



## POLITICS WITHOUT WOMEN

RECOMMENDATIONS ELABORATED WITHIN  
THE FRAMES OF THE PROJECT  
“WOMEN IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS”



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In December 2012, the Institute of Public Affairs completed the implementation of a research project "Women on election lists", which has contributed to the debate that has been under way for some time now in Poland, concerning the presence of women in public life. The Law and Democratic Institutions Team, under the research direction of Prof. Małgorzata Fuszara, analysed the participation of women in the 2010 local government elections and in the 2011 parliamentary elections. The studies made it possible to identify the barriers preventing women from standing for election on equal footing with men. The recommendations that we are now proposing are based on an in-depth analysis of the statistical data, results of qualitative studies, an analysis of certain solutions applied in other countries as well as legal opinions. Thanks to a meeting with male and female politicians and experts we have managed to obtain their opinions and supplement the recommendations.<sup>1</sup>

The Constitution of the Republic of Poland, in Art. 33, establishes the principle of equality between men and women in all aspects of life, as well as the equal right of women and men to hold offices, perform public functions and to receive public honours. However, in Poland, women are still a minority in decision-making bodies of various levels. Their participation in the central level legislative bodies amounting to 25 % and to approx. 10% in executive bodies, leads to a conclusion that their chances in the electoral process are not equal. Without introducing mechanisms making the chances of men and women equal, the legislator would not be able to fulfil the guarantee of real equality.

<sup>1</sup> The experts meeting took place on 30 November 2012, at the Institute of Public Affairs. The participants included: Prof. Małgorzata Fuszara (Project Manager, Institute of Applied Social Sciences, Warsaw University and IPA), Prof. Beata Łaciak (Member of the IPA Executive Board, Institute of Applied Social Sciences, Warsaw University), Agnieszka Liszka, PhD (Member of the IPA Executive Board), Marcin Walecki, PhD (Chief of Democratic Governance and Gender Unit, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights), Wanda Nowicka (Speaker of the Polish Sejm), Przemysław Radwan-Roehrenscheff (Director General, Association School of Leaders), Magdalena Tchórznicza (School of Leaders), Przemysław Major (President of the Bieruń Town Council), Agnieszka Grzybek (Zieloni 2004), Katarzyna Wernicka-Badzyńska (Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment), Aleksandra Niżyńska (Institute of Public Affairs).

Indeed, the solutions such as gender quotas or alternating men and women on election lists, guarantee equal chances in the electoral process. Making it possible for women to stand for election on equal footing with men does not entail equal results in the form of a pre-set number of seats in an elected body, but equal chances to be elected.

The barriers to women's political careers identified during the project, allow us to formulate recommendations in three areas that require – as the results of the study show – some targeted changes so that the voice of women could be heard equally well as the voice of men. The key areas that influence the presence of women in politics include legislation, in particular - the electoral law, democracy inside political parties and public debate.

The aim of introducing gender quotas on election lists, as part of the legislative changes, was to ensure an equal start for men and women at the electoral race. However, the analyses of the influence of a particular place on the candidates list on their election success show that being present on the list is just the first, small step on the way to such success. The position that a male or a female candidate occupies on the list of a given party is of key importance. The solution we recommend is to alternate men and women on the list. This mechanism, informally referred to as a "zipper system", is used by political parties in countries such as Sweden, Germany or Slovenia. Its introduction makes it possible to avoid a situation where women are usually placed at the very end of the list. Supplementing the quota mechanism with alternating male and female candidates offers a chance for equal opportunities for men and women in the electoral process in proportional representation electoral systems.

This mechanism cannot, however, be used in case of single-member districts – under the electoral law in force in Poland since 2011 that applies to Senate elections and to elections of municipality councils. A majority electoral system is not conducive to increasing the participation of women in public life as only one candidate is promoted in each electoral district. Research shows that lack of democratic mechanisms for nominating candidates favours men and limits women's chances of being nominated. This leads us to another recommendation, the return to proportional representation system in the elections to the Senate and in local elections at the municipality level. We do realise that arguments in favour of a majority electoral system may overshadow its drawbacks related to reducing women's chances for election

success. That is why we recommend discussion about various mechanisms, applied in different countries, whose aim is to make men and women equally present in the electoral process under majority electoral systems.

It is worth emphasising that there are also other factors, not directly related to the electoral system or the way in which election lists are compiled, which do influence the percentage of women in elected bodies and which, at the same time, may be controlled by way of legal regulations. Such a factor is, for instance, presence of women in campaign ads broadcast by electoral committees using their entitlement to free broadcasting time on public television. In view of the results of studies analysing the presence of men and women in election campaign on television, it seems that an effective solution could be an obligation imposed on the National Broadcasting Council to monitor the proportion of male and female candidates appearances in campaign commercials.

Another area which, unlike the legal system, requires fundamental change, is democracy within political parties. As the analyses carried out by the Institute of Public Affairs show, political parties in Poland are struggling with the problem of oligarchisation, have a poor member base, the quality of their candidates is low and the control over their finances is limited to a small group (the clique). The manner of compiling the election lists is one of the symptoms of limited functioning of democracy in Polish political parties. This situation is not favourable for the appearance of new male or female leaders but rather tends to preserve the *status quo*. The imperfect operation of democratic mechanisms within the parties negatively affects the participation of women, both in the leadership of the parties and in the local and central authorities.

The last area which requires change so that women could have the same chances as men to access elected bodies is the broadly understood public sphere. Here, the transformation does not require legislative changes or influence over the internal regulations of political parties, which does not mean that it is easy to achieve. Its success depends on some profound changes in numerous aspect of Polish public debate.

We address the recommendations presented below to five types of entities: state authorities, political parties, non-governmental organisations, the National Broadcasting Council and the National Election Commission.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **1. State authorities:**

- The election law provisions regulating the quota mechanism in proportional representation electoral system should be supplemented with an obligation to alternate male and female candidates on the first 10 places on the election list (the "zipper").
- The proportional representation electoral system should be restored at all election levels. As all analyses show, such a system is much more conducive to making the chances of men and women in electoral process equal.
- A multifaceted debate on the political priorities of men and women should be encouraged. It should take place, among others, within the Parliamentary Women's Group. Deliberative democracy should be introduced in the form of broad debates on political priorities, with the participation of representatives of various social groups, which would help bring closer together the expectations of the voters and the actions of politicians of both sexes.
- The equality policy should be strengthened and gender stereotypes should be challenged through establishing the offices of equality plenipotentiaries in government agencies.
- The state authorities (parliament, government, local authorities) should engage in dialogue with representatives of women's movement, which would help take into consideration the priorities of women and the matters important to them and, would thus enhance the *substantive representation* of women.

### **2. Political parties:**

- Parliamentary clubs and groups should promote women speaking on their behalf, especially during parliamentary debates.
- Parties should promote balanced participation of men and women in their managing bodies.
- Women's sections should be formed within political parties.

- Political parties should allocate the party funding in such a way that women standing for election could use the funds to a greater extent.
- Parties should establish a fund from which they could fund initiatives supporting women.
- Parties should set clear criteria for selection of male and female candidates at least one year before the planned elections so that women could have a chance to prepare to taking part in the elections.
- Women's sections within political parties should organise women's mentoring within the party which would consist in female candidates being tutored by other women, those who have already been elected to local or national authorities.
- Regulations concerning parity and the so called zipper rules with regard to election lists should be included in the parties' statutes.

### **3. Non-governmental organisations:**

- Before the 2014 local elections, training should be organised for women who get involved in politics for the first time.
- Political parties should undergo gender audit.
- A debate should be initiated concerning the consequences of the changes in the local government election law from the gender perspective and discussion should be held on possible ways to ensure equal opportunities for women in majority electoral systems (e.g. *twinning*, *all women's short-list*).
- Non-governmental organisations should form a broad coalition whose role would be to disseminate information about the impact of single-member districts on the chances of women in the electoral process, about the access to campaign financing (the so called "*early money for women*") and about equal access to the electoral process.

### **4. National Broadcasting Council:**

- The National Broadcasting Council should carry out periodical monitoring of the public television and private broadcasters with regard to presenting men and women in the media.
- The National Broadcasting Council should initiate debate on the way women are presented in campaign ads.

- The National Broadcasting Council should issue an ordinance on the principles and the manner of joint campaigning on the radio and on television by election committees which are entitled to have their campaign ads broadcasted before the elections. The ordinance should include an obligation imposed on the parties to preserve proper balance between the time devoted to promoting male and female candidates in campaign ads broadcasted on public television.

#### **5. National Election Commission:**

- The information ads prepared by the National Election Commission before elections should be produced using gender-sensitive language.