DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

POLITICAL REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN ROMANIA

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December 2021

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Women in Romania continue to face difficulties when it comes to taking part in electoral competition and even greater difficulties when it comes to actually occupying eligible positions.

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The organisational culture of political parties continues to be heavily influenced by patriarchal values in terms of gender roles.

FRIEDRICH EBERT STIFTUNG

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In the post-1989 era, the political representation of women has been one of the indicators of the quality of democracy at which Romania has consistently been among the last places at European level. Women in Romania face difficulties even standing for office in elections, not to mention the even greater difficulty of actually occupying eligible positions. It is troubling that 2019-2020 elections for the first time since Romania's accession to the EU saw a decrease in political representation of women, both at national and European levels.

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Correcting shortcomings in legislation and making candidate selection procedures more transparent could ensure inter alia both a greater presence of women on electoral lists and help promote a political agenda that more consistently represents the interests of women.

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Recent sociological research shows that public perception of gender equality and of women occupying political positions has improved over the past 20 years, although compared to other democratic countries attitudes remain more closely aligned with a traditional, patriarchal gender contract. Moreover, the organisational culture of political parties continues to be heavily influenced by patriarchal values in terms of gender roles.

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Table of Contents

1

INTRODUCTION

Political representation of women is a topic that is at the nexus of several strands of reflections and research in the field of political science and gender studies. The quality of democracy and civic participation, the existence of an autonomous and dynamic civic/associative space, the degree of democratisation and inclusiveness of political parties, respect for the rights and freedoms of all citizens, socio-economic development and the level of corruption, gender contract and ideological reactions to gender equality – all these socio-political processes and institutions influence the presence and access of women to positions of power in political institutions.

Since 1990, the democratic (re)construction of the Romanian political space has tended to be masculine. The political representation of women remains, throughout all three post-communist decades, at low levels, placing our country at the bottom in comparative international analyses. Compared to the 1990s, the situation has improved, especially under the influence of the EU accession process, and in the 2016 parliamentary elections there was an even more visible increase in the seats obtained by women; nevertheless, representation on candidate lists and in eligible positions still remained small. Four years later, with the European Parliamentary elections in 2019 and local and parliamentary elections in 2020, respectively, the upward trend seems to have stopped and even reversed. Thus, in 2019 European elections, the percentage of women who won a seat was only 21.2%, compared to 34.4% in 2014. In 2020 local elections there was a minor increase in the share of women who won a seat as mayor, rising from 4.6% in 2016 to 5.4%. But in parliamentary elections the number of women decreased, with women representing only 18.5% of parliamentarians, compared to 19.1% in 2016. It should also be added that, for the first time in many years, the number of women has dropped dramatically at the government level as well, with there only being one woman among cabinet ministers in the initial government (for the Ministry of Labour).

For the first time since Romania's accession to the EU, there has been a decrease in women's political representation (which is already at a very low level), and this requires – including in the light of recent political developments at European and regional levels – serious reflection. Through this study we aim to identify the main factors that influence women's access to a political mandate (local, national or European) in the Romanian context and try to understand what the elements are that can explain the current situation.
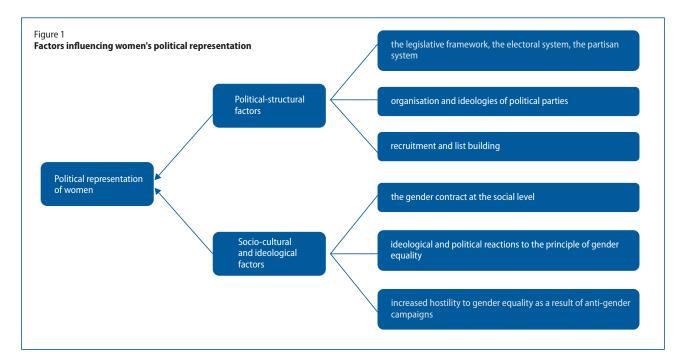
At the international level, there is already a rich literature that has analysed the presence of women in politics, both from the perspective of various factors that (re)produce gender inequalities in the political space, as well as from the perspective of the concept of political representation. Some research has also focused on the Romanian and/or regional context. In this report, it has not been our aim or intention to perform a synthesis of the existing literature, with a selective list of references being provided in the final bibliography.

It should be noted that women's political representation is not limited to their number in political institutions: beginning with Pitkin's (1967) reference analysis, a considerable amount of research has explored the relationship between descriptive representation (the number of women in politics) and substantive representation, understood as political action in favour of women's needs, interests and aspirations, promoting a feminist agenda, and claiming gender equality (Celis, Childs, Kantola & Krook 2008, Celis & Childs 2011). Increasing the number of women in politics is not necessarily a guarantee for the development of a political agenda that pays attention to the needs and interests of women, or for supporting and advocating gender equality. Moreover, none of the factors influencing women's political representation, which we have attempted to summarise in the following sections, in itself constitutes a strategy for bringing about balanced and equitable political representation for women. In terms of their organisation and functioning, political parties are influenced by the gender contract at the societal level, in turn producing gender stereotypes and inequalities through organisational practices and behaviours; because *parties make gender*, but also *gender makes parties* (Kenny & Verge 2016). Thus, apart from the fact that there is a need for a multidimensional analysis of political (under)representation of women combining several factors, we must always take into account the socio-political context and the historical dimension of each country because these elements can sometimes fundamentally change the role and consequences of these factors.

Research on Romania has focused more on socio-cultural and ideological factors – the communist past, the societal gender contract, attitudes towards gender equality and gender quotas, the connection with feminist activist space, but also the influence of the European context – to explain the weak political representation of women during the three decades of post-Communism, as well as its slight increase perceptible in 2008

(Bucur & Miroiu 2019, Băluță I. 2015, 2013a, 2012, Băluță O. 2017, Gârboni 2014, Popescu 2004, Miroiu 2004). In recent years, some analyses have focused on the electoral system, the legislative framework and the ideologies of political parties with regard to the descriptive representation of women (Norocel 2018, Chiru & Popescu 2016, Chiva 2005, Băluță I. 2013b). Greater attention has been paid to the organisation of political parties and especially to the process of political recruitment, including resources and positions that benefit women in political competition at party level and then in electoral competition (Iancu 2021, Băluță O. 2017, Chiru & Popescu 2016 , Băluță I. 2010).

Figure 1
Factors influencing women's political representation

Taking the literature in the field as a starting point, we attempted to highlight a series of factors that explain the low presence of women among political parties, especially in their leadership structures and power networks, on electoral lists and especially in institutions of political representation – at local, national and European levels (see **Figure 1**). In order to make it more readable, we chose to place the theoretical explanations in each subsection, and not in a separate section. We then tried to analyse the results of the 2020 elections based on these factors within the methodological and documentary constraints that we discuss in the following.

This study is based on a mixed methodology combining qualitative methods – documentary analysis and content analysis – as well as quantitative methods: a statistical analysis of poll data and election results. Wherever appropriate, we also used existing research, especially for factors for which the material constraints on this report did not allow further analysis.

We applied content analysis to the following types of sources: legislation in the field of equal opportunities, electoral legislation and legislation on the financing of political parties, the statutes of political parties and the procedures for the selection of candidates, and the web and Facebook pages of political parties' women's organisations. To complete the public information (available on party websites) on the provisions relating to supporting the presence of women in party structures and on electoral lists, we sent emails requesting additional data to all current parliamentary political parties/organisations: the PSD (Social-Democratic Party), the PNL (National Liberal Party), the USR (Save Romania Union), PLUS (Freedom, Unity and Solidarity Party), the UDMR (Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania) and the AUR (Alliance for the Union of Romanians). The only response received was from the PLUS[1] party. The design for the research was also based on informal discussions with members of political parties[2] who were involved in 2020 electoral processes.

The quantitative component of the study is based on a statistical analysis of poll data in order to obtain a picture of values and attitudes towards the role of women in society and politics, and a statistical analysis of election results for European, local and general elections in 2019-2020. Here, we used data from the *European Values Study* (2020) and the *Gender Barometer* (2000, 2018). The data on electoral results were taken from the website of the *Permanent Electoral Authority*. The data regarding the distribution of gender among parliamentarians in the period 1990-2020 were taken from the web pages of the two chambers as well as from the databases of *Romanian Electoral Studies: Romanian Parliamentarians*.

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[1] We analysed the USR and PLUS separately, as two political parties, because in the three elections held in 2019-2020 they had different statutes, their own leadership and their own rules on the establishment of candidate lists, even if the final negotiations related mainly to the place on the electoral lists were made at the level of the USR-PLUS alliance (for this level there is no written procedure, although information could possibly be reconstructed through interviews).

[2] We managed to have such discussions with politicians from the political parties PSD and USR. The short time to complete this report did not allow the use of semi-structured interviews, which are necessary to explain/nuance some aspects of the analysis, as we will mention wherever appropriate.

2

A CRITICAL LOOK AT THE LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

At the legislative level, the provisions relating to support for political representation of women are few and without any real impact. Thus, as early as 2002, Law 202/2002 on Equal Opportunities and Treatment between Women and Men stipulated that political parties are obligated to »ensure a balanced representation of women and men in the nomination of candidates in local, general and European Parliament elections«. However, it does not elaborate what this balanced representation means or how it can be obtained. Electoral laws governing local elections (L 115/2015, art. 7 (1)), national (L 208/2015, art. 52 (2)) and European (L 33/2007, art. 16 (8)) contain a single article on this issue, with almost identical wording: »The lists of candidates for the election of members of Romania in the European Parliament shall be drawn up so as to ensure the representation of both sexes«. Law 208/2015 on the Election of the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies, as well as for the Organisation and Functioning of the Permanent Electoral Authority adds that this obligation does not refer to lists with only one candidate. However, there are no sanctions providing for nullity of the lists in the event of non-compliance, as is the case with other provisions. Thus, in the local elections of 2020, over 900 lists (about 5%) did not ensure the representation of both sexes, while in parliamentary elections the number of lists on which only men were present decreased from 23 in 2016 to six (Pârvu, Ioniță & Popescu 2020).

Of the nine legislative elections organised since 1990, seven took place based on the system of proportional list voting, and two (2008 and 2012) on the system of uninominal majority voting, but also combined with a proportional system. There is research showing that the type of voting influences the descriptive representation of women. Thus, majority electoral systems are considered much less favourable to the presence of women on electoral lists/elected seats than proportional systems, even if there are countries with proportional systems that display poor political representation of women (Norris 2006, Tremblay 2012). The data in **Table 1** show that the change in the type of election in Romania did not influence the percentage of women present in Parliament.

Table 1
Political representation of women in the Romanian Parliament, 1990-2020

	1990	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016	2020
% of women in the Chamber of Deputies	4.5%	3.8%	7.3%	11.0%	11.4%	11.4%	13.3%	20.7%	18.5%
% of women in the Senate	0.8%	2.1%	1.4%	7.9%	9.5%	5.8%	7.4%	15.4%	18.4%
% of women in Parliament	3.7%	3.3%	5.6%	10.1%	10.9%	9.8%	11.6%	19.1%	18.5%

Source: authors' calculations based on data provided by the Permanent Electoral Authority.

Since 2006, the Law on Party Financing provides for additional funding for parties that have women in eligible seats: »The amount allocated annually to political parties from the state budget is at least 0.01% and at most 0.04% of gross domestic product. For political parties that promote women on electoral lists, on eligible seats, the amount allocated from the state budget is to be increased twofold in proportion to the number of seats obtained in elections by female candidates.« (L 334/2006, Art. 18 (2)). With the significant change in the financing of parties from the state budget (GD 10/2016 amending L334), »the increase of the subsidy in proportion to the number of seats obtained in elections by female candidates« also increases in importance, which can influence the significant increase of the percentage of women elected in the 2016 parliamentary elections (Iancu 2021). However, informal discussions with members of political parties show that this factor was not discussed or taken into account in the process of compiling party lists at party level, and the decline in the number of women in 2020 confirms these statements. This factor should be verified through interviews and retested in the next rounds of elections in order to obtain a clearer picture of how this funding mechanism works at the level of political parties and the impact it produces.

Hence, the legislation in force does not contain sufficiently clear and/or strong provisions to increase women's political represen-

tation. In addition, the few existing provisions are not accompanied by clear rules of application or precise sanctions and, even when they exist, they are not applied, as in the case of electoral lists that had no women candidates and were not verified and invalidated. In fact, existing studies show that one of the most important factors for increasing women's political representation is gender quotas (whether they are at the level of legislation or at the level of political parties) (Childs & Krook 2009, O'Brien & Rickne 2016). Over 100 states have adopted, in recent decades, various quota systems: legislative quotas or voluntary, internal quotas (Kenny & Verge 2016). On the other hand, although they are a strong catalyst, gender quotas do not guarantee – depending on their type and implementation – any increase in the descriptive representation of women (Kenny & Verge 2016), nor do they in all cases produce a substantial change in the definition of equality or an effective (re)renewal of representative democracy (Lépinard & Rubio-Marin 2018: 11).

So far, in Romania all legislative projects proposing various variants of gender quotas have been rejected, often thereby generating controversy and ideological attacks, as we show in the following.

3

THE ORGANISATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES: DOES THE POLITICAL GAME REMAIN MASCULINE?

Existing research underscores that the organisation and ideological orientation of political parties is an important factor affecting gender equality in politics. Political parties are institutions that have historically been dominated by men and are characterised by traditional conceptions of gender relations (Kenny & Verge 2016). The structure of political parties favours the presence of men in leadership positions and, implicitly, in decision-making. Through various norms, practices and behaviours (formal or informal, conscious or unconscious), political parties *make gender* (Kenny & Verge 2016): men have defined and controlled the definition of the rules of the political game (Lovenduski 2005), which influences access to positions of power and resource distribution (Kenny & Verge 2016). The ideological orientation of parties can be an additional factor in perpetuating gender inequalities: in general, left-wing parties have equal values and principles and support gender equality more than right-wing parties (Chiva 2005, Kittilson 1999, Norris 1993). A comparative study of Hungary and Romania shows that parties with a conservative-nationalist orientation promote traditional gender roles, while some right-wing (conservative) parties reinterpret gender roles in terms of neo-liberal values (as opposed to welfare status), correlating with anti-feminist positions (Norocel 2018).

In Romania, according to Law 202/2002: »Political parties have the obligation to provide in their statutes and internal regulations positive actions in favour of the underrepresented sex at the decision-making level, as well as to ensure balanced representation of women and men in proposing candidates for local and general elections and for the European Parliament« (Art. 22, para. 3).

How do current parliamentary parties relate to this law, which is part of the acquis communautaire and therefore transposes basic EU principles into national law? Of the six political parties/organisations with parliamentary representation in 2020 (AUR, PLUS, PNL, PSD, UDMR, USR), only four have special provisions in their statutes relating to support for the presence of women in party leadership structures (PLUS, PNL, PSD, UDMR). In the case of PLUS, these provisions are linked to the powers of the Commission for Equal Opportunities, which aims *inter alia* at »encouraging persons of both genders« (Art. 62, 1). PNL mentions, among the principles of internal activity, guaranteeing women's access to any position elected in the party (art. 13, b). In their statutes, the PSD and UDMR have more important provisions relating to the representation of women in the leadership structures of the parties. The PSD statute provides for internal quotas of at least 30% for women in the governing bodies of the party and at all levels of representation (art. 46, 3). UDMR stipulates that women must also appear in the elected bodies (art. 7). In their statutes, the AUR and USR do not have articles to ensure the representation of women in leadership structures.

If we analyse the composition of party leadership (according to the data on their websites[3]), we find that all six parties/political organisations currently have male presidents. Taking into account the positions of vice-presidents (where they exist) or the national bureaus, the data paint the picture shown in **Figure 2**.
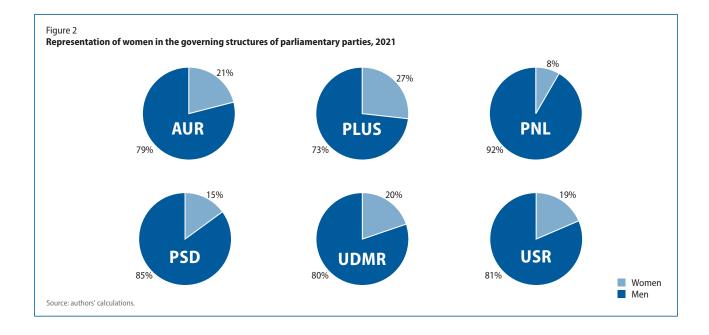
A very accurate comparison is more difficult to make, given that political parties do not have the same leadership structures (for example, not all have first vice-presidents and/or vice-presidents). However, overall we find that at the highest level, party leaderships are dominated by men: in all parties, the presence of women varies between 8% and 27%. It is also worth mentioning that the share of women in PSD leadership structures is only 15%, although the party's statute provides for a minimum representation of 30% of women on these bodies. Thus, although the percentage requirement for women's representation in party leadership structures (internal quota mechanism) is a factor in balancing the representation of women and men, the PSD is also the only party that, at least in the chosen example, does not respect its own statutes.

The presence of women in party leadership structures is important for both descriptive and substantive representation: as we will see in the section below, leadership structures play a

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3   The analysis was carried out on the data available in August 2021, before the PNL and USR-PLUS congresses.

decisive role in shaping the party's political agenda, as well as in selecting and validating candidates for the various types of elections (both through explicit regulatory mechanisms and procedures, as well as through implicit and informal practices specific to the functioning of power networks and leadership within political parties). A greater presence of women in these structures is likely (although the relationship is not a causal one) to ensure both a greater presence of women on electoral rolls and the promotion of a political agenda that represents the interests of women.

Figure 2
Representation of women in the governing structures of parliamentary parties, 2021

Source: authors' calculations.

4

WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS - A CATALYST FOR GENDER EQUALITY?

Women's organisations in political parties can be a way to promote gender equality within political parties (Holli 2006, Kantola 2019), although some authors consider these structures redundant, overlapping with internal democratic arrangements of parties, and argue that, to increase the substantive political representation of women, a more nuanced approach to political parties regarding the role of women is needed (Childs & Kittilsson 2016). Although in some national contexts (i.e. Finland) these organisations have had a demonstrated positive impact on the political representation of women, at the discursive level there are a number of controversies and contradictions that undermine the legitimacy of these structures (Kantola 2019). Women's access to leadership structures and positions of power in political parties is a catalyst for gender equality (Cheng & Tavits 2011), although it is not in itself a guarantee of changing male political practices and the organisational culture of political parties.

Of the six political parties/organisations in Romania, four have articles on the presence/possibility of creating women's organisations. In the following, we analyse the attributions of these organisations (according to the statutes), the rights granted to them (if any) and then their activities and objectives, starting from their web pages and/or Facebook pages. We aim to see to what extent women's organisations are a factor that favours the descriptive and substantive representation of women. In this regard, we analysed posts on Facebook pages made during the 2019-2020 election campaigns: 27 April - 25 May 2019 (European Parliament); 27 August - 26 September 2020 (local) and 6 November - 5 December 2020 (Parliamentary).

Women's organisation - AUR (OF AUR). The AUR statutes provide for the possibility of setting up a women's organisation (art. 27, 1). The President of the Women's Organisation is a member of the National Steering Committee (art. 44) as well as the National Steering Bureau (art. 45).

There is no information on the party's website regarding the existence of a women's organisation, but on Facebook there is the official page *Women's Organisation – AUR*[4], which presents itself as a political organisation. The first post dates from 9 February 2020. The only information on the purpose and objectives of this organisation is summarised in the following sentence: »A page for women who care about the future of their

children and for those who care about everything they leave behind, beautiful and good!« From a post from 16 May 2020, we find out that the president of the organisation is Adela-Ioana Târziu Grăjdeanu (wife of Claudiu Târziu, co-president of the party).

Between 27 August and 26 September, the AUR Women's Organisation had a total of 33 posts, of which 16 were about women's organisations in Bucharest and Cluj, and especially about the promotion of AUR women standing in local elections: Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Sibiu, Deva.

Between 6 November and 5 December 2020, there were 48 posts, all related to the election campaign. Only 17 were related to the messages/interviews/posters/videos of the female candidates (Adela-Ioana Târziu Grăjdeanu, candidate on the AUR Bacău Senate list, and Simona-Teodora Roşca-Neacşu, candidate for the Chamber of Deputies, Cluj-Napoca).

In order to illustrate the position of the AUR Women's Organisation towards gender equality, we include a quote from Adela-Ioana Târziu Grăjdeanu announcing in a posting on 7 September 2020 her candidacy for the General Council in the capital:

> »For those who do not know me, my name is Adela-Ioana Târziu Grăjdeanu, I am 35 years old, and since the age of 16 I have been involved in civic, voluntary, pro-life and pro-tradition activities. I have degrees in law, psychology and theology/social work. For 7 years I have been heading the Cultural, Formative and Recreational Centre - ›Casa cu Rost‹ (The House with Meaning), a place where people return to tradition and beauty, parents and children, young and old learn crafts and activities designed to improve their quality of life, find support, a community of people with solid values and principles.«

PNL Women's Organisation (OFL). According to the PNL Statute, the Organisation of Liberal Women (OFL) »acts to encourage and promote women in all fields of activity, as well as to

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4 Cf https://www.facebook.com/Organizatia-femeilor-AUR-1081317 87429017/ (accessed 3 October 2021)

institutionalise, observe and implement the principle of equal opportunities in political, economic and socio-cultural life. (art. 48)«. On the organisation's page, it is stated that »[t]he purpose of OFL is to debate and analyse issues related to the policy of supporting women, children and families in society in order to develop programs and a strategy in the field.«[5]

During the campaign for the European elections, there were 71 posts on the organisation's Facebook page[6], most of them relating to the election campaign. Practically no post promotes female candidates, and their presence in messages / photos / videos is absolutely marginal. During the local election campaign (27 August - 26 September 2020) the Liberal Women's Organisation posted only four messages on Facebook, and during the parliamentary election campaign only nine posts (again, there were no posts promoting female candidates).

Florica Cherecheș, the president of the organisation since 2017, is also the vice-president of a county and municipal organisation of the PNL and a member of the Ecumenical Prayer Group in the Romanian Parliament[7]. On her webpage she presents herself in human terms: »I am a wife, mother of four children, and grandmother of eight grandchildren, my pride and joy! I love people, I am a fighter, a champion of new beginnings, both in personal and family and professional life. I love Oradea, Bihor and I am very proud to be Romanian!«[8]

The PSD Women's Organisation (OF PSD). The PSD Women's Organisation has the most extensive presentation (compared to other political parties) in the PSD Statutes (section 2 of the chapter on internal structures, art. 183-186), having as objectives the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities, family policies and children, but also »the promotion of women in the party's decision-making structures and for assuming public responsibilities and dignities«. Also, according to the party's statutes, the PSD women's organisation is assigned positions in all party leadership structures, with the president of the women's organisation at all levels being assimilated to the position of vice-president of the corresponding organisation (example art. 46, paragraph 4).

The Facebook page has a name different than the Statutes: *The Organisation of Social Democratic Women (OFSD)*[9]. The organisation was much more active on Facebook in the 2019 European Parliament campaign: 62 posts, most of them related to the election campaign. Most (22) are related to the electoral messages/visits of Rovana Plumb (candidate for the European Parliament). In the rest of the posts, the information and/or the message are about female politicians: Viorica Dăncilă (prime minister), Carmen Avram (candidate), Gabriela Zgoană (candidate) and Carmen Dan (minister).

In the local elections, the PSD women's organisation had only nine posts, most of them related to the campaign of Gabriela Firea (five), one of the party's vice-presidents and the incumbent general mayor of Bucharest at the time. The most consistent post (24 September) actually resumes the message of Maria Manuela Catrina, director of the Social Democratic Institute Ovidiu Șincai, calling for support for the political representation of women by the PSD: »182 candidates for mayor, over 200 county councillors, over 3000 local councillors, the largest number of female candidates the Social Democrats ever had«. The period of the 2020 parliamentary elections featured the lowest level of activity, with only five posts, all of them unrelated to female candidates' campaigns.

Regarding the president of the women's organisation, Viorica Dăncilă was appointed in 2019, after presidential elections, and was replaced in the aftermath of local elections in 2020 through a decision by the PSD National Political Council with Doina Federovici, who was elected to head Botoșani County Council. Doina Federovici never appears in posts by the Social Democratic Women's Organisation from the analysed periods, and her name does not appear at all on the PSD website as president of the women's organisation.

The UDMR Women's Organisation (OF UDMR). In the UDMR Statutes, article 38 lays down rules on the functioning of the Women's Organisation. The female representatives of the organisation »acquire in the local, county and central forums of the Union the quality of member, functions and the right of representation« (Art. 5). And, very importantly, »[t]he Women's Organisation may delegate a number of members equal to no more than 15% of the total members of the Assembly of Delegates« (Art. 25). According to the party's website, the organisation aims to promote women in public life.[10] The Women's Organisation of the UDMR has a page on the party's website where its leadership is presented: the president, Rozalia Biro, an executive president, nine vice-presidents, a communication officer and a desk officer (functions are not feminised).

Unfortunately, the organisation does not have a Facebook page allowing one to perform a comparative analysis with other women's organisations. Without going into detail (methodologically speaking there are data that simply cannot be compared), we note a series of media interventions by the president of the organisation, Rozalia Biro, who calls for women's seats in the European Parliament, as well as messages emphasising the importance of political representation of women and their interests.

In conclusion, women's organisations of parties, when they exist, can be levers for women's access to leadership positions in a party. According to the statutes of the parties, the women's organisation of the PSD and the corresponding organisation from the UDMR have ensured representation in all the leading structures of the party, and the president of the AUR women's organisation is a member of the National Bureau and the National Committee. The PNL women's organisation does not benefit from any representation in internal leadership structures. As studies to date show, the presence of women in leadership

5   Cf https://pnl.ro/organizatia-femeilor-liberale/ (accessed 3 October 2021)
6   Cf https://www.facebook.com/oflromania (accessed 23 December 2021)
7   Cf http://www.cdep.ro/pls/parlam/structura.co?cam=0&leg=2016&idc=235 (accessed 3 October 2021)
8   Cf https://www.fchereches.ro/despre-mine/ (accesssed 3 October 2021)
9   Cf https://www.facebook.com/OFSD-Organizatia-femeilor-social-democrate-126102207458164/ (accessed 3 October 2021)
10 Cf http://udmr.ro/page/despre-noi (accessed 3 October 2021)

positions and in decision-making structures related to the party's activity and objectives, electoral lists, etc., can serve as a catalyst for women's political representation. This may well be true in the case of the PSD and UDMR, which have statutory provisions ensuring women's organisations' representation in their respective parties' governing bodies.

From the analysis of the objectives as stated on the official websites and of the posts on Facebook from 2019-2020, several observations can be made relating to the way in which women's organisations support (or do not support) the declared and substantive representation of women. The clearest objectives in favour of an agenda that promotes women's rights and interests are assumed by the UDMR women's organisation, followed by the Organisation of Social Democratic Women. The AUR women's organisation promotes a conservative agenda and a family-traditionalist vision, without any reference to gender equality; thus the organisation is part of a conservative vision on the role and interests of women. We also notice an orientation of the agenda towards »familialism« and maternalism in the posts of the Liberal Women's Organisation, and marginally so in those of the PSD women's organisation. During the election period, all the organisations (except the one belonging to the AUR) had a more important activity in European elections (where, however, one sees the greatest decrease in the number of women elected) and an extremely low level of activity in the 2020 campaigns. The support of female candidates is visible in the case of the PSD women's organisation and the one belonging to the AUR, although this is almost non-existent in the case of the PNL women's organisation.

Informal discussions with a PSD member revealed that the women's organisation can play an important role, but the position of the organisation's president in internal power networks and her commitment to supporting women's representation greatly influences the presence or absence of actions in favour of women. Or, if we look at the posts and the profile of the presidents of women's organisations, except for Viorica Dăncilă, they are either quite absent or they actually promote a conservative, family-paternalistic agenda, where gender equality is not a priority. The women's organisation of the UDMR and Rozalia Biro would deserve a separate case study, our hypothesis being that in this case we are dealing with a women's organisation that influenced the political representation of women at the level of the Union.

5

FROM STATUTORY PROVISIONS TO THE REALITY OF LISTS AND ELECTED OFFICIALS

Recruitment and establishment of electoral lists is one of the processes that play a key role in understanding the political (under)representation of women (Bjarnegård 2013), and more and more research is trying as of late to analyse this. We must emphasise from the beginning that this aspect is difficult to explore, given that it remains very little formalised / institutionalised, is influenced by a series of informal practices, values and representations that transcend political parties and there is a low availability of political actors to talk openly about this process. The titles of the articles are often suggestive: the process of compiling electoral lists is called the »black box« (Kenny & Verge 2016) or the »secret garden« of politics (Bjarnegård & Kenny 2015). The adoption of formal selection criteria by political parties favours in principle the presence of women, compared to informal procedures based on a patronage system and networks (Lovenduski & Norris 1993). However, formal criteria can also contain and generate a number of gender inequalities (Bjarnegård & Kenny 2015): qualities that are masculine rather than feminine can be favoured (directly or indirectly) (Murray 2010) and can be generated by practices and norms (social and/or organisational) that are favourable to men (Lilliefeldt 2011). In addition to these criteria, there are all the informal practices and processes for encouraging candidates, for establishing electoral lists (including competition between constituencies and/or eligible positions) that generally require the use of qualitative methods (participatory observation, semi-structured interviews) and in which gender differences are very present, both explicitly and (especially) implicitly. Here are just a few examples: favouring positions and/or power networks in which women are much less present, late-hours meetings, the process of »reproducing« representatives by favouring those who already hold mandates (Bjarnegård & Kenny 2015), keeping the definition of effective political resources in male hands starting from traditionally male game rules (Achin et al. 2011, Guionnet 2013) as well as social and cultural constructions of gender on the whole.

Only the USR and PLUS have a separate chapter in their statutes on the nomination of candidates in elections, so these are the only parties that display a desire for transparency and institutionalisation/democratisation of candidate selection practices, which should encourage the presence of women (Lovenduski & Norris 1993). In the other parties, references to the appointment/validation of candidates appear only in the articles that talk about the prerogatives of the various leadership structures, in a fairly centralised organisation and with patronage-type power logics. Thus, in the case of the AUR, at the local level, the lists are approved or rejected (and in the case of rejection are decided) by the local Steering Committee; the candidates for the County Council are validated by the County Steering Committee, while for the national level the decision lies in the domain of the National Steering Committee (art. 36, 40, 44). The PNL statutes only refer to the candidacies for the position of President of Romania and Prime Minister (appointed by the National Council), the candidacies for the parliamentary and European elections as well as the candidacies for the positions of mayors of municipalities and county residences, sectors in Bucharest and the capital's mayor's office (candidates are appointed by the National Political Bureau and proposed by the National Board of Directors) (art. 81, 87 and 91). In the case of the PSD, the decision for local elections is taken at the level of local and/or county leadership structures (art. 61, 80). The County Political Bureau nominates for the National Political Council (which has the task of validating the proposals) the candidates for parliamentary and European parliamentary elections. (art. 80, 142). The UDMR assigns to the Standing Committees at local and county level the role of nominating and validating in the first instance the candidates for local and county councils and for the positions of mayors and county council presidents, but final approval is provided by the Standing Committee of the Union (CPU). Moreover, with candidates for the positions of mayor and county council president, criteria relating to electoral support and/or to the support of the organisations from the respective county are imposed (art. 23). Candidates for parliamentary and European elections are nominated by county organisations, but are approved by the CPU, which can make changes in these if two-thirds vote for this (art. 79). The USR has an internal voting system (in their local and county General Assemblies) for candidates for any position and electoral list (in local, county, parliamentary and European elections). Applications are validated or invalidated by the National Bureau, which must motivate any invalidation and has no right to nominate other candidates (Chapter 7). PLUS establishes by statute (Chapter F) both the eligibility conditions (art. 64) and the criteria for designating candidates: competence, moral and ethical probity, vision and program, electoral attractiveness, and ensuring the representation of both genders (art. 65.) The lists are established after consulting (without

specifying the exact method) the members of the organisations (at local and county levels). For county councils, parliamentary and European elections and the position of President of Romania, the final decision lies with the National Council (art. 66). *The Regulation on Local Elections* art. 8 (2) stipulates: »a 20% bonus is granted for female candidates, persons under the age of 30, persons of a different ethnicity than Romanian and persons with physical or sensory disabilities«.

Analysis of the formal criteria for establishing electoral lists shows that the most transparent and institutionalised provisions are to be found in the case of PLUS. Also, PLUS is the only party that lays down in its statutes the criterion of representation of both genders in the selection of candidates, and in the specific rules it grants bonus points (albeit reduced) having the effect of supporting women's candidacies. This combines with the fact that it is a new party, which means that the rule regarding reproduction of mandates does not apply, so PLUS should have had balanced electoral lists in terms of the presence of women and men. The USR has much less in the way of explicit criteria, without any provision relating to gender equality, and the principle of internal elections is not necessarily favourable to women, given that parties and the political game are dominated by men (it is worth recalling that, among the nine vice-presidents of the party, only one is a woman). The other four political parties/formations are more in line with the system of patronage, judging from the decision-making roles assigned to organisations at each level, but centralising power at the level of national bodies, especially in the case of parliamentary and Euro-parliamentary elections. There are no specific criteria regarding the selection, only in the case of the UDMR is it suggested for certain positions that conditions enhancing electoral attractiveness be created. All four parties have women's organisations, but the PNL is the only party that does not grant any right of representation in the internal leadership structures to women or women's organisation. The PSD is the only party that, in addition to granting the right to represent the women's organisation on governing bodies (a principle that also applies with the UDMR and AUR), sets internal quotas of 30% for all leadership structures. UDMR lays down quotas of 15% only for delegates to the Assembly of Delegates. The PNL has the least favourable status and procedures for women, according to the research presented above.

As we have shown in **Table 1**, representation of women in the Romanian Parliament increased slightly from 1990 to 2016 but registered a decline in 2020. A similar decrease was registered in 1992 and 2008, but Romania's political year 2020 cannot be compared with that of 1992, and in 2008 the decrease can be attributed to the changeover in the electoral system. Although the presence of women in the Parliament had barely reached 20%, a percentage that underscored male domination of the political sphere, Romania's entry into the EU seemed to have favoured the onset of an upward trend. Therefore, we view the decrease observed in 2020 to constitute a new phenomenon in Romanian politics, and one which begs explanation. In this context, a number of points need to be clarified.

The first observation is that, in terms of representation in the Romanian Parliament, we are witnessing two simultaneous

phenomena. On the one hand, there is a tendency toward harmonisation concerning the representation of women in the two chambers of Parliament. The first Senate in post-communist Romania had 119 members, of which only one was a woman – Lia Manoliu. The situation was not much better in 1992 (with only three female senators) or in 1996 (only two female senators). After having an almost exclusively male Senate, in 2020 a Senate came about in which the proportion of women was similar to that of the Chamber of Deputies (18.4% in the Senate and 18.5% in the Chamber of Deputies). On the other hand, however, representation in the Chamber of Deputies decreased significantly, from 20.7% in 2016 to 18.5% in 2020, a decrease of more than 10%.
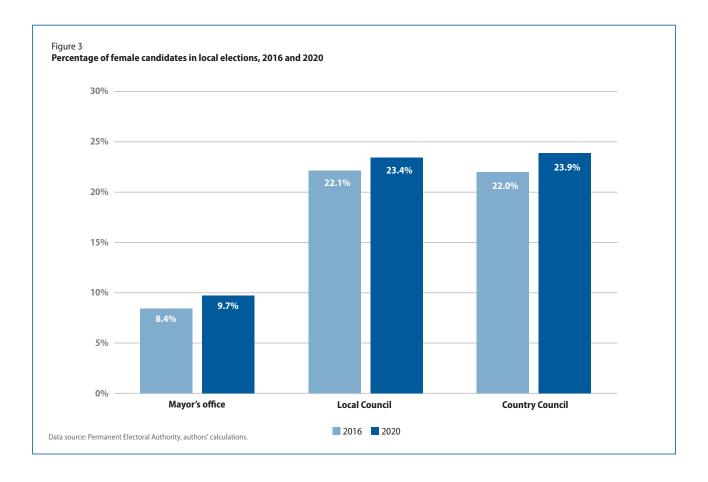
A second observation was already touched on at the beginning of this study: in elections to the European Parliament, the percentage of women plummeted from 34% in 2014 to 21% in 2019. And this decrease took place even though all parties represented in the European Parliament are directly aware of how important this is at European level.

However, a third observation also warrants mention: the decline observed in parliamentary and European elections has not been observed in local elections, where the percentage of female mayors increased from 4.6% in 2016 to 5.4% in 2020. However, data for the local elections provide more information, because we are talking not only about elections to the mayor's office, but also about elections to local councils and county councils, which generate a very large number of candidates: in 2020 local elections, the lists of candidates included 13,797 candidates for mayoral positions, 14,064 candidates for county councillor positions, and 227,786 candidates for local councillor positions.

Based on the lists of candidates, we can analyse the gender distribution of candidates for the three local electoral races (see **Figure 3**). Between 2016 and 2020, we can see a slight increase in the presence of women on the lists of candidates for all three races: mayor's office (from 8.4% to almost 10%), local council (from 22.1% to 23.4%) and county council (from 22% to 23.9%).

This distribution should seem familiar, as we see it in multiple contexts: women are accepted in greater proportions in low and medium-level positions, but as we approach the top of the hierarchical pyramid, the prevalence of women decreases. Just as the proportion of women is higher among secretaries of state than among ministers, just as the proportion of women is higher among lecturers and assistant professors than among full professors, just as the proportion of women in private companies is higher in *middle management* than on boards of directors, women are also more likely to serve on local councils than hold the position of mayor. We may also add that a political function at the local level seems more compatible with the need to reconcile personal life and a political career, so the »choice« of women to get involved in local politics is less in conflict with stereotypes about traditional gender roles (this being considered important or mandatory only for women).

Unfortunately, presence on a list of candidates is not the same as holding the position for which elections are organised. And we can verify this by analysing the results of mayoral elections,

Figure 3
Percentage of female candidates in local elections, 2016 and 2020

Data source: Permanent Electoral Authority, authors' calculations.

where we were able to compile a database for all mayors in 2016 and 2020[11]. Thus, while in 2016 women represented 8.4% of mayoral candidates, only 4.6% won the election. And in the last local elections, in 2020, women represented 9.7% of the candidates but were only elected in 5.4% of the races. Of course, an increase from 4.6% to 5.4% may seem important in percentage terms, but in reality, we are talking about an administrative function in which the gender distribution is, after 30 years of democracy, 5% women and 95% men. Some of the possible explanations for such a situation have already been mentioned above. One can add an additional explanation at this

point: even when women are included on the lists, they have a lower chance of occupying eligible positions.

To demonstrate this, we present in **Table 2** the proportion of women for each of the top five positions on the lists for Local Councils for the main parliamentary parties. This is, as we mentioned earlier, the first level at the base of the political hierarchy in elections. At the level of all parties and all lists of candidates, 23.4% of candidates are women. If positions on the lists were assigned independently of the candidate's gender, we would expect to see the same value for each row and each column: 23.4%.

Table 2
Percentage of female candidates in first place on lists for Local Councils by party, 2020

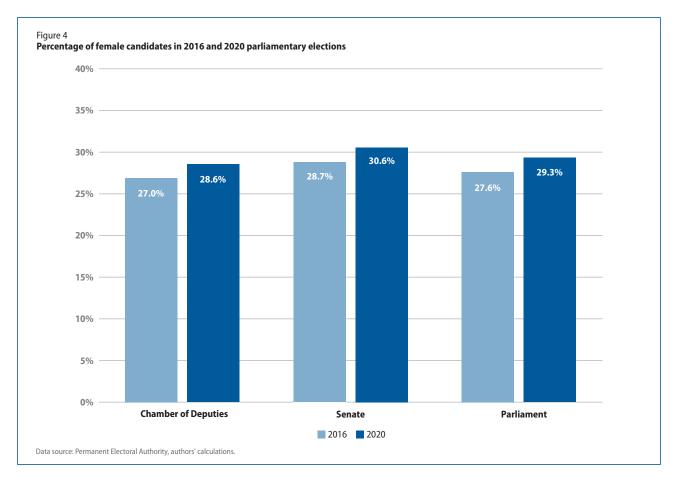| Position on the list	PSD	PNL	PLUS	USR	UDMR	AUR
Head of the list	8.4%	7.4%	18.4%	14.7%	12.8%	7.7%
Position 2	12.6%	11.7%	18.8%	20.4%	17.8%	12.2%
Position 3	17.2%	16.5%	27.9%	26.0%	22.0%	17.1%
Position 4	17.9%	15.9%	25.6%	27.5%	24.1%	16.6%
Position 5	19.0%	18.3%	25.3%	26.7%	23.5%	18.6%

Data source: Permanent Electoral Authority, authors' calculations. Notes: (1) Grey cells show that the proportion of women in that party and for that position on the list is higher than the average proportion of women on all lists at 23.4%; (2) For the PSD, PNL, UDMR and AUR we only took into account those lists where they ran with their own lists, not as local alliances.

11   Unfortunately, AEP does not publish aggregate lists of all local and county councilors who have won mandates, and compiling them would have taken longer than we had available for this study.

The data tells us another story, however: in all parties, women are under-represented in the first two positions on the lists for local councils. The greatest under-representation can be observed on the PNL lists, where only in 7.4% of cases is the list

led by a woman, followed by the AUR (7.7%), PSD (8.4%), UDMR (12.8%), USR (14.7%) and PLUS (18.4%). For three of the parties – the AUR, PNL and PSD – women are under-represented by comparison with the average for the first five places on the list. With the other three parties – the PLUS, UDMR and USR – the under-representation of candidates from the first two or three

places is matched by over-representation, by comparison with the average, for the following positions on the list. It should be noted, however, that for these parties, positions 3-5 tend to be ineligible (depending on the constituency), which may explain the higher presence of women in these positions.

Figure 4
Percentage of female candidates in 2016 and 2020 parliamentary elections

Data source: Permanent Electoral Authority, authors' calculations.

We now turn our attention from local elections to parliamentary elections, comparing the same electoral points in time, 2016 and 2020, from the perspective of the presence of women on lists of candidates and on the lists of those elected to the Romanian Parliament. The gender distribution of candidates in the last two rounds of parliamentary elections for each of the two chambers and for the entire Parliament is shown in **Figure 4**. We can observe the same trend in local elections: the presence of women on candidate lists increased slightly between 2016 and 2020, from 27% to 28.6% in elections to the Chamber of Deputies and from 28.7% to 30.6% in elections to the Senate.

As we mentioned in the case of local elections, presence on the lists of candidates does not automatically mean winning a seat as Member of the Parliament, this being dependent on being placed on an eligible position on the party list, a decision that is outside the influence of voters (data is presented in **Table 3**). What we notice in this case is that, although the percentage of women included in lists for Parliament increased between 2016 and 2020, both for the Parliament as a whole and for each of the two chambers, this evolution was not reflected in the percentage of women elected to Parliament: the percentage of women elected to the Chamber of Deputies decreased from 20.7% in 2016 to 18.5% in 2020, while the percentage of women elected

to the Senate increased from 15.4% to 18.4%. As a result of the small size of the Senate compared to the Chamber of Deputies, at the level of the entire Parliament the percentage of elected women decreased from 19.1% in 2016 to 18.5% in 2020.

The data on the position of women on lists for the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate do not provide a very clear picture and should be analysed in relation to the number of eligible positions for each list. Even so, it is worth mentioning the big difference between the percentage of female »head of the list« observed in the 2016 elections and the percentage observed in 2020 elections: in just four years the presence of women in the first position on party lists decreased massively. Thus, for the four main parties that won seats in Parliament in both rounds of elections, the following trends can be identified: (1) The PSD: The percentage of women at the top of the list decreased from 21% to 16% in the Chamber and from 18.6% to 9.3% in the Senate; (2) The PNL: The percentage decreased from 18.6% to 7%, but in the Senate it increased from 14% to 18.6%; (3) The USR-PLUS: The percentage remained low in the Chamber (9.3%), but in the Senate it decreased from 14.3% to 7%; (4) The UDMR: The percentage has been cut in half in both chambers.

Table 3
Percentage of female candidates in the top five places on lists for the Chamber of Deputies and Senate by party, 2016 and 2020

Chamber 2016	PSD	PNL	USR-PLUS	UDMR	AUR
Head of the list	20.9%	18.6%	9.3%	14.0%	---
Position 2	18.6%	20.9%	17.5%	27.9%	---
Position 3	32.6%	27.9%	30.0%	16.3%	---
Position 4	37.2%	32.6%	27.0%	20.9%	---
Position 5	30.2%	19.0%	21.9%	25.6%	---
Chamber 2020	**PSD**	**PNL**	**USR-PLUS**	**UDMR**	**AUR**
Head of the list	16.3%	7.0%	9.3%	7.0%	14.0%
Position 2	32.6%	20.9%	40.5%	30.2%	32.6%
Position 3	11.6%	18.6%	38.1%	30.2%	25.6%
Position 4	30.2%	34.9%	31.0%	25.6%	32.6%
Position 5	32.6%	23.3%	25.0%	19.0%	16.3%
Senate 2016	**PSD**	**PNL**	**USR-PLUS**	**UDMR**	**AUR**
Head of the list	18.6%	14.0%	14.3%	18.6%	---
Position 2	20.9%	30.2%	25.7%	20.9%	---
Position 3	32.6%	42.9%	61.3%	39.5%	---
Position 4	41.9%	29.3%	37.5%	34.9%	---
Position 5	20.8%	29.2%	25.0%	25.0%	---
Senate 2020	**PSD**	**PNL**	**USR-PLUS**	**UDMR**	**AUR**
Head of the list	9.3%	18.6%	7.0%	9.3%	23.8%
Position 2	30.2%	14.0%	28.6%	31.0%	34.1%
Position 3	55.8%	53.5%	35.7%	45.2%	41.5%
Position 4	23.8%	27.9%	41.0%	30.6%	35.9%
Position 5	37.5%	33.3%	39.1%	25.0%	42.9%

Data source: Permanent Electoral Authority, authors' calculations. Notes: (1) Cells marked in grey show that the proportion of women in that party and for that position on the list is higher than the average proportion of women on all lists in that year. (2) The AUR had not yet been formed in the 2016 elections.

The trend is clear: women were already under-represented on electoral lists (they accounted for 27.6% of candidates for the Chamber in 2016 and 29.3% in 2020). In 2020, however, compared to 2016, under-representation is accentuated by a much lower probability of standing at the top of party electoral lists. For two of the five parliamentary parties (the USR-PLUS and the UDMR) the chance of a woman heading the list is less than 1 in 10, both in the Chamber and in the Senate. For two other parties (the PNL and PSD) the chance of a woman heading the list is less than 1 in 10 in one chamber and less than 1 in 5 in the other chamber of Parliament. For the newest parliamentary party, the AUR, the chance of a woman heading the list was about 1 in 7 in the Chamber and almost 1 in 4 in the Senate. As with the lists for local councils, it should be noted that the prevalence of women on the lists is greater in ineligible places, while the eligible places are occupied mainly by men.

A special case, in 2020, is the AUR, which has a conservative-nationalist-orthodox political program, but a relatively large number of women on the electoral lists and also of elected women. Many of the women are in fact spouses / mothers / sisters[12], their presence on the lists thus lying outside the objective of political representation of women. Statements by the leaders of this group, who confessed that they listed family members because they did not have sufficient human resources, suggest a need for an additional case study on this party.

All the data presented so far indicate an under-representation of women in the political sphere, both in leading positions in a party and on electoral lists, regardless of the type of elections, and in the positions elected for various institutions (town hall, local councils, county councils, Parliament). In the next section we show that the situation reflected by these data is in line with the values of Romanian society regarding the role of women in politics in particular, and gender equality in general.

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12 See, for example, https://www.g4media.ro/dinastiile-din-aur-27-de-perechi-sot-sotie-tata-fiica-tata-fiu-mama-fiica-mama-fiu-frate-sora-frate-frate-pe-liste-co-presedintele-are-sotia-pe-liste-meritocratia-principiu-fundamental-in-pr.html (accessed 10 October 2021)

6

PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER ROLES, FEMINISM AND GENDER EQUALITY

Social representations related to the roles and characteristics of men and women, gender stereotypes and values, and beliefs generated by gender socialisation influence both the behaviour of women (who may be reluctant to enter politics, feel less prepared, think less likely, not manage to reconcile personal/family life with a political vocation, etc.), as well as that of men (who find in their colleagues male characteristics that they consider important for a »good leader«) and the electorate (who can have more confidence in male figures, precisely as a result of the incorporation of gender stereotypes). Much research shows that gendered practices and norms influence both the aspirations and opportunities of women and men. Therefore, all stages, from the »choice« to enter politics, to the »choice« to announce a desire to participate in electoral competition and to the »choice« made by the electorate, are strongly influenced by the gender contract in society (Lovenduski & Norris 1993, Paxton et al. 2010, Krook 2010, Bjarnegård 2013). Countries with traditional values of gender equality discourage women's political participation, both at the level of (male) political elites and the level of the electorate (Inglehart & Norris 2003). Also, both the adoption or rejection of the quota system and the general position on gender equality in politics are influenced by cultural norms surrounding the notion/value of equality (Davidson-Schmich 2006).

The factors that determine the political representation of women do not exist in a vacuum, but are influenced by the values, attitudes and beliefs of Romanians regarding the role of women in society, by what we call the »gender social contract«. For an analysis of these, we have used two data sources: the *Gender Barometers* conducted in Romania (2000, 2018), which provide an image of attitudinal changes in Romania over almost two decades, and the fifth wave of the *European Values Study*, carried out in Romania in 2018, which allows Romania to be placed in a European context.

The 2018 Gender Barometer shows that 43% of Romanians believe that family life suffers when a woman has a job and that having a job is a good thing, but what women really want is to have a family and children (44%); At the same time, they more or less unanimously consider that both spouses must earn money to support the family (96%). Social representations reflect a paradoxical juxtaposition of traditional family values and the acceptance of women's presence on the labour market, associated with a less traditional social status. This situation is also found at the level of public policy, where the labour market is dominated by a neo-liberal vision and logic, while family and childcare policies are part of a family logic (Băluță I. 2014).

Beyond gender roles at the family level, a comparison with the situation in 2000 shows changes in perceptions of the role that women can play at the leadership level in economic and political terms (see **Table 4**). While 20 years ago a majority felt that women were not sufficiently prepared, for various reasons, to take on leadership roles in economics or politics, now the majority reject such a perspective.
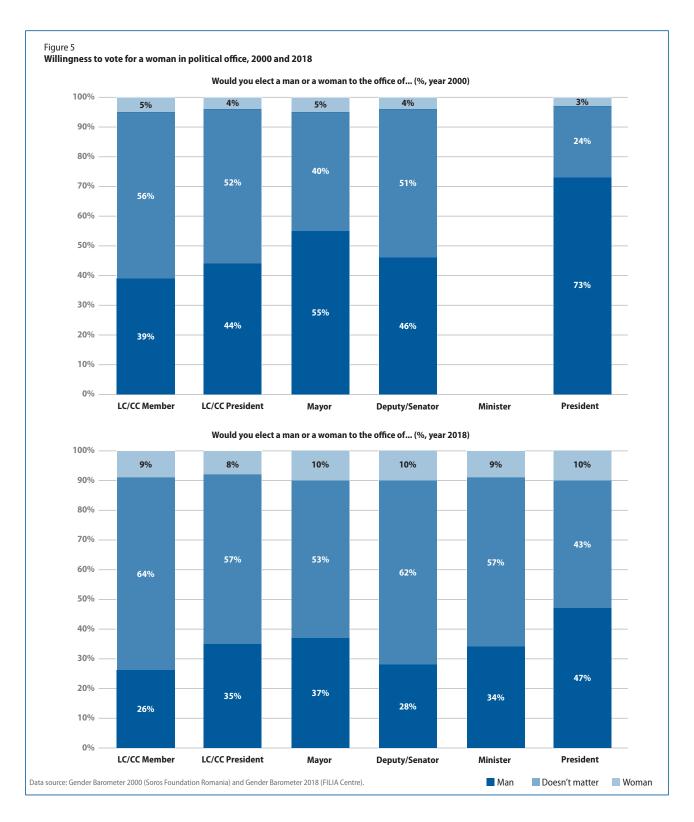
Table 4
Perceptions of the role of women in management

% agree with the statement that …	2000	2018	Change
Women are too busy with household chores and no longer have time for management positions	74%	46%	28%
Politics and business are corrupt and that's why women don't want to get involved	61%	46%	16%
Men are better able to lead than women	60%	46%	14%
Women are less united than men	54%	46%	8%
Women do not trust their strengths	50%	34%	17%
Women are afraid of great responsibilities	36%	31%	5%

Data source: Gender Barometer 2000 (Soros Foundation Romania) and Gender Barometer 2018 (FILIA Center).

These data are also corroborated by those in **Figure 5**, which also show changes in the willingness of voters to vote for a woman in public administration. If in 2000 less than 5% of voters would have voted for a woman for any position, in 2018 this percentage increased to 10%. More important, however, are the changes in terms of the »main« positions with regard to perception of importance – mayor and president. In this case the majorities have changed, from 73% who would have voted for a man 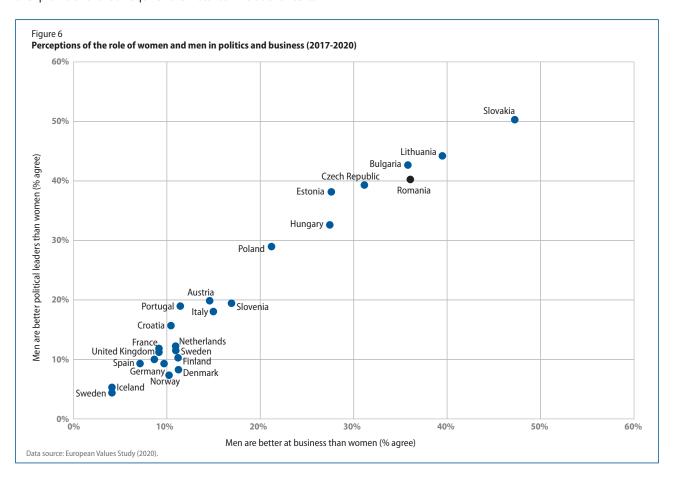as president to only 47% who would have taken this into account in 2018, and from 55% who would have voted only with a man for the position of mayor, and only 37% who would have done so in 2018. Except for the position of President of Romania, which is still seen as a position more suitable for a man, for all other positions most Romanians believe the gender of the candidate does not matter in their voting decision. According to these data, Romania in 2018 seems to have been slightly more prepared to accept women in political positions, but we must not forget that voters still preferred male candidates.

Figure 5
Willingness to vote for a woman in political office, 2000 and 2018

Data source: Gender Barometer 2000 (Soros Foundation Romania) and Gender Barometer 2018 (FILIA Centre).

Of course, the discussion on societal values and the gender contract is broader, with some contradictory aspects, and requires an analysis in and of itself. However, we note that there is a greater openness to gender equality in society, and an increased acceptance of women in decision-making positions (although the preference remains for men). By comparison, the political world seems trapped in a system that overvalues male politicians. The presence of women in political positions has decreased or, in rarer cases, has not changed. Women are included on the lists of candidates (in part also to comply with the provisions that require the lists to include a certain

proportion of women), but in rather ineligible places, eliminating from the start their chances of an honest electoral fight, in which they might be able to be elected to the positions they want.

The discussion about political representation of women in Romania must be placed in an international context in order to view the above changes in a comparative perspective. To this end, we use data from the *European Values Study* and have chosen as a comparison group the cluster of member countries of the European Union.

Figure 6
Perceptions of the role of women and men in politics and business (2017-2020)

Data source: European Values Study (2020).

Looking at things from this perspective, changes over the last twenty years in the role of women in society are less impressive. Compared to the other countries in the European Union, Romania's population still seems to support a traditional model, in which a single characteristic – being a woman or being a man – dictates what one has to do in life. Thus, 48% of Romanians believe that the role of men is to earn money and that of women is to take care of home and family, compared to only 26% on average in the EU or less than 10% in Scandinavian countries. Similarly, compared to the rest of the EU countries included in the *European Values Study* (see **Figure 6**) Romania stands out with large percentages of the population who believe that men are better political leaders than women (40%) or that men are better at business than women (36%).

The data presented here show that in the last twenty years Romania has become more open to gender equality, but is still at a significant distance from the way other European Union Member States relate to this issue. This situation is reflected in all

reports on gender equality at international level. We merely cite in this regard the *European Gender Equality Index (EIGE)*[13], where of the six areas that are considered to reflect the extent to which equality between women and men is achieved, the European average has the lowest value in terms of women's participation in decision-making: 54.5% (the general European average being 67.9%). Romania ranks 26th out of 28, with an overall score of 54.4%. The field of women's access to power registers the lowest score (37.5%), with political representation registering 41.6%. It should be noted that this value is for 2020, so it was based on data available before recent elections.

At the level of Romanian society, concerning the gender contract and societal values regarding gender equality, a more careful

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13   https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020 (accessed 10 October 2021)

analysis would be needed of the tension between traditional values (traditional family, the maternal role of women, the predominance of a heterosexual binary essentialist conception over family and gender roles) and the acceptance of the active status of women on the labour market, with increased recognition of their ability to practice vocations or to have »traditionally male« positions.

In recent years, identity issues have gained special importance in Romanian politics and we expect that in the coming years they will become a key element on the public agenda. The reason for this expectation is based on the current regional context (Hungary and Poland have for some time had conservative policies regarding sexual minorities, gender roles, marriage and abortion), the recent history of the main political parties in Romania, which have rather conservative positions on these issues and, last but not least, the presence of the AUR party in Parliament, which gives it a platform to radicalise the message on these issues.

Finally, also in terms of values and representations, reactions to gender equality and feminism (at the societal level) and to the introduction of political quotas (at the political level) are also factors that influence women's political representation. We would like to briefly highlight three elements, starting with existing studies.

First of all, gender equality policies were introduced/adopted mainly as a result of the process of accession to the European Union in a top-down manner, with at most formal support from Romanian political parties. Legislation is often vague or has no implementation rules, and the effective implementation of legislative provisions or objectives set by national sectoral strategies is defective, if not to say non-existent (Băluță & Tănăsescu 2018, Băluță I. 2014b, Băluță, Iancu & Dragolea 2007, Albu & Mocanu 2006).

Secondly, both in academia and in the public and political spheres, all three decades of democracy have seen a rejection of, and hostility towards, gender/feminist studies and the feminist agenda. For example, Frunză talks about the association of feminism with multiculturalism, both considered responsible for the abolition of the saviour, liberalism (Frunză 2010), and Miroiu offers a bitter rhetorical analysis of mainstream anti-feminism: »What feminist intellectual movement can there be when the great *gurus* of the nation, people with all the media channels open to them and with great public success remain steadfast in their anti-feminism?« (Miroiu 2006: 142). And in recent years, with the amplification of anti-gender campaigns in Romania, gender, gender equality, and gender studies have been portrayed as threats to tradition and nation (Băluță I. 2020,

Băluță O. 2020). At the level of political parties, at least for parties such as the PMP (People's Movement Party), anti-feminist attitudes predominate, including among female politicians (Norocel 2018). The analysis of Facebook pages of women's organisations also reveals an appreciation of traditional gender roles, with an emphasis on family (traditional) and motherhood/maternalism, sometimes with implicitly anti-feminist accents.

Finally, the various proposals and/or bills on the introduction of gender quotas have been rejected and have generated public and political debates that reflect hostility toward gender equality and feminism. For example, Sulfina Barbu's 2011[14] project was attacked both by party colleagues and PSD voices, being categorised as »feminist-Marxist«, »exacerbated communism« or »disturbing leftism« (Băluță I. 2015). The claim of gender equality is thus delegitimised and rejected by means of an association with an unacceptable ideological position in Romanian society since 1989: Marxist-communist ideology.

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14   PL-x 333/2011 on the introduction of a mandatory quota for women's political representation in the Romanian Parliament, which proposed 40% quotas for women on electoral lists. (http://www.cdep.ro/pls/proiecte/upl_pck.proiect?idp=12039)

7

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis of the data on the 2020 elections shows that, although there is a slight increase in the presence of women on the electoral lists compared to 2016, the final results indicate a decrease in women's political representation. Moreover, an analysis of the position on parliamentary lists shows a significant decrease in first place for all political parties that participated in the 2016 election (without suggesting that in 2016 the presence of women in eligible positions would have been balanced).

Table 5
Proportion of women among candidates and members of Parliament in 2020 parliamentary elections by political party

Party	% candidate women	% elected women
AUR	30.3	15.9
PNL	25.3	17.9
PSD	26.1	24.2
UDMR	27.1	10.3
USR-PLUS	27.4	18.8

Data source: www.cdep.ro, authors' calculations.

The percentage of women on electoral lists, respectively the percentage of elected women, show that political parties in Romania remain strongly masculinised institutions. In the case of the AUR, explanations for the relatively large number of female candidates are related to the establishment of electoral lists with a family solution (with mothers, wives and sisters of male candidates being used to fill seats), and hence unrelated to objectives like political representation of women. In the case of the other parties, departing from the theoretical literature and as evidenced by the factors analysed, we are able to draw some conclusions.

Although in 2020 the presence of women in PSD leadership structures, as well as the activity of the PSD women's organisation were lower, the existence of internal gender quotas, granting women representation rights through party statutes, the tradition of previous elections and an active women's organisation (such as under the leadership of Viorica Dăncilă) are factors that explain the persistence of the PSD at the top in terms of descriptive representation of women.

The USR-PLUS ranks second in terms of the percentage of women elected, although it is below 20%, i.e. at a fairly low level. Transparent functioning and the promotion of an internal democratic culture favour the presence of women; at the same time, there are important differences between PLUS, which is much more conducive to promoting gender equality, and the USR, which completely ignores this goal. It is interesting to follow the evolution of the new party, especially after the

congress held in September 2021, which seems to have favoured the PLUS team.

The PNL is the party least in favour of women's representation policies, with a more or less male leadership and a virtual absence of any women's organisation. However, the percentage of elected women places it in third place, a short distance behind the USR-PLUS. At 17.9%, it is slightly higher than in 2016 (16.16%), so there seems to be a sort of reproduction of positions allocated to women at work here.

The UDMR has a relatively recent tradition in supporting an increase of women's political representation: until 2016 women were virtually non-existent on lists and especially among UDMR MPs. The women's organisation was established in 2013, with the right to be represented in governing structures, which explains the greater presence of women in 2016 and 2020 elections. Although it is currently in last place compared to the other parliamentary parties, and compared to 2016 the percentage of women is slightly lower, we can say that in this case the women's organisation and statutory provisions helped boost the presence of women on UDMR lists.

Finally, the analysis of perceptions of gender roles and gender equality shows that at the social level there is a greater openness to equality between women and men comparing 2000 and 2018: a much greater willingness of the population to vote for women in various political offices/functions (except for the office of President). At the same time, also in 2018, although 96% of

respondents believe that both partners should work, 40% believe that the family suffers because of women's careers and 44% believe that women want a family and children the most. The paradoxical combination between neo-liberal values in the labour market (and not only) and conservative-paternalistic »familialism« (clearly reflected in family policies, although not only) is an element that deserves further study and can also explain the gap that seems to exist between a society more open to equality between women and men on the one hand, and political parties which even appear to be regressing in their support for equality. Last but not least, the predominant anti-feminist attitudes in all three post-communist decades, enhanced by anti-gender campaigns (with ever more diverse manifestations of this in Romania) are factors that may explain the decline of women's political representation in 2020.

What solutions could be adopted to improve the political representation of women in Romania? In the following we propose some recommendations in this regard.

First of all, there is a need for a careful review of the legislative framework: clearer provisions are needed, with implementation rules and sanctions designed to support the promotion of gender equality at the level of political parties and in the electoral process. At the same time, the aim should be to introduce gender quotas in electoral legislation and to encourage political parties to adopt internal gender quotas. Likewise, there is a need for legal provisions to ensure proper enforcement of existing legislation (e.g. ineligibility of voter lists that do not have any women).

Transparency of procedures and information, respectively the collection of relevant data, is another line of possible intervention. A legal obligation should be introduced for all the databases of the Permanent Electoral Authority to contain indicators of gender, age, occupation/profession for candidates and elected officials. Similarly, an obligation should be introduced for all mandatory reporting by political parties to contain data on gender differences. At the same time, there would be a need for the establishment of a National Observatory for Gender Equality aimed at the systematic and periodic collection of data, especially quantitative data, relevant to the political representation of women. Last but not least, these measures should be accompanied by the creation and enforcement of mechanisms enhancing the transparency of existing information at the level of political parties.

Finally, there is still a need for sensitivity, education and awareness-raising regarding gender equality in Romanian society. One could design activities to raise awareness on gender equality barriers targeting women's organisations and political party leaderships. Furthermore, it would be desirable to introduce topics on political representation, gender equality in civic culture classes in school, and to organise an annual forum on gender equality in politics and administration at universities, with the participation of academics, politicians/policy-makers and representatives of the associative environment.

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