the functioning of the democratic system are put under question. Therefore parity democracy is a step towards a modern democracy. Introducing parity needs to be seen in the context of European initiatives and measures to promote inclusive and participatory democracy and to increase the democratic legitimacy of European institutions. The introduction of parity democracy at EU level would also be an important corollary to the institutional reforms, which will take place if the new Lisbon Treaty enters into force.

**Parity democracy is not just about numbers, but also about improving the quality of policies.** A 30% representation of women is considered as the critical mass needed in order for the women representatives to be able to change the political culture, bring new issues to the agenda, and to act efficiently for women's rights<sup>8</sup>.

---

<sup>7</sup> IDEA and Charter 88: *Handbook on Democracy Assessment*, Stockholm; IDEA 2002

<sup>8</sup> 30% threshold was suggested by the UN Commission on the Status of Women

## Why is Parity Democracy different from quotas

---

The EWL defines equal representation of women and men in political decision-making as a 50/50 representation of each sex in any decision-making body<sup>9</sup>. Although parity democracy implies setting a minimum for women's representation, it is conceptually different from quotas. Quotas can be seen as a temporary means used to protect the rights of a minority and ensure its participation in the decision-making. Quotas are temporary tools to fix a bias, but parity goes a step further, because it doesn't have a time limit and because:

- 1) Parity concerns the **equal representation and power-sharing between women and men, for which quotas are one possible means**. Parity transforms concepts such as citizenship, equality universality, making political systems more democratic.
- 2) Unlike quotas, the concept of **parity democracy does not treat women as a minority** group within the dominant framework. Women represent more than half of the citizens, so they can not be considered as a minority any more than men.
- 3) **Parity democracy implies removing structural and cultural impediments for women's entry into decision-making**, such as adapting the working conditions of elected representatives to the demands of modern life, dissolving gender stereotypes, and changing electoral systems which are less favourable to women.

## Arguments for parity democracy

---

Parity democracy can be defended on four different grounds: i) arguments based on equality and justice; ii) arguments based on democracy; iii) arguments based on the concrete benefits that women's increased participation would bring; and iv) arguments based on the idea of women's interests. Different arguments work in different political and cultural contexts, depending on how the issue of gender equality has been framed in political discussions in a given country.

- i) **The equal representation of women and men is a question of justice and equality between women and men**
  - The right to political participation is a fundamental human right for women and men and it needs to be concretely put into practice.
  - EU member states have committed themselves to equality between women and men many times at international, European and national level.
- ii) **The equal representation of women and men is an aspect of modern democracy**
  - Women's under-representation in politics is a serious democratic deficit and a threat to the legitimacy of our democratic system. Parliaments are not fully

---

<sup>9</sup> The European Parliament resolution of 2 March 2000, and the Council of Europe recommendation Rec (2003) 3 on the balanced participation of women and men in decision-making suggest a 40:60 gender balance either way.

inclusive of the opinions and perspectives of the population they represent unless women – more than half of the population – are equally represented.

- To develop policies which affect people's lives without their presence and without taking into account their opinion, perspectives and realities is not in line with modern idea of democracy.

### **iii) Gender balance improves policy making**

- The inclusion of both sexes in policy making leads to more adequate decisions and to an allocation of public resources that better fit the needs of a diverse citizenry, heightening in turn public satisfaction with policy delivery.
- Women equal participation may lead to the introduction of new or neglected issues to the political agenda. For example, because women have been the ones most affected by issues of reconciliation of work and private life, and have not been present enough in decision-making, reconciliation has long been seen as a private issue rather than a problem to be tackled by the society.
- Including women to the field of politics may result in a new political culture, which can lead to better government and better conflict resolution.

### **iv) Better representation of women's interests and perspectives**

- Women as a group have some common needs and interests related to i.e. sexual and reproductive rights or violence against women that do not concern men to the same extent.
- Women's and men's interests may conflict because of the gendered division of labour and uneven share of power.

Recent studies in countries where women's presence in political decision-making has increased show evidence, that women's equal representation in politics can lead to important changes in the political culture and in the content of the policies. Although more research is needed, numerous examples can be presented to support the argument that gender balance makes a difference<sup>10</sup>. However, even if women's equal representation in politics would not change anything, parity is needed in the name of equality, democracy and justice.

## **Benefits of parity democracy**

---

### **Benefits for the European Union**

- Remedying the democratic deficit, the under-presentation of women undermines the EU initiatives to bring the Union closer to women and men living in European societies and engage them in decision-making processes. It is also an obstacle to more adequate political decisions and a better allocation of the Union's resources.
- Gathering the support of European women for the European integration, as according to surveys, women are more euro-sceptic than men. This requires more women involved at EU level and addressing more issues that are perceived as important for them and for the improvement of society as a whole.

---

<sup>10</sup> Skeije 1993 on Norway, Squires and Wickham-Jones 2001 on Scotland, Stephenson 2001 Scotland.

### Benefits for political parties

- A renewal of people within the parties, widening the perspectives and bringing new competences in order for them to be more representative of the citizens they are meant to represent.
- A renewal of the legitimacy of the parties and more specifically, an increase of support from women for their policies and their actions, as women may give more support to political parties that take their preoccupations into account and that ensure their participation and representation.

### Benefits for European women

- Ensuring the visibility of women on the political field and thus contributing to the eradication of stereotypes and the realization of women's human rights
- Putting women's interests on the agenda of the European Union.

## 2. Suggested Answers to Arguments against Parity Democracy

### Does parity democracy violate democratic principles? – No!

Some reject parity in the name of democracy. Measures to introduce parity are said to violate the key democratic principles of equality and universality; of each woman and man having equal value and equal rights in front of law and in politics. In fact, this idea of universality of democracy is based on abstract individualism, and voters and representatives are seen as deprived from all social attributes such as gender, class and race. However, this universalistic view of citizenship is a historically specific idea, which emerged in the French revolution and was itself originally based on the exclusion of women. Universal citizenship is therefore a partial concept that under the guise of neutrality has served the purposes of dominant social groups.

This neglect of differences, which is still understood as the basis of democracy and enshrined in different ways in our political systems means that the voice of women is suppressed by a political world monopolised by men, and women's full access to their political rights is denied. **True equality presupposes acknowledging and accepting difference.** Women and men face different realities and consequently have different problems, needs and interests. To ignore these differences is to favour the current unequal relations of power and thus to perpetuate inequality.

To be universal, **democracy must apply equally to all women and men and to members of discriminated or excluded groups.** The critique of parity democracy in the name of universalism and equality reveals that these are still partial conceptions. Parity

democracy does not abandon universality of democracy – on the contrary, by exposing its limits, parity extends the frame of the universal and the scope of the democratic principle of equality. As such parity contributes to more justice and democratic progress.

### **Is parity democracy contrary to the principle of freedom? – No!**

In the name of freedom, some people criticize parity legislation on the pretext that it makes the State intervene unnecessarily in an area where free competition on the “best man (sic) wins” basis or voluntary self-regulation would be preferable. Parity democracy is also accused of curbing the free choice of the electorate.

“Natural” progress in the field of gender equality will not be enough to influence the historical relations of power between women and men and to end the discrimination of women in the political world. Women who aspire to political office face numerous structural and cultural obstacles. In the event of injustice, it is the State who is best placed to implement measures in favour of a more just situation. Rather than waiting centuries for hypothetical equality in the political arena, citizens must take their fate into their own hands and take additional and decisive steps towards true equality between women and men.

As regards the “freedom” of the electorate, it is already circumscribed by other factors, such as electoral systems which allow voters to choose the party but often not the representative, and a representation of regions which does not always reflect the number of inhabitants. It cannot be said that in a system where political parties choose and rank the candidates, often based on non-transparent and non-democratic procedures, it is the voter who has the freedom to choose. Therefore, a fair representation of women as well as other groups on candidate lists enhances rather than undermines the freedom of the electorate to choose candidates who represent them.

In a democratic society, freedom has to be defended, but it needs to be counterbalanced with promoting justice and equality. Freedom and equality do often contradict, but this is the very essence of democracy. Only by accepting the confrontation of the two key democratic values can we guarantee that our political system remains democratic.

### **Does parity democracy take into account merit? – Yes!**

The argument that politicians should be elected based on their qualifications and not on the basis of their gender, or that it is shameful for women to be elected because of their gender, shows how women’s qualifications are downgraded in a male-dominated political world. Women’s engagement with informal politics on local level and within civil society and their high level of education, make women ideal candidates for positions of political responsibility. It should also be emphasised, that women face many structural and cultural obstacles such as access to financial and other resources, traditional division of paid and unpaid labour between men and women, and the prejudices of the political parties and voters, which make women’s political participation much more difficult even with equal merit.

Merit, while being an essential criterion in the choice of an elected representative, must not be used to avoid the question of representation and legitimacy. Equal political participation

of women and men is a question of representation and is as such comparable to having rules for each country's representation in the European Parliament for example. In the same way, international civil servants within the European Commission and other institutions are chosen first on the basis of nationality, and after on the basis of their qualifications. Quotas based on nationality have never been seen as a problem for the voters or a cause of shame for those elected or employed, but as something which guarantees the legitimacy of the European institutions. Accordingly, women politicians elected in the framework of a gender quota system are chosen because they are competent and they have a lot to contribute to the political world, but also because they represent half of the population.

### **Does parity democracy promote a simplified view of women? – No!**

Some oppose parity democracy as a limited idea that adopts a natural view of women and their interests, and ignores the diversity of women. To support parity is not to say that women form a unified group with common interests which should be represented. On the contrary, it is only by increasing the number of women representatives that the diversity among women will be truly represented. Parity is therefore the very possibility to get this diversity of perspectives and interests represented and heard.

### **3. Women in political decision-making in Europe in numbers**

#### **European Parliament: women elected by Member State<sup>11</sup>**

Member State	Seats	Women	Women %	Member State	Seats	Women	Women %
1. Sweden	19	11	<b>57,90%</b>	15. Romania	35	11	<b>31,40%</b>
2. Luxembourg	6	3	<b>50%</b>	16. Germany	99	31	<b>31,30%</b>
3. Netherlands	27	12	<b>44,40%</b>	17. Greece	24	7	<b>29,20%</b>
4. Slovenia	7	3	<b>42,90%</b>	18. Belgium	24	7	<b>29,20%</b>
5. France	78	33	<b>42,30%</b>	19. Bulgaria	18	5	<b>27,70%</b>
6. Austria	18	7	<b>38,90%</b>	20. Portugal	24	6	<b>25%</b>
7. Lithuania	13	5	<b>38,50%</b>	21. UK	78	19	<b>24,40%</b>
8. Ireland	13	5	<b>38,50%</b>	22. Latvia	9	2	<b>22,20%</b>
9. Hungary	24	9	<b>37,50%</b>	23. Czech Rep.	24	5	<b>20,80%</b>
10. Slovakia	14	5	<b>35,70%</b>	24. Italy	78	15	<b>19,20%</b>
11. Finland	14	5	<b>35,70%</b>	25. Poland	54	7	<b>13%</b>
12. Denmark	14	5	<b>35,70%</b>	26. Cyprus	6	0	<b>0%</b>
13. Estonia	6	2	<b>33,30%</b>	27. Malta	5	0	<b>0%</b>
14. Spain	54	18	<b>33,30%</b>	<b>Total:</b>	<b>785</b>	<b>238</b>	<b>30,3</b>

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union

<sup>11</sup> Situation as of January 2007, after the accession of Bulgaria and Romania

## Women in the European Parliament by political group<sup>12</sup>

Political group	Seats	Seats %	Women	Women %	Woman as chair
Group of the European People's Party (Christian democrats) and European Democrats (EPP-ED)	286	36,71%	68	<b>23,78%</b>	
Socialist Group in the European Parliament (PSE)	213	27,34%	87	<b>40,85%</b>	
Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)	101	12,97%	41	<b>40,59%</b>	
Union for Europe of the Nations Group (UEN)	44	5,65%	5	<b>11,36%</b>	
Group of the Greens/ European Free Alliance (V/ALE)	42	5,39%	20	<b>47,62%</b>	Yes
Confederal Group of the European United Left / Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL)	41	5,26%	13	<b>31,71%</b>	
Independence/Democracy Group (ID)	23	2,95%	4	<b>17,39%</b>	Yes
Not Affiliated	29	3,72%	4	<b>13,79%</b>	
<b>Total</b>	<b>779</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>242</b>	<b>31,07%</b>	

Source: European Parliament

## Women in single or lower houses of national parliaments in EU member states and accession countries<sup>13</sup>

Country	Elected	Seats	Women	Women %	Country	Elected	Seats	Women	Women %
1. Sweden	09 2006	349	164	<b>46,99%</b>	16. Poland	10 2007	460	93	<b>20,22%</b>
2. Finland	03 2007	200	83	<b>41,50%</b>	17. Latvia	10 2006	100	20	<b>20,00%</b>
3. Netherlands	11 2006	150	59	<b>39,33%</b>	18. UK	05 2005	646	126	<b>19,50%</b>
4. Denmark	11 2007	179	68	<b>37,99%</b>	19. Slovakia	06 2006	150	29	<b>19,33%</b>
5. Spain	03 2008	350	127	<b>36,29%</b>	20. France	06 2007	577	105	<b>18,20%</b>
6. Belgium	06 2007	150	53	<b>35,33%</b>	21. Italy	04 2008	629	133	<b>21,14%</b>
7. Austria	10 2006	183	60	<b>32,79%</b>	22. Czech Rep.	06 2006	200	31	<b>15,50%</b>
8. Germany	09 2005	613	194	<b>31,65%</b>	23. Greece	09 2007	300	44	<b>14,67%</b>
9. <i>Macedonia</i>	07 2006	120	35	<b>29,17%</b>	24. Cyprus	05 2006	56	8	<b>14,29%</b>
10. Portugal	02 2005	230	65	<b>28,26%</b>	25. Ireland	05 2007	166	22	<b>13,25%</b>
11. Luxembourg	06 2004	60	14	<b>23,33%</b>	26. Slovenia	10 2004	90	11	<b>12,22%</b>
12. Lithuania	10 2004	141	32	<b>22,70%</b>	27. Hungary	04 2006	386	43	<b>11,14%</b>
13. Bulgaria	06 2005	240	52	<b>21,67%</b>	28. Romania	11 2004	330	31	<b>9,39%</b>
14. <i>Croatia</i>	11 2007	153	32	<b>20,92%</b>	29. Malta	03 2008	69	6	<b>8,70%</b>
15. Estonia	03 2007	101	21	<b>20,79%</b>	30. <i>Turkey</i>	07 2007	549	50	<b>9,11%</b>
<b>Total:</b>									<b>22,85%</b>

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union

<sup>12</sup> Situation as of May 2008. As the EP statistics are not up to date due to changes in MEPs and some MEPs are missing from the second table, the figures in table 1 and 2 are not exactly the same.

<sup>13</sup> Accession countries in italics, situation as of 11 July 2008

## 4. Existing provisions and measures for the promotion of gender equality 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 2003<sup>14</sup>. The recommendation on gender equality standards and mechanisms adopted in November 2007<sup>15</sup> 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 analysis of the constitutions of the Member States of the European Union shows that the great majority of the countries which have a written constitution have 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

---

<sup>14</sup> [REC \(2003\) 3](#)

<sup>15</sup> [CM/Rec \(2007\) 17](#)

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.<sup>16</sup>

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)	

### Existing quotas in European countries

A data base provides information on the various types of quotas in existence today, detailing the percentages and targets in countries worldwide, see: <http://www.quotaproject.org/>

## 5. Proposed measures to improve the situation

### 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

<sup>16</sup> The information is derived from the International Constitutional Law website <http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/>

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 elections<sup>17</sup>.

In most EU Member States some political parties have adopted **voluntary party quotas**<sup>18</sup>. 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).<sup>19</sup>

## 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

---

<sup>17</sup> See Global Database for Quotas for Women with information on voluntary party quotas in each country. [www.quotaproject.org](http://www.quotaproject.org)

<sup>18</sup> See Global Database for Quotas for Women with information on voluntary party quotas in each country. [www.quotaproject.org](http://www.quotaproject.org)

<sup>19</sup> Matland, Richard E. 2005: "Enhancing women's participation: Legislative Recruitment and Electoral Systems". In *Women in Parliaments: Beyond Numbers. A revised edition*. International IDEA.

voters decide the order of the elected candidates within the party) have impact on the representation of women.<sup>20</sup> International IDEA has put together a useful country table on best-fit quota systems according to the national electoral system<sup>21</sup>.

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.<sup>22</sup>

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.

---

<sup>20</sup> 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

<sup>21</sup> [www.idea.int/publications/designing\\_for\\_equality/dyntable.cfm](http://www.idea.int/publications/designing_for_equality/dyntable.cfm)

<sup>22</sup> Global Database of Quotas for Women, [www.quotaproject.org](http://www.quotaproject.org)