

## Women's Participation in the Romanian Political Life

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**Abstract.** Women have started to gain ground in politics in almost all countries from Europe. On the one hand, the people who are against this phenomenon consider it a demonstration of the depreciation of the political positions. On the other hand, others consider this aspect as an indicator of social development through overcoming of taboos. The study analyses the evolution of women's participation in the political life in Romania after 1989.

**Keywords:** women's participation, decision making, gender apartheid.

### 1. Introduction

Women's participation in politics and in the exercise of political responsibilities should be encouraged and facilitated by actions able to promote their awareness, comprising civic and political education, which helps women gain knowledge of their rights and to become aware of their capacity to have a direct hand in political life. The Government, Parliament, political parties and organizations, trade unions, non-governmental organizations and the media, can all contribute to this process.

The importance given at a global level to this aspect is recently underlined in Inter-parliamentary Union and NU Division for woman promoting session (March, 4, 2009), which brought into discussion the Declaration voted at the 4th Global Conference for Women that took place in Beijing, according to which the existence of a balance between the responsibilities that both women and men share, represents an essential factor for the health of women, men, as well as for their families' well-being and also for the consolidation of democracy. There were four rounds of discussions and one of them was: Men and women in politics: sharing responsibilities from public and private lives- there had been taken into account the necessary measures for supporting the balance between public and private lives, for women, as well as for men; the benefits offered to parliamentarians regarding their vacations and facilities; the role of social models played by male parliamentarians, for example in exerting the right to paternal vacation.

Annually (Inter-Parliamentary Union) edited the booklet entitled *Women in Politics* which contains statistics regarding the participation of women in political life and within the parliaments (UIP, 2008). In 2008, within the framework of classification of active women in parliament, the first place is still occupied by Ruanda, with a percentage of 56.3% in the second chamber and of 34.62% in the first chamber, followed by Sweden on the 2nd and 3rd places, with a percentage of 47% and Cuba, with 43.2%. Finland occupies the 4th place with a percentage of 41.50%. An important progress has been registered, after the last parliamentary elections, by Cuba, Angola and Mozambique. Romania has registered a decrease of feminine representatives in parliament, with a percentage of 11.38% in the Deputies Chamber and of 5.84% in Senate, occupying the 97th place, similar to Azerbaijan, state with a unicameral parliament structure. This classification has been made by taking into account the percentage of women from the 2nd Chamber of Parliament, in the case of bicameral systems.

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## 2. Women's Participation to European Political Life

**Romania.** The stimulation of women and youth participation in the political life is compulsory in all political parties in Romania, as part of the democratization and transparency processes that Romania was forced to undergo. Often, the political parties hastened to report that they have the largest number of youth and women in their organizations, these becoming „must-have" conditions for all parties, a compulsory ingredient for success, just like the presence of children or animals represent a guaranteed success in TV shows.

The rights and degree of immunity of the women to the discriminations that are specific to a patriarchal society are directly proportional with the degree of their representation in politics. Unfortunately, in Romania, politics was and still is a domain where men are in the spotlight.

The majority of positions held in top management are dominated by men who, in general, tend to focus on their own problems and interests. The political organisms dominated by men promote neither women nor their problems.

Women's reluctance to follow a political career on one hand and the reluctance of the political parties to promote them in top management positions on the other hand, can be translated not only into a deficit of women representatives in the political structures, but also into the strenuous development of the democratic principles in public life and an enduring economic development of the society (ANES, 2008).

Almost in all countries from the old continent, women have started to gain ground in politics. The people who oppose to this phenomenon consider that it is a manifestation of the depreciation of political position. Others assume that there is an issue of image involved or the mirror of the development of society. Whatever the explanation might be, it seems that actions speak louder than words. In other European countries the politician woman is in the front row, more and more women being nominated to participate in running important ministries. (Sandru, 2009)

**Italy.** "Le Figaro" points out that the Italian government does not have too many women. Except Mara Carfagna, in Berlusconi's Office there are three more politician women. The first one, in protocol order, is Stefania Prestigiacomo, who was nominated the Minister of the Environment. Italy is still being considered an island of machismo (a doctrine according to which the man makes his superiority felt towards women). Revealing for the prejudices that have always been in Italy, is the fact that the four women that have been appointed ministers in Berlusconi's government wear suits and trousers during the day, when they make their oath in front of the president of the republic. In Italy, women are recruited mostly for their aesthetics rather than competencies. They look like a "Hugh Hefner's harem", ironically states the British "Daily Telegraph", yet showing regret in the fact that women in Gordon Brown's government are dressed like "potatoes sacks".

**France** is also one of the countries where the values of women in politics are promoted. Eleven women are in the Francois Fillon government, among which Rachida Dati (ministry of justice) and Fadela Amara (state secretary of Algerian origin) reflect "the French diversity" , the colours of a new France. It has to be underlined the fact that two women have been designated in ministries that have traditionally been run by men. Thus, Michele Alliot - Marie was named minister of Internal Affairs and Christine Lagarde, minister of Economy and Industry, Valerie Pécresse (minister of Higher Education and research), Roselyne Bachelot (ministry of Health).

**Spain.** Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero always says that massive arrival of women on labour market represents "the major event" of the last 30 years in Spain. He designated on the 12th of April this year a "revolutionary" government, which, for the first time, is formed by more women than men (nine women and eight men). Moreover, women hold positions that are not necessarily appropriate for them. For example, Carme Chacon (37 years old), recently become mother, known for her "eco-pacifist" positions, was appointed Defence Premier while she was pregnant!

In **Eastern Europe**, Iulia Timoșenko was appointed the first female prime-minister of Ukraine. In Germany, Angela Merkel has become the first female chancellor in history. Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga was elected the president of Latvia in 1999. Tarja Halonen was the first woman to be elected president of Finland in 2000. Ireland successively elected two female presidents: Mary Robinson (between 1990-1997) and Mary McAleese, in 1997. Also, in Switzerland two women have been elected heads of state: Ruth Dreifuss (1999)

and Micheline Calmy-Rey (2007). In 2007, Jacqui Smith had become the first female Prime Minister of Internal Affairs from the history of Great Britain. It has to be mentioned the fact that in this country women occupied important political positions, such as Margaret Thatcher, the first female premier (between 1979-1990), and Margaret Beckett, ex- Secretary of State for International Affairs.

### 3. Statistics Regarding the Participation to Decision Making in Romania – Sex Segregates

The European average, concerning the ministries in national governments, shows that the proportion of men, as compared to that of women, is approximately 3 to 1 (25% women and 75% men). Regarding women's participation in decision-making processes within the ministries, the public management workplaces that are politically dictated (state secretary and state vice-secretary) occupied by women are poorly represented. Women are not represented in the 12 ministries out of 19 present ministries (ANES b, 2008).

The situation in the last three years in Romania, at the Governmental level, is the following (and we can notice a decrease of women presence):

2007 - at the first level of decision, after the ministerial one (state secretary, general secretary) - 27,8 % of the positions were held by women

2007 - at the second level of decision (the position of director) - 41,9% of the positions were held by women

2008 - no women held the position of minister

2009 - 19% of the ministries are women (4 women)

Table 1. The number of parliamentary in Romanian Parliament (mandate, chamber and gender apartheid)

Mandate	Number of parliamentary			
	Deputy Chamber		Senate	
	Women	Man	Women	Man
1992	13	326	3	140
1996	25	315	2	141
2000	38	317	9	131
2004	31	285	12	125
2008	36	280	8	129

We have examples of ministries where all the positions of state secretary/ state vice-secretary are traditionally occupied by men: Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure, Ministry of Administrations and Internal Affairs, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development, Ministry of National Defence. The ministries where the representation is balanced (50%) are: Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation - 2 positions, Ministry of Relation with the Parliament - 1 position; Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises, of Commerce and Business Environment- 1 position.

Regarding the situation of women's participation in the first and second level of decision-making within the ministries, referring to the public positions of management that are not politically dictated, in 2009 the situation is as follows:

Level 1 (general secretary, deputy general secretary, high public servant, general manager) :

Women - 5 (25%)

Men - 15 (75%)

Level 2 (deputy general secretary , deputy secretary, general manager, manager)

Women - 35 (46,2%)

Men - 42 (53,8%)

It is obvious that the percentage of the positions held by women is growing gradually with the level of decision.

At parliamentary level, I am presenting a statistical analysis which starts in 1992 (the year of the first democratic elections) and the data reflect the fact in the last sixteen years we have no improvement in woman participation in Romanian Parliament. We have mandate with a severe decrease of females in the Senate, as in 1996-2000, but the average is 8,6% in the Deputy Chamber and 5,6% in the Senate Chamber.

In comparison with the average of the parliaments of EU states (24%) and the percentage of the European parliament (31%) in the legislation of 2004 – 2009, Romania has a representation of women in the parliament of only 9,76% according to the results of the parliamentary elections of 2008. In the European Parliament women's representation has met another significant jump from 31% in the previous mandate to 35 % in 2009 – 2014 mandate. Romania has in the present in the European Parliament 36 % women : 12 women out of 33 europarlamentaries (PSD - social democrat party 5, PNL- national liberal party 3) (CDEP, 2002).

Table 2. Percentage of women at local administration level

<b>Mandate</b>	<b>Local Council</b>	<b>Country Council</b>	<b>Prefecture</b>
<b>2000</b>	6,2	5	7,3
<b>2004</b>	11,55	15,37	9,5
<b>2008</b>	10,8	12,6	4,7

At the level of local administration, for 2008 - 2012 , the situation regarding the positions held by women is the following:

- In county councils - 12,6% of the positions are held by women (178 from 1402 of local councillors are women). The counties with the weakest representation are: Neamt (0%) , Brasov (2,8%) and Caras Severin (3,3%)
- In local councils, in 37 of the counties, 10,8% positions are held by women (4011 from 38625 of the local councillors are women). The counties with the weakest representation are Bistrita Nasaud (6,5%) and Suceava (6,9%).
- In Prefect Institutions - 4,7 % (2 women out of 42 positions) positions of prefect are held by women and 10,7% (9 women from 84 jobs) positions of vice-prefect are held by women.

In comparison with 2004 - 2008, one can notice a drop in the degree of participation of women in the decision-making process concerning local administration, both regarding their presence in the County councils, Local councils and also in the Prefect Institution.

According to specialists, this situation is due to the fact that Romania is still a patriarchal society, strongly anchored in traditions and misogynist behaviour. From the total of 3.184 mayors elected in the local elections in 2008, only 3.5% are women. The supremacy in the municipal entities and cities of the 41 counties and in Bucharest municipality belongs exclusively to men. Women were elected mayors only in communes. Bacau holds the record with seven women as mayors.

There are also other counties where no woman was elected as local leader. Among these are Brasov, Bistrita Nasaud, Covasna, Mehedinti, Olt and Bucharest.

Regarding the equal participation in the decision-making process, the conclusions of the study emphasize the fact that women do not get involved in decision-making in their communities, although the percentage of females who vote is quite big. For example, in the north-eastern area of the country, the percentage of women that vote is of 90%; nevertheless, only 19 % get involved in the decision-making process. This imbalance can be found also in other parts of the country, while in the county of Cluj there is a much more active participation of women in decision-making process(ANES b, 2008).

In Romania, television represents the favourite mass media of the women from the country side, who rarely read a newspaper, not to mention use the internet. Moreover, almost one-third of the interviewed women stated that they do not use any kind of information resource.

More than 50% of the interviewed women showed their interest in getting more information about the rights they have on the labour market, being at the same time interested in acquiring information regarding the necessary steps in order to start a business, or information related to the good health of procreation. In order to obtain these data, informative items and information points from the local authorities are preferred (Romanian National Institute of Statistics, 2008a).

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

In any democracy, the representation of all needs (implicitly women's) is a fundamental aspect. Women still occupy a loose role in Romanian politics. The study shows that ministries are represented by women only in a percent of 19% (compared to 25% in the EU average) and in the Parliament women's presence is lower than 10% (compared to 24% in the EU average). Over the past 5 years we can notice a "feminization" process of the middle layers of public administration and some sectors like justice, health and labour, which demonstrates that Romanian politics is not yet ready to overcome a patriarchal type of mentality, the decisional pyramid being occupied mostly (if not entirely) by men, even if at the European level most men (77%) consider that politics is dominated by men and an increasing of women representation would lead to change of style (euro barometer 2009)

Future strategies for increasing women's involvement in politics should take into account the following:

- the importance of creating some new balanced policies and strategies for obtaining equality with men, which has to equally take into account the needs and responsibilities of each of them;
- the issue of inequality between men and women should be not only a female concern, but also it should involve the active interest of men;
- promotion of women's rights, creation of real opportunities for assuring these rights, and implicitly, of a balance at the level of responsibilities that are to be shared by both men and women, harmonization between legislative texts at national level in conformity with the international stipulations;
- legislative approach from interdisciplinary perspective, which implies connection and counterbalance between women's civil, political, cultural, economic and social rights;
- the media can help to instil among the public the idea that women's participation in political life is an essential part of democracy, (and) should also avoid giving negative or minimizing images of women.

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