

**INSTITUTE OF
PUBLIC AFFAIRS**



QUOTAS, WOMEN, POLITICS

Report from the Conference

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The conference was held in the British Embassy in Warsaw in the cooperation with the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights in the frames of the projects: „Partnership – equal chances for women and men” financed by Trust for Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe and “Women in the electoral process – towards equal access to political sphere” financed by the Open Society Foundations.



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The conference "Quotas, Women, Politics" organized by the Institute for Public Affairs, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the British Embassy in Poland was held on 17th of April in Warsaw. It was dedicated to the presence of women in the political sphere, with a special emphasis on gender quotas on electoral lists – the mechanism that had been applied for the first time in Poland in the 2011 parliamentary elections. The event was carried out within the frames of wider projects: "Women in the electoral process – towards equal access to political sphere", based on the research on women's participation in politics and "Partnership – equal chances for women and men", through which the IPA promotes partnership relations in both private and public life.

The conference was divided in two sessions. The first one was an expert panel based on Polish and British experiences and referred to existing mechanisms of increasing the level of women's participation in politics. The international trends in promoting gender equality in elected offices were also presented in this part of the event. The second session was focused on Polish experience in introducing gender quotas on electoral lists. The female representatives of four parliamentary parties took part in the discussion panel.

The conference was opened by Jessica Glover - Deputy Head of Mission and Consul General at the British Embassy in Warsaw, Kristin van der Leest - Adviser on Gender Issues at the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and Dr. Jacek Kucharczyk - President of the Institute of Public Affairs. In each of the speeches the limited influence of women on politics in all OSCE countries and the importance of the debate about the introduction of gender quotas' mechanisms were underlined.

SESSION I "TOWARDS INCREASED PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN POLITICS"

The first session was opened by the presentation "Women's Representation: What works in the UK" by Professor Joni Lovenduski from Birkbeck College, University of London. The expert started with the origin of controversies regarding quota mechanism, which she identified with different ways of understanding such concepts as equality in a society, political representation and gender. She associated these discrepancies with various discourses of citizenship, present in the public sphere, such as the liberal, the republican, the corporatist/consociational and the hybrid of the three mentioned. Since each form of the discourse is related to different approach towards quotas, it makes it very difficult to introduce this mechanism to the electoral system.

Professor Lovenduski used the supply and demand model, while analyzing the situation of women in politics. She argued that the popular belief in a low supply of qualified women, ready to occupy important political positions, often results from the low demand for female candidates expressed by the politicians who create electoral lists. In order to bring back the balance to the model mentioned, it is necessary to, on the one hand, use the mechanisms motivating women to develop their political careers and, on the other hand, to apply sanctions to those parties that do not support their female members. Apart from the obvious role of the state in achieving such balance, the role of non-governmental organizations was considered as crucial in promoting gender equality and monitoring political

parties.

The British expert also presented her own typology of possible strategies aimed at increasing the number of female candidates on electoral lists, that is, rhetoric, promotion, "guarantees" and monitoring. Professor Lovenduski argued that the most effective of the strategies listed above was the guarantee of equality, for example, in a form of gender quotas. She emphasized that they had to be designed in accordance with the existing electoral system and cultural environment. According to the expert, the only universal model would be one that prohibits registration of an electoral list not containing the appropriate proportion of female and male candidates. While describing the case of the United Kingdom, Lovenduski stressed the key role of political parties, which controlled financial aspects of electoral campaigns and were responsible for the creation of electoral lists, and media that could have a strong impact on voters' behaviour.

The Polish experience in the analysed area was presented by professor Małgorzata Fuszara from the University of Warsaw. In her presentation she briefly summarized the presence of women in the Polish Parliament since 1989, emphasizing the role of non-governmental organizations, female politicians and quota mechanism in growing female representation. Professor Fuszara also commented the main findings of the research carried out within the frames of the project "Women in the electoral process – towards equal access to political sphere", run by the Institute of Public Affairs in cooperation with the University of Warsaw with a financial support of Open Society Foundations. The expert reminded that in the first Polish parliamentary elections, in which the gender quota mechanism was applied, all electoral committees managed to meet the required proportion (35%) of female and male candidates on their lists. What is more, the percentage of women on the electoral lists has doubled since the elections of 2007. Female candidates constituted 44% of all people running for office in 2011. The research showed though that apart from the mere presence on the electoral lists, preferential positions on those lists played a crucial role in electoral success. The increase of the proportion of female candidates mentioned above referred mainly to the so called "unwinnable positions", from which the chances for being elected were minimal. Professor Fuszara underlined the fact that the creation of electoral lists remained the least transparent element of electoral process.

In the second part of her presentation, the expert summed up the results of interviews carried out with female and male candidates in the parliamentary elections of 2011 and focused on possible recommendations for the future, including legislative changes and the ones referring to the internal functioning of political parties and parliamentary clubs. She also mentioned that women's organizations were preparing draft bill, in which they would propose introduction of gender parity on the electoral lists, together with the zipper system where female and male candidates are placed in alternate slots among top positions on party's candidate list.

The last part of the first session constituted the presentation "Gender Equality in Elected Office: A Six-Step Action Plan" made by Kristin van der Leest from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. The expert presented a six-step plan of increasing the level of women's participation in the public sphere, proposed by Pippa Norris and Mona Lena Krook, taking as a starting point the statistics on female representation in parliaments of all OSCE's

countries. According to the Office she represented, if current trends persisted, without application of institutional mechanisms, equal representation would be achieved in 50 years. The six-step action plan could be seen as one of such mechanisms, including the following elements of the electoral process: constitutional rights, electoral systems, legal quotas, parties' regulations and recruitment procedures, capacity development and parliament reform. The mechanism is unique due to its elasticity – the plan can be properly adapted to socio-political conditions of a specific country.

Kristin van der Leest briefly described each of the six steps included in the plan. The first one – “constitutional rights” – referred to women's right to vote and to be elected. The next one – “electoral systems” – had a special influence on women's chances of being elected, though the latest research showed a decreasing relevance of the aspect mentioned. Another step – “legal quotas” – can be a very effective measure, if properly designed and implemented. The fourth step “party rules and recruitment procedures” should be analysed from the gender mainstreaming perspective, especially in a reference to regulations regarding financing of political parties. The fifth step “capacity development” included three possible approaches:

- 1) Equal opportunity initiatives:
 - Candidate training, recruitment initiatives and knowledge networks
- 2) Fighting stereotypes, raising awareness:
 - Media campaigns, voter and citizen education
- 3) Political party initiatives:
 - Women's sections, fundraising and women's parties.

The final step – “gender-sensitive parliamentary practices” – involved continuous monitoring of the impact of all the actions mentioned above on equal representation of women and men in elected offices.

SESSION II “IMPACT OF THE LEGAL QUOTA ON THE SITUATION OF FEMALE CANDIDATES DURING THE 2011 ELECTIONS”

In the second part of the conference the female representatives of four parliamentary parties participated in a discussion panel on the effectiveness of gender quota mechanism in Poland. The following politicians were present: Anna Grodzka (Palikot's Movement), Agnieszka Kozłowska-Rajewicz (Government Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment), Stanisława Prządka (Democratic Left Alliance), Beata Szydło (Law and Justice) and Bożena Szydłowska (Civic Platform). The discussion was moderated by Olga Kozierowska, journalist of TVN24 and radio PiN.

The majority of the panellists agreed that the quota mechanism had been necessary and continuation of legislative work aimed at ensuring 50% of females on electoral lists and introducing the zipper system should be continued. Not all of them supported legal measures as a way of increasing the participation of women in politics. Some politicians claimed that gender quotas had worsen the situation of female candidates because it had turned them into weaker candidates in the eyes of the voters.

The female parliamentarians and government representatives almost unanimously came to a conclusion that quotas were just a beginning of the road

towards equal participation of women in the political sphere. In order to make the mechanism effective, it should be complemented with such elements as gender-equal practices inside political parties, promotion of female candidates in elections, equal division of funds for electoral campaign or the zipper system on the lists.

SUMMARY

The last part of the conference comprised a panel discussion with many interesting voices from academia as well as the non-governmental organizations. The debate has been concluded by Dr. Marcin Walecki (Head of the Team for Democratic Rules and and Participation in Public Life, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, OSCE), who underlined the necessity of discussing women participation in politics, particularly among such esteemed experts. He has also stated that his Office is strongly interested in enhancing efforts to increase women's participation in the public sphere. According to Dr. Walecki, the number of female deputies in the Polish Lower Chamber of Parliament (the Sejm) may stop growing or even decrease, if we do not intensify our efforts aimed at equal opportunities. It is important not to focus on quota mechanism exclusively, but also to consider internal regulations of political parties and financing systems of political parties. Marcin Walecki has proposed a reform of political parties' financing systems, so that equality of genders is taken into account. He has also pointed out that the issue of conflict-oriented and aggressive politics may be addressed by increasing number of women in elected bodies. Dr Walecki has concluded the conference by quoting one of the female member of the European Parliament¹ who stated: *"And I would like to quote Maureen Reagan who already decades ago said: "I will feel equality has arrived when we can elect to office women who are as incompetent as some of the men who are already there."*

¹ By Sophie in 't Veld, (D66, Netherlands), Parliament's rapporteur on the annual report on the state of gender equality in the EU 2011, March 2012