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Political party strategies for increased representation of women in political decision-making in the EU Member States and Poland

1. Initial remarks

Both the European Union Member States and Poland have well-established democratic systems in place and the Constitutions of those countries define requirements imposed upon citizens regarding execution of their electoral rights. There is no single country in the above-mentioned group to introduce any restrictions regarding political involvement with respect to gender (the only requirements to be met concern the minimum age limits for candidates, their lack of criminal record and their citizenship). It may be argued, therefore, that from an official point of view there has been nothing to prevent women from active involvement in political activities. However, it is still the fact that their participation in political life is actually hampered by different kinds of barriers and their opportunities to make political careers are seriously hindered.

Women have accounted for more than a half of the world's population, yet their share among all members of national parliaments in the global scale is less than 15 per cent.¹ Women's participation in the public sphere has been much weaker than that of men and their under-representation upon the highest level of hierarchy of authority proves that this area of life is highly masculinised. This global trend is further confirmed by an example of women's representation in both legislative and executive authorities in Western European countries, where female participation in lower chambers of parliaments accounts, on the average, for *circa* 1/4 of total number of deputies. The ratio of their participation in

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¹ *Women in Parliaments: World Classification*, Inter-Parliamentary Union, March 2003, (www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm).

executive governmental bodies is very similar.² Among 15 EU Member States Finland is the only one where a woman has been appointed to the post of the Prime Minister.³ Similarly, in positions of appointed Head of State, women have still been present only exceptionally: at present this is only the case in Ireland, where Mary McAleese is the President, and in Finland, where the same position is held by Tarja Halonen. The situation in Poland – as further discussed below – is similar.

The issue of an inadequate representation of women in political life in relation to their total number and importance in society as the whole deserves broader consideration. It should be seen from perspective of women's participation in circles of political and economic élite that has generally been insignificant. Women have not only been underrepresented in central-level governments; their inadequate presence on regional level is of concern as well. Leaving the issue of parliamentary representation aside, positions filled by appointment, such as those of ministers, have also typically been far from reflecting fair proportions of both sexes. The number of women who represent their governments in an international arena and work in responsible positions in international organisations has been particularly small. Apart from the field of political life, one should also mention in this respect such a vital area as economy, within which representation of women on senior managerial positions is very unsatisfactory.

It should be underlined in this context that establishing public authority institutions without a half of society participating in them is contrary to the very concept of modern democracy. As a result, this is also incompatible with the interest of the whole society. That being said, one should put forth quite an important question: how far activities of those institutions may be regarded representative, if such a significant group of the whole population participates therein to such an insufficient degree? The question is asked bearing in mind that representation of authority is one of fundamental assumptions of democratic system. As a conclusion, any efforts to reinforce democracy have to aim at broader participation of women in wielding political power.

In democratic systems political parties have been institutions that enable citizens to participate in authorities, express and generalise interests, aspirations

² See: *Women in Decision-Making*, European Database, June 2001, (www.db-decision.de).

³ Since April 2003 Finnish government has been presided by Mrs. Anneli Jäätteenmäki. By now the post of Prime Minister has been filled in the European Union Member States by the following women: in United Kingdom Mrs. Margaret Thatcher (since May 1979 until November 1990) and in France Edith Cresson (May 1991 - April 1992). More on the subject of women filling top-level political positions – see: *Politics: Women's Insight*, IPU Reports and Documents no. 36, Inter-Parliamentary Union, Geneva 2000 and *Worldwide Guide to Women in Leadership* (<http://www.guide2womenleaders.com/index.htm>).

and postulates of society and represent different social groups. In the area under consideration here, therefore, activities of political parties have been of utmost importance, as they should form a forum upon which women can manifest their interests and, moreover, should enable them to participate more actively in political life, including in wielding political power. There is, therefore, a very important issue in this context, that of checking, what types of actions have been undertaken by political parties in European countries in order to enable and facilitate bigger political participation of women.

What we mean in this respect is party-level actions aiming at elimination of disproportion in opportunities of women and men in the area of politics, and mechanisms to promote balanced participation of women in political life and to raise their number in top-level legislative and executive authorities. It should be stressed in this respect, that among all determining elements shaping political representation of women, political factors belong to most important ones. They have particular influence upon subsequent stages of formation of political élites, and in particular upon selection of candidates for deputies to parliaments, and then directly upon the course of elections to legislative authorities. Naturally, selection of candidates and giving them support during elections is one of the main functions of political parties. This way, their role may be perceived as that of a janitor, opening door to positions in institutions of authority. Therefore, access of women to public authorities depends, to a considerable degree, on a specific political system, and in the frame of such system, on activities of political parties and on the way the electoral system works.

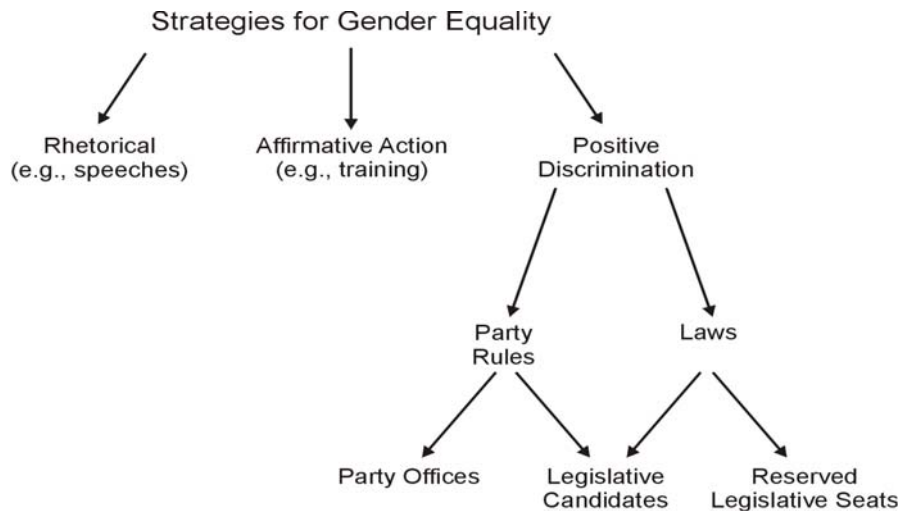
2. Mechanisms of influencing political participation of women at a party-level

Political parties have fostered women's political activity mainly on national level. Instruments used to influence the situation in this area have depended on the stage of involvement of women to decision-making political structures, since specific possibilities to influence the situation have been different upon every stage. A catalogue of actions undertaken by political parties in order to stimulate bigger participation of women in politics includes the following:

- **rhetorical activities,**
- **affirmative actions,**
- **positive discrimination.**⁴

⁴ More on the same subject – see: Lovenduski J., *Introduction: the Dynamics of Gender and Party* in: Lovenduski J., Norris P. (eds.), *Gender and Party Politics*, Sage, London 1993 and Norris P., *Breaking the Barriers: Positive Discrimination Policies for Woman* in: Klausen J., Maier Ch.S. (eds.), *Has Liberalism Failed Women? Assuring Equal Representation in Europe and the United States*, Palgrave, New York 2001.

Diagram 1. Strategies for gender equality



Source: Norris P., *Breaking the Barriers: Positive Discrimination Policies for Women* in: Klausen J., Maier Ch.S. (eds.), *Has Liberalism Failed Women?*, Palgrave, New York 2001, p.92.

2.1. Rhetorical activities

Rhetorical activities constitute fundamental, even if just symbolic, way in which a political party may manifest its interest in the issue of political participation of women. Such actions take the form of declaratory pronouncements, such as declarations, affirmations and party documents, addresses and speeches given by party leaders or electoral slogans. Such actions aim at manifesting to the electorate that the given party perceives this issue in its activities, rather than at preparation of any specific catalogue of actions with a view to stimulate political participation of women. The purpose of those actions, undertaken in either short- or long-term perspective, is to change the image of the party, although in some cases this is reduced to just a transitory aim of gaining the broadest possible electorate support. Sometimes, however, such rhetorical actions are signs of true, specific and precise actions aiming at enlargement of political participation of women within the given group and, where this is the case, they form a transitional stage, necessary to undertake further activities.

2.2. Affirmative actions

Affirmative actions mark the stage of transition from words to acts. It is that stage of strategy for promoting larger participation of women in politics, which takes form of specific actions undertaken by political parties. This category of

actions may be implemented at any stage of involvement of women into political activities and may regard overcoming both individual and institutional barriers. The category includes, among other things, all kinds of training, both for candidates who are eager to start political activity (the stage of recruitment) and for those who are involved in staff selection, as well as provision of comprehensive support for women (also including financial support).⁵ Moreover, affirmative actions may also consist in such campaigns as providing more publicity to political activities of the given party in order to encourage women to active membership therein, appointment of a larger number of women on exposed political positions and broader implementation of methods of parliamentary activities more friendly to family life. (The most important strategies in this area have been presented in Table 1.)

Political parties may undertake a range of different actions in order to encourage women to involve in politics and in public life in general. Among such actions, organisational, training or logistic measures may be distinguished.

Organisational measures include formation of groups of women within political parties. This solution is popular in most European Union Member States.⁶ For example, in German Social-Democratic Party (SPD), among nine working groups active in that party there is a Working Group of Female Social-Democrats (ASF). Such mobilisation of female party activists should be regarded as very important, since parties having relatively high percentage of such activists have, at the same time, significant percentage of female candidates in elections. This is the case, for example, in Finland, where in the biggest parties: Finnish Social-Democratic Party, National Coalition (KOK) and the Green League (VL) groups of women have been active, which translates into relatively high percentage of women in the Finnish Parliament. Also in Sweden many activists, as early as in Seventies and Eighties, decided to work within

⁵ As an example of such action the so-called *EMILY's list*, in place in the United Kingdom, may be quoted. The *EMILY's list* was introduced in February 1993 with the purpose to provide female members of the Labour Party with financial support necessary to start as candidates in Parliamentary elections. During the period preceding the elections in 1997, on the basis of the "List" the total amount of over GDP 40,000 in subsidies was awarded to seventy women applying to be selected as candidates for positions of members of Parliament. Twenty-six of them were in fact selected and fourteen out of them became MEPs. At present, thanks to the "List" support is going to be provided to women intending to start as candidates also to other representative bodies, such as Welsh National Assembly, Scotch Parliament, authorities of London as well as the European Parliament.

⁶ This has been a very popular solution, not just in the European Union Member States, but world-wide as well. According to studies carried out globally by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, inner female fractions have operated in 192 out of 395 political parties in research (that is, nearly in half of them) as well as in 52 out of 68 countries analysed in this context. See: *Men and Women in Politics: Democracy Still in the Making*, Inter-Parliamentary Union, Geneva 1997, p.137.

political parties⁷ that have thus become an adequate political base for them, enabling them to promote female political careers.

Table 1. The party-level strategies of attainment of larger participation of women in wielding political power

<p>Type 1: Strategies of overcoming individual barriers</p> <p><i>Recruitment:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Campaigns to mobilise women to involve in party activities <p><i>Selection:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Training for women, including courses preparing for taking on positions in political parties – “Cabinets of shadows”, consisting of women working on practice in political structures in order to gain experience and knowledge – Establishing social funds (including those to finance children care) to support women working in important positions in political parties
<p>Type 2: Strategies of overcoming institutional barriers</p> <p><i>Selection:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Adoption of uniform criteria for candidates selection and elimination of existing forms of discrimination with respect to sex – Establishment of personal data bank to contain information <i>i.a.</i> on the candidates’ plans for political careers – Introduction of quotas both in party structures and in electoral lists – Placing women beside men or women exclusively on electoral lists

Source: The Author’s own specification on the basis of: Leijenaar M., *How to create a gender balance in political decision-making*, European Commission, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg 1997.

Existence of various types of female groups, fractions or wings within parties have an effect of stimulating political activity of women, among other things, through promotion of recruitment to the given group and through exerting pressure upon their parties to more actively address the issues that are of interest to women. Furthermore, such groups have been helpful and conducive to a larger number of women assuming leading positions in their parties.⁸ Since general political climate is defined by masculine standards,

⁷ Sainsbury D., *The Politics of Increased Women’s Representation: the Swedish Case* in: Lovenduski J., Norris P., *Gender and...*, op. cit., p.276.

⁸ Also, non-governmental female organisations have played an important role. They act as groups of pressure, paying attention to a broad range of key issues and initiate a number of “pro-female” actions. The example of such activities may be found in efforts, undertaken in United

women need an organisational forum on which to share their experience and in that sense such groups are important as – in many cases – the only measure that supports women in their intent to involve in politics. For example, in the United Kingdom female groups have been established in all political parties, but, at the same time, the range of other measures aiming at encouraging women to involve in political life is very insignificant.

Generally speaking, mobilisation of active party members has an important influence upon enlargement of female representation in composition of political parties. A distinct relationship may be observed between a high percentage of women in a given party and a large number of women put forth by such party as candidates during elections or elected thereby to its decision-making bodies. That's why an active attitude of women who have already been party members is so important⁹ – this gives measurable effects. As mentioned by J.Lovenduski and P.Norris, a number of women involved in political parties as their ordinary members have grown during the recent years, the fact that is particularly evident in such countries as Sweden and Germany.¹⁰ In spite of being mainly represented in lower-level positions in their parties, women could, through their number and active attitudes, exert higher pressure upon being well represented in top level – *i.e.* in the Parliament, as well. In other words, parties having a greater number of active female members can boast respectively higher percentage of women in their parliamentary clubs. (This relationship has been confirmed by the studies carried out in Sweden by D.Sainsbury.)¹¹

Also very important in this respect is broadly understood training activity. This type of affirmative actions may take place upon any stage of women's involvement in political structures and may be implemented in a number of various forms.

On the stage of recruitment this takes form of actions the purpose of which it is to encourage groups of women interested in undertaking party activity. In general framework of training, special courses have been held to prepare women to start as candidates in parliamentary elections or to a role of members of

Kingdom by such organisations as “300 Group”, the aim of which it is to introduce 300 female deputies to the lower chamber of the Parliament and to bring about general increase of number of women actively involved in public life, or by the Fawcett Society that has undertaken campaigns aiming at increasing general interest in women's affairs during electoral campaigns. In Finland, the Coalition of Associations of Finnish Women for Common Actions has activated during periods preceding parliamentary elections to organise information campaigns. Over 600 thousand women have belonged to the Coalition, while over 20% of all women in Finland have belonged to legally established female organisations.

⁹ Caul M., *op.cit.*, p.83.

¹⁰ Lovenduski J., Norris P., *Gender and party politics*, Sage, London 1993.

¹¹ Sainsbury D., *The Politics of Increased Women's Representation: the Swedish Case* in: Lovenduski J., Norris P., *Gender and...*, *op.cit.*

Parliament. In Germany, for instance, the 90/Green Alliance has held workshops and meetings aiming at encouraging women to start in elections.

On the stage of selection, training for party selectioners who choose candidates to start in elections is of critical importance. In this area, it is desirable to promote uniform principles regarding the process of selection and to introduce clear indications allowing to properly control both the criteria used and the process of selection itself. Implementation of uniform and standard procedures enhances women's chances to qualify to elections.

Other types of training are targeted to active party members. Most political parties have offered training programmes for their members and staff. Some of those programmes have been addressed specifically to women and men seeking to become members of Parliament. Such programmes are prepared to promote their chances during the pre-electoral campaign, that means improving their presentation skills, negotiation techniques, media attractiveness, and so on. Also, several parties in Europe use a particular type of training in the form of appointing "a cabinet of shadows", through which women who have been hesitant about carrying on their further political career have an opportunity to gain necessary knowledge and experience.

Affirmative actions also include efforts to provide women with support in terms of care over their children and adjusting dates and time of party meetings to their family duties. Among parties that have implemented such measures the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) may be mentioned, in whose activity "*most funds, such as those for financing costs of nursery schools, are intended for working women who have to provide care for their children. The purpose of other measures is to create more part-time job opportunities and to introduce more flexible working time*".¹² It should be underlined, in this context, that among all solutions discussed here this one proved least popular in political parties. It may be concluded therefrom that leaders of such parties are disinclined to directly interfere with traditional division of work or to undertake activities in an area that is so culturally sensitive. Offering training courses, provision of children care and adjustments of party meetings allowing women to better reconcile their activities with performance of their family obligations - these types of actions undermine the existing political and social culture, as they potentially benefit just women, rather than both sexes. One may conclude therefrom that this is the main reason for little interest, on the part of political parties, in implementing organisational and training measures addressed to women.

¹² *Men and Women in Politics: Democracy Still in the Making*, Inter-Parliamentary Union, Geneva 1997, p.20.

2.3. Positive discrimination

Positive discrimination is another, highly measurable, yet, at the same time, most “invasive” possible way of exerting, by a political party, influence upon stimulation of female representation. In most cases this solution takes form of quotas.

Quotas have been a solution consisting in reserving certain number of places in electoral lists and in governmental bodies to women. This means that guarantees are given, in either official or unofficial way, that no sex is going to be represented over some specified level, both in electoral lists and during appointments to inner positions within a given party, in order to ensure proportional and adequate representation to a group that has been underrepresented and, accordingly, to correct the hitherto-existing situation of gender imbalance.

The size of quotas is determined on different levels, ranging from 20 to 50 per cent. Quotas may be regarded as only transitional measures advocating women’s participation in political life. Beside that, permanent measures may also be adopted.¹³ It should also be emphasised that such specification of participation of women, expressed as percentage, does not have to relate *per se* to both above-mentioned cases. This means that this solution is not always used both in appointments to party positions and in preparation of electoral lists. Sometimes certain political parties introduce a quota system only in one of those situations.¹⁴

The idea of using a quota system dates back to late seventies. This practice has become relatively popular in Western European countries, leading in the period between 1975 and 1985 to the number of parties that implemented this system being doubled.¹⁵ Adoption of a certain form of quota policy became a frequent solution in many European parties, especially among left wing or ecological groups. Out of 76 parties active in the European Union Member States and having at least ten representatives in a lower chamber of their respective legislative assemblies, as many as 35 (or 46%) have used such instruments. The number of those parties accounts for almost 70% among those groups, whose female participation in their parliamentary representations is

¹³ It should be underlined that while quotas may be introduced voluntarily by political parties, they also may be in force as obligatory national-level legislation (among the EU Member States such legislative solution has been adopted in Belgium and France).

¹⁴ A comparative study performed by the Inter-Parliamentary Union in early Nineties has shown that in the global scale quotas have been introduced in electoral lists by 22 political parties, while other 51 political groups used the quota system in the process of filling their inner party positions – see: *Women and Political Power*, Inter-Parliamentary Union, Geneva 1992.

¹⁵ Squires J., Wickham-Jones M., *Women in Parliament: A Comparative Analysis*, University of Bristol, Equal Opportunities Commission, Manchester 2001, p.12.

higher than 24%, while, on the other hand, among 17 parties for which that ratio is lower than 10%, only one implements the quota policy.¹⁶

Empirical studies show that the countries, in which political parties have used quota systems for a long time, have highest female parliamentary representations. This relates, among others, to Scandinavian States, and in particular to Denmark and to Norway.¹⁷ Also in the case of Germany, as a result of adoption of quotas by most important political parties, female representation in the Bundestag has grown in relatively short period.¹⁸ This is particularly true in the case of the Green party that, as early as in 1980, adopted stiff, 50-per cent quotas and in whose parliamentary club most members (nearly 60%) are women. Similar solutions have been adopted by such important political groups as CDU (levels of 30% of women in electoral lists and among party leaders) and SPD (33% and 40%, respectively). In consequence, after parliamentary elections in September 2002, 37.5% of new members of Bundestag originating from that party were women. Also, more women than before found their place in top levels of this party hierarchy.¹⁹ The same holds true for German Christian-Democratic party, in which the position of the party President was taken by Mrs. Angela Merkel. In the case of Spain, introduction of quotas brought results nothing short of spectacular: after the quota system has been put in place in both socialist PSOE and centrist People's Party, already in the first elections the number of women elected to the National Parliament increased by as many as 89 per cent, while the number of women elected to regional parliaments grew even more, by 116 per cent.²⁰

¹⁶ Russell M., *Women's Representation in UK Politics: What can be done within the Law?*, The Constitution Unit, London 2000, p.15-16.

¹⁷ Both in Sweden and in Finland a high percentage of women in legislative authorities has not only been due to use of the quota system that were adopted there in the Nineties (according to the principle "every second mandate for a woman"), but is also a result of high general political culture in those societies. (More on the same subject – see: Christensen A., *Women in Political Parties* in: Bergqvist C. et al. (eds.), *Equal Democracies? Gender and Politics in Nordic Countries*, Scandinavian University Press, Oslo 1999, p.82.) It should be underlined here that Swedish women have maintained for a number of years their leading position in terms of their parliamentary representation. This is further confirmed by recent parliamentary elections held in September 2002, during which women won 45.3% of all mandates in the Riksdag, thus giving their country first place globally with respect to a number of female deputies in national Parliament.

¹⁸ Caul M., *Women's Representation in Parliament: The Role of Political Parties*, 1997, (<http://democ.uci.edu/democ/papers/caul.htm>); Kolinsky E., *Women in Contemporary Germany. Life, Work and Politics*, Berg Publishers, Providence - Oxford 1993.

¹⁹ According to the ranking carried on by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, after holding parliamentary elections, Germany occupied eight place in the global scale in terms of number of women in their national Parliament.

²⁰ Threlfall M., *State Feminisms or Party Feminism?*, "European Journal of Women's Studies", vol. 5/1996.

In comparative studies concerning representation of women in parliaments an opinion prevails that quotas have positively influenced numbers of women involved in structures of political power. The European Commission put it outright in its special document entitled "Women in political decision-making positions": "*the quota regulations have been an important instrument of ensuring access to key political positions to women*".²¹ Also such experts studying this issue as R.Inglehart and P.Norris agree that: "*adoption of quotas for female candidates within inner party regulations proved to be one of the most important measures aiming at admission of bigger number of women to those positions*".²² According to M.Russel, "*since quota have been first used by political parties in Europe, female representation in some cases increased very significantly*".²³

One should point out, in this respect, that the quota system has also been an object of some reservations. On the one hand, it has been accused of infringement of the principle of equal and fair treatment of all citizens, while, on the other hand, objections were raised regarding its effectiveness. It seems, however, that one should agree with the opinion contained in the "Final Declaration" of the Conference of the Inter-Parliamentary Union: "*There have been a number of different views regarding quotas. Their adherents underlined the need to have this solution adopted in all levels where decision-making process is actually inherent, from political parties up to the level of national Parliament, central government and State administration. It is quite obvious for us all that quotas have been necessary evil that has to be used temporarily in order to restore proper balance between men and women and that they should be discontinued as soon as the desired effect is achieved*".²⁴

Measures used in the area of positive discrimination also include any kinds of special arrangements regarding methods of establishing electoral lists, and in particular principles defining order of candidates' names thereupon. This is an extremely important issue, on which, to a considerable degree, their chances in elections depend. Generally, places at the beginning of the list are highly preferable to all candidates, while the least attractive are the so-called "dark places" (in the middle and at the bottom of the list, *i.e.* places to which voters are less likely to pay attention). Therefore, it is not only important to implement

²¹ *Women in Political Decision-Making Positions. Facts and Figures*, European Commission 2000, p.17.

²² Inglehart R., Norris P., *The Developmental Theory of the Gender Gap: Women's and Men's Voting Behavior in Global Perspective*, "International Political Science Review", vol. 21(4)/2000.

²³ Russell M., *Women's Representation in UK Politics: What can be done within the Law?*, The Constitution Unit, London 2000, p.14.

²⁴ The Conference of the Interparliamentary Union, held between 14-18 February 1997, quoted from: *Politics: Women's Insight*, Inter Parliamentary Union, Geneva 2000, p.68.

quota regulations, defining an obligatory percentage of women among candidates, but to specify where such a guaranteed pool of names is to be inserted in the list as well.

Accordingly, parties that implement a strategy of enhancing electoral opportunities of their female candidates purposefully place women's names in favourable places, thus giving them better chances to win. Most popular method in this context is the so-called zip-system, which consists in placing women's and men's names on the list in an alternative order, one after another.²⁵ This method has been successfully used, for example, by the German Green party²⁶ as well as by most important parties in Sweden, where – as mentioned before – during the last 15 years women have enjoyed a number of considerable successes in parliamentary elections.

There has been much evidence suggesting that quota systems are going to be increasingly popular and adopted by political parties in order to attract more women, both as voters and as potential candidates to political positions. Due to the fact that quotas remain a controversial solution, they have been an object of frequent debates in national parliaments. Without a doubt, such debate is desirable as it raises the issue of an unequal participation of different social groups in political life as the subject discussed upon public forum and therefore it indicates the need of reaching a final, practical solution to this problem that remains topical one. After first adoption of the quota system a “snowball” effect was observed, since even those parties which originally refused to use the system, became aware that either selection alone or also appointment of bigger number of women (according to quotas or without such regulations) is an effective way to win larger electorate support.

3. Situation in Poland

Referring the present considerations to present situation in this area in Poland one should first and foremost point out its specific character, a legacy of historical and systemic experience. It should be emphasised, then, that although Polish women gained their electoral rights as early as in 1918, nevertheless, changes taking place in our country following the World War II took a different course than it was the case in most Western European countries. Due to political isolation that lasted for several dozens of years and to a totally different political and economic system, models established in Western countries (which had

²⁵ More on the same subject – see: Squires J., Wickham-Jones M., op.cit., p.12 and Dahlerup D., *Using Quotas to Increase Women's Political Representation in: Women in Parliament...*, op.cit.

²⁶ During elections to the city council of Hamburg in 1986 the Green Party in Germany used an even more radical method. It prepared an electoral list including only women and, to astonishment of many experts, it won as much as 10 per cent of the electorate votes.

already undergone the process of industrialisation and urbanisation some time before) were largely unknown in our country. Opportunities to bring thorough changes in this field appeared as late as after the decline of the former communist rule at the turn of the Eighties and Nineties. Those changes, leading to modification of a system of social values, implied, in consequence, transformation in the area of social attitudes.

Considering women's participation in public life one should wonder, therefore, which factors were most influential for the process of shaping of systems of value regarding division of social roles among men and women. Furthermore, one should not overlook the presence of an important phenomenon that was peculiar not only to Poland. With respect to social role of women a far-reaching and deeply rooted conservatism of all post-communist societies is observed, caused by a long period in which the so-called "real socialism" was in place. Facing that, experiences of Western European countries are not easily transferable to Polish circumstances. The communist system supported, to a large degree, traditional models of relationships between men and women (mostly as a result of such models being anchored in traditional peasant communities) and, at the same time, prevented people from organising themselves in various groups of interest (which also affected potential feminist groups) that have been so typical to democratic societies.

Due to non-existence of feminist movement in Poland in the post-war period, there have been no voices either contesting or at least questioning the model of family relationships in their traditional shape. Being isolated from the ideas of feminism, at that time under discussion in the Western countries. Polish society had no opportunity to get acquainted with concepts promoted in many countries already since the Seventies (such as the above-discussed quota systems) and provoking such lively debate in the West of the continent.

In Poland the area of politics used to be perceived, until then, as traditional domain of masculine activity, rather than that of women's involvement. At present, however, participation of female deputies in the lower chamber of Polish Parliament (*i.e.* in the Sejm) accounts for 20.3%, while in the upper chamber (the Senate) the respective ratio is at 23%. And while that proportion is still unsatisfactory, yet much more women have been elected during the last elections than it had been the case in any previous elections held during the Nineties.²⁷ Compared to the former composition of the Parliament, the number

²⁷ This growth of the number of women was caused, among other things, by an institutional solution. Elections in 2001 were organised according to a new, changed electoral ordination (the fact related with a new administrative structure of the State). In 2001 electoral districts were larger (compared to those in 1997) and had more mandates than before (the total number of 52 former electoral districts was reduced to 41), while the total number of deputies to the lower chamber (460) and of senators (100) was left unchanged. This way, one of conditions conducive to an

of women in it increased by 54% and in the Senate the increase amounted to more than 100% as participation of female deputies grew up from 11 to 23 per cent (see: Table 1). This means that political representation of women since the beginning of systemic transformation that had taken place in Poland after 1989 has gradually increased. To sum things up, in a global ranking prepared by the Inter-Parliamentary Union with respect to political representation of women in central-level legislative authorities, Poland ranks at present at 38th place, while after the previous elections, those of 1997, it occupied 49th position).²⁸

In spite of such positive trends, according to the status as of the end of 2002, a very weak representation of women in structures of central level executive authority, filled by appointment, is observed. Among head positions in the Chancellery of the Prime Minister,²⁹ only one was held by a woman, appointed to the office of secretary of State. Out of 14 ministries, only one was managed by a woman³⁰ and just four out of 47 central-level offices were presided by women.³¹

Table 2. Political representation of women in the Parliament after 1989

Year of parliamentary elections	Women's participation (%)	
	the Sejm (lower chamber)	the Senate (upper chamber)
1989	13	6
1991	9	8
1993	13	13
1997	13	12
2001	20	23

Source: the Author's own calculation.

increase of a number of women in electoral lists was fulfilled, since there has been a relationship, scientifically confirmed, showing that the more mandates attributed to each district, the better chances have female candidates in electoral lists.

²⁸ *Women in Parliaments: World Classification*, Inter-Parliamentary Union, March 2003, (www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm).

²⁹ In post-war history of Poland the only female Prime Minister was Hanna Suchocka who performed the duties from July 1992 to October 1993.

³⁰ We mean the Ministry of National Education and Sport, managed by Krystyna Łybacka.

³¹ Source: *Kancelaria Prezesa Rady Ministrów: Obsada kierowniczych stanowisk państwowych w Kancelarii Prezesa Rady Ministrów, ministerstwach, urzędach centralnych oraz kierowniczych stanowisk w niektórych państwowych jednostkach organizacyjnych; stan na 27.09.2002 r. (The Chancellery of the Prime Minister: Filling of the leading State administration positions in the Chancellery of the Prime Minister, ministries, central offices and top management positions in some State administration organisational units; as of 27.09.2002)* (<http://www.kprm.gov.pl/admin/obkprm.htm>).

In an attempt to analyse the situation in Poland prior to the elections held in September 2001, it might be observed that the presence and awareness of the issue of equal rights of women and men as well as that of specific women's problems was still unsatisfactory in the programmes of political parties. Even at the first level, that of rhetorical activities,³² an evident lack of any significant interest in increasing political participation of women has been seen in Poland. Naturally, there have been parties that took problems of women into account, but there have also been those (and, admittedly, that was the case in most of them) that haven't seen the need to specifically address female electorate at all and that have not even a single female deputy in the Parliament (the Polish Peasant Party (PSL) being an example of the latter attitude).

The presence of the issue of equal rights of women and men in programmes of particular political parties seems an important question in this context. From the point of view of a degree to which the "women's cause" is considered in such programmes, political parties may be divided into three following groups:

- the first group consists of parties that did not mention women in their programmes and paid no attention at all to their problems (this group was by far the largest);
- another group is formed by parties that, while referring to women and their situation in their programmes, did that only in the context of families and in relation with roles traditionally attributed to women in families;
- finally, the third group were parties that reserve a separate place to "female issue" in their programmes and firmly stress the need to increase the number of women participating in public life, also declaring that women's aspirations must not be limited just to performance of roles traditionally attributed to them.

Announcements that efforts towards an increased participation of women in political structure would be intensified, have appeared in pre-electoral programmes of the following three parties: the Alliance of Democratic Left-Wing (SLD), The Labour Union (UP) and the Union of Liberty (UW).

Mr. Leszek Miller, the President of the Alliance of Democratic Left-Wing (SLD) declared during the Congress of that party, in December 1999, that equality of chances, equality of sexes and opposition to any evidence of discrimination, have been values highly advocated by the SLD. Also during that Congress, a special resolution was adopted, regarding provision of equal opportunities to women. The Labour Union, in turn, favours introduction of the quota systems and supports the idea of adopting an act on equal status of both sexes. Significantly, as many as 45 per cent of candidates of that party for deputies in parliamentary elections were women. Also the Union of Liberty

³² More on the same subject – see: Norris P., *Breaking the Barriers...*, op. cit. and Lovenduski J., *Introduction: the Dynamics of Gender...*, op. cit.

declared that ensuring the equal status and equal opportunities to women is one of its most important political objectives. During the former term of office of the Sejm, the Union of Liberty put forth a proposition to add a provision to electoral ordination, to guarantee at least 30 per cent of places in electoral lists to women. (Other parties, that is the Polish Peasant Party (PSL), Self-Defence, the League of Polish Families (LPR) as well as the Right and Justice (PiS) have opposed any mechanisms aiming at an increase of women's participation in public life, such as quota systems or the "zip" method.)

Among political parties that took part in parliamentary elections in September 2001, three used a quota solution while preparing their lists of candidates for deputies to the Sejm: namely, they were SLD, The Labour Union (UP) and the Union of Liberty.³³ All of them took on an obligation to reserve for women at least 30 per cent in their electoral lists. However, particular methods in which such obligation was filled should be regarded controversial, as, for example, in the lists of SLD women accounted for only 17% of candidates placed in positions 1 - 5 on the lists, while in the case of the Union of Liberty it was just a little more satisfactory 21%. This way, more often than not, names of female candidates appeared in the bottom of electoral lists.

As mentioned before, candidates listed in top places usually enjoy much better chances to be elected. This rule was confirmed indeed by the fact that 48.3 per cent of all women elected were persons from either of three first places on the lists of candidates.

Electoral lists of various political parties were very different in terms of numbers of women thereon and of places given to female candidates. The following should be included in the group of parties least interested in the issue of women (*i.e.* those that placed only between 15-20 per cent of women on their lists): the Right and Justice (PiS), the Polish Peasant Party (PSL), and the Citizens Platform (PO). Even less (less than 15%) places were given to women by the Solidarity-Right-Wing Electoral Action (AWSP) and by German Minority.

Another issue that deserves attention is that of particular methods of selection of candidates. In most cases a decentralised system prevailed and bodies recommending given persons for candidates were mainly composed of men. This, combined with highly unofficial and unclear selection criteria, seriously diminished chances of women.

Still, it has to be emphasised that during the recent years an increase of recognition of women in roles of politicians may be observed on the part of society as the whole, although the area of politics in general has still been

³³ However, the Union of Liberty failed to earn the required lower limit number of votes (5%) during parliamentary elections and has not entered the Parliament.

perceived as a space of masculine activity rather than of feminine or at least of both alike.

Factors that have contributed to increasing awareness, in the circles of political élites, of the need of larger participation of women in political life include an intensification of activities undertaken by different kinds of female movements and groups, operating both within political parties and in non-governmental organisations. Seen against a background of passive attitudes, lack of any significant signs of interest or even disapproval of a major part of Polish political élites regarding the issue of equal rights and opportunities of men and women in public life, efforts manifested by such movements have greatly contributed to initiation of a broad range of campaigns and actions towards promotion of political activity of women. They have organised a number of actions and initiatives, a good example thereof being the Pre-Electoral Coalition of Women, organised with considerable involvement, that, both before the parliamentary elections in September 2001 and before elections to regional governments, held in October 2002, disseminated the ideas of equal status of both sexes among politicians and society as the whole and monitored political parties' behaviours regarding representation and promotion of interests of women. It should be underlined that as many as 50 different organisation accessed the Coalition, organised as an open arrangement of various female organisations and environments.

Also worth of mention was an important pre-electoral women's initiative, taken above any party divisions, called "Women competing, women voting", the aim of which it was to convince a part of the electorate upon appropriateness of voting for women and also to increase electoral presence among female part of society. Participants of the initiative presented a declaration of ten reasons why people should have voted for women and adopted a principle of avoiding mutual attacks between women during the pre-electoral campaign.

Such an active involvement of the above-mentioned women's organisations resulted in establishment, in December 2001, of the institution of the Government Plenipotentiary for Equal Status of Women and Men,³⁴ operating directly with the Council of Ministers and enjoying the status of Secretary of State. Terms of reference of a person appointed to that position included, among

³⁴ The Position of Government Representative for the Equal Status of Women and Men was first established in Poland in the mid-Eighties. Since that time both its place in the structure of government and the scope of its competence changed several times. The name of the office was changed as well. However, all those changes tended towards limitation of a scope of institutional possibilities to defend rights of women. An intent to push problems of women aside as issues of secondary importance was clearly seen in modifications of names of that position. Subsequent names were as follows: the Office of Representative for the Affairs of Women; Women, Family and Youth, Family and Women, and, finally, just Family.

other things, such tasks as analysis and evaluation of governmental documents with respect to their consistence with the principle of equal treatment of women and men, provision of support to non-governmental organisations involved in this field and encouraging them to co-operate with the State administration. The Plenipotentiary's scope of competence also included co-operation with its equivalents in other countries. (However, the Plenipotentiary is not vested with the right of legislative initiative).

Finally, a remark should be made about efforts contributed by the Women's Parliamentary Group (PGK), a supra-party lobby of women-deputies to the Parliament. The fundamental purpose of operation of PGK is to introduce such legislative changes that ensure equal rights to women. So far, the group has put forth an initiative to introduce a draft act on equal status of women and men to the Sejm agenda twice (in 1998 and in 2002).³⁵ Moreover, it proposed establishment of a Commission for the Equal Status of Women and Men.³⁶

The above-mentioned draft act on equal status of women and men assumed that percentage share of women in every collegiate body appointed by public authority as well as on electoral lists should at the minimum levels of 30% in 2002, 40% in 2003 and, finally, 50% to be attained until 2012. Furthermore, names of women and men should be placed in electoral lists in an alternative order (in line with the "zip system" principle). Despite a number of attempts, however, initiatives to resolve the "equal status" act in Poland have proven unsuccessful so far. The above-mentioned first draft of such an act was modelled on Norwegian legislation, including, among other things, a proposal of establishment of an independent, separate State body to supervise implementation of the act and procedures or reaching equal rights. The authors of the draft act also suggested that at least a 40-per cent participation of representatives of each sex is guaranteed in all bodies appointed by public authorities. At present a subsequent draft of the "equal rights act" is under debate in the Sejm.

On the other hand, an initiative to establish a Commission for the Equal Status of Women and Men was rejected back in 1999. Also an attempt to change the electoral ordination, undertaken in 2001, proved unsuccessful. The Sejm rejected the project of amendment that contained the provision regarding introduction of, among other things, the minimum level of 30 per cent participation of representatives of each sex on electoral lists.

³⁵ The draft from 1998 was rejected in the Sejm already in the first reading, while the second one, presented by a group of senators to the President of the Senate in July 2002 together with the motion calling him to undertake a legislative initiative has still awaited consideration.

³⁶ This project was put forth by PGK in 1999 and failed to win majority of votes.

While studying the issues under consideration here one should also take into account the fact that Poland, as part of its endeavours to acquire the status of the European Union Member State, has an obligation to harmonise its legislation with the EU legal requirements, also in the area of guaranteeing equal rights and opportunities for women in political life. Poland has belonged to those applicant countries that have been admonished relatively often by the EU party for its inadequate efforts undertaken in this respect. For example, the European Commission underlines that Poles should strive at establishing appropriate administrative structures as well as institutional and legal mechanisms to more effectively promote the principle of balance and equal status of both sexes.³⁷

In the area of promotion of balanced participation of women and men in all spheres of life Poland has still lagged behind, compared to most European Union Member States. This is so despite a number of international obligations taken by Polish government in that area. One of the most important documents in this context is the so-called Platform of Action adopted after the IV Global Conference of the United Nations on Women's Affairs in Beijing in 1995. On the basis of that Platform the "National Programme of Government's Action for Women" was undertaken in Poland, however, its implementation is still to begin.

4. Final remarks

During recent years in most European Union Member States and also, to a certain degree, in Poland, requirements regarding equal representation of women and men in structures of political authority have been filled more and more often and better. The issue of equal participation of both sexes in public life has become a subject of broad social debate, gaining an increasing support and women's participation in public life is seen today as something acceptable much easier than ever before.

In the meantime many political parties have become aware of the problem and many of them have taken proper account thereof in their programmes. Gradually, also governments of individual States have begun to see the issue and, furthermore, also such supra-national structures as the European Union, the Council of Europe or the United Nations have increasingly involved in efforts to reach an equal and well-balanced participation of women in political life. Each of them brings its important contribution in the work, doing that – depending on types of reasons hindering women's access to political power – through different programmes and strategies, including a broad scope of methods and measures.

³⁷ See: *Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in the European Union. Annual Report 2000*, European Commission 2001, COM(2001) 179 final, especially p.23-30.

Only through such complete and comprehensive programmes, aiming at increasing the number of women in political decision-making bodies upon sub-national, national and supra-national level, it might be possible to change the present state of affairs that has still been unsatisfactory, since, as emphasised in the “Declaration of Athens”: *“Women represent half the potential talents and skills of humanity and their under-representation in decision-making is a loss for society as a whole”*.³⁸

³⁸ Declaration of Athens was signed at the first European conference “Women in Decision-Making” in 1992 by the female ministers of the EU Member States.