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Gesine Fuchs & Beate Hoecker

## **Without Women merely a Half-Democracy**

The Political Participation of Women in the  
East European Accession States

The *Series Eurokolleg* addresses important aspects of the process of European unification. The aim is to illuminate the problems and policy options of complex European issues.

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## **Without Women merely a Half-Democracy**

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### **Introduction and Problem Delineation**

Alongside the institutionalisation of the rule of law and democratic procedures, a balanced political participation and representation in a society constitutes a fundamental prerequisite for a vibrant democracy. Therefore, the fact that women's participation in the political decision-making and opinion formation processes is only marginal, or at best mediocre, is a core problem for the theory and practice of democracy.

However, an enhanced or even equal representation of women in political decision-making bodies does not automatically mean that gender equality has been achieved. For this, the issue must enter the mainstream of political discussion and become an indispensable standard for every political decision.

The problem exists both in the older member states of the European Union as well as in the 10 new states that will accede to the Union in 2004: thus, the average representation of women in the present EU-15 states is 23%, while the corresponding figure in the European Parliament is 31%. These figures have hardly risen since the nineties. The political participation of women in the accession states is lower than in the EU-15 states, this being true both for the respective parliaments (16%) as well as governments (13%). Among the observers from the new member states in the European Parliament, women constitute a 15% minority. The political culture and mentality in these countries is not exactly conducive to the political participation of women. Besides, only a small section of the political elites of the accession countries perceive equality for women as a political responsibility. For the majority of them, gender constitutes a biological and not a social category.

In 1995, with Sweden, Finland and Austria – all countries with a tradition of gender equality policies – acceding to the EU, women's participation and the gender equality policy received a push (larger number of women commissioners, establishment of the Task Force of the Commission for Equal Opportunities etc.). Hence in an inversion of the same argument it may be feared that the accession of the 10 new states will induce a setback in the political participation and representation

of women, and in the policy of gender equality.

In its Copenhagen Criteria, the European Union set down the basic prerequisites for future accessions. Apart from stable institutions and a functioning market economy, new accession states are also required to commit themselves to compliance with the targets set down by the EU and to adopt common rules, standards and policies that make up the body of EU law. An integral component of this body of law (*acquis communautaire*) is **equality between men and women** and its active promotion, **to which the EU had committed itself in the Treaty of Amsterdam of 1997**. With this, the accession countries must on the one hand adopt and implement the **directives on gender equality** passed by the Council of the European Union, while at the same time build up **institutional and administrative structures** enabling the actual application and implementation of the principle of equal rights. In theory there is to be no accession without equality of opportunity. However in practice there have been and still are considerable problems in adopting and implementing the body of common EU law. If this was complicated enough in other policy areas, in matters pertaining to gender equality, resistance has to an extent been truly stubborn. Could one expect the new members to adopt the "gender *acquis*" when this is often realised only fragmentarily or to a merely modest degree even in the 15 older member states of the EU? And what can we hope for from the accession with regard to the political representation of women? Unlike in the area of employment, the European Union has so far refrained from adopting strong policies and directives in this area, confining itself instead to non-binding recommendations and resolutions.

In the following, the factors influencing the political participation of women are outlined and the situation in the Central and Eastern European accession states is presented. The latter constitute the majority of the accession countries, and are distinguished by their common history of the so-called real socialism. In addition, reference is also made to Bulgaria and Romania, which will be acceding only in a subsequent round of enlargement.

What are the reasons for these developments? What political possibilities and scenarios exist for a balanced representation of men and women in politics?

### Political Participation of Women: Modes of Argumentation and Factors of Explanation

There are various arguments as to why it is important and indispensable for women to influence political decisions. In political practice there is seldom a single argument that is advanced; rather, one encounters a mixed array of arguments.

**Arguments invoking justice** point to the fact that democracy also includes the right and consequently the opportunity for all groups in a society to participate in relevant decisions. Equality in political participation, they maintain, is an important criterion for assessing democracies, and in doing so, the systematic under-representation of certain groups is considered a problem. Besides there is no argument to support male domination in elected assemblies. The argument revolving around **women's interests** suggests that the interests of women in male-dominated bodies are being suppressed, obscured and marginalised. Irrespective of whether one could speak of "objective women's interests" or whether these interests evolve in a concrete process, the presence of women in political bodies – the

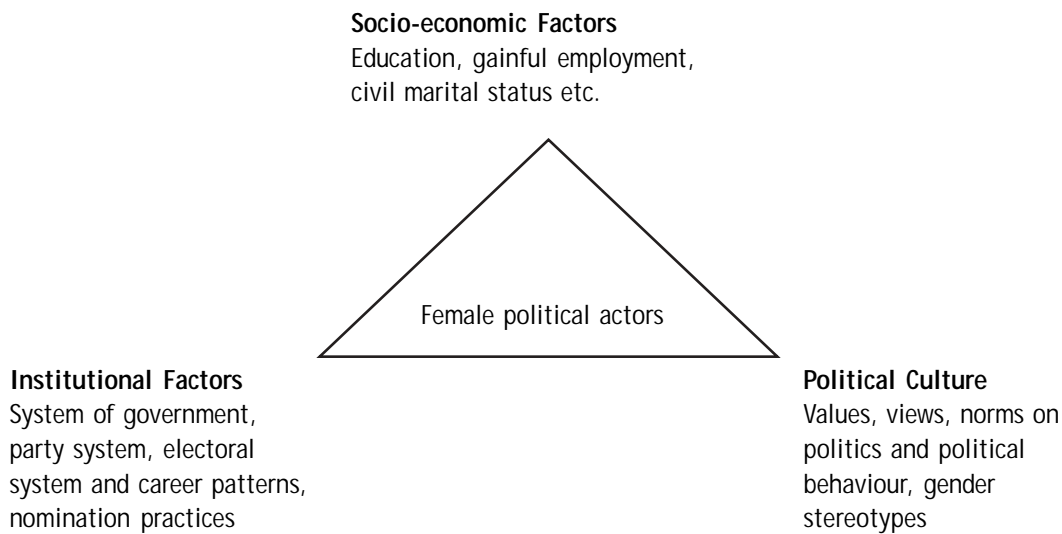
argument goes – is a necessary, though not sufficient, prerequisite for women-friendly policies. On the one hand, **emancipative arguments** refer to overcoming patriarchal power structures, while on the other point to the fact that the increased participation of women would improve the quality of democratic decisions, enable a better balance between participation and representation, as well as establish better links with the "grassroots".

Generally, current definitions understand "political participation" as all actions undertaken by citizens, both male and female, either individually or in groups, to influence political decisions at all levels of the political system, or to make such decisions themselves. Today one distinguishes between "**formal (or institutionalised) participation**" such as participation in elections or activities in parties and parliaments, and "**informal participation**", such as involvement in social movements or participation in political protests. The following remarks refer to the formal aspect of political participation, that is, participation in parties, parliaments and governments. However, it is important to bear in mind that informal participation in social movements and in civil society is essential for formal participation, for it sets issues on the political agenda, legitimises the presence of women in politics and can exert political pressure for increasing the representation of women in political institutions.

**Table 1: Arguments in favour of the political participation of women**

	Argument	Possible political strategies
<b>Equality and justice</b>	Women and men have equal rights to participate in political decisions and to influence them. It is unfair for one sex to monopolise the other.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- positive measures for promoting women</li> <li>- quotas for seats and candidate lists</li> <li>- creating awareness also with men, changing pre - set gender roles</li> </ul>
<b>Women's interests</b>	Since women have interests that differ from those of men, they must be involved in the political decision-making process to improve its quality.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- gender mainstreaming</li> <li>- building a women's organisation and working in it</li> </ul>
<b>Emancipation and change in the political process</b>	Since the patriarchal society produces a stark imbalance of power between men and women, these structures must be overcome through political actions to promote the development of a self-determined society.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- double strategy: engagement in movements and organisations against patriarchal patterns generates political pressure and is backed by parliamentary activity</li> </ul>

Figure 1: The magic triangle explaining the political participation of women



Source: Compiled by the authors after Hoecker, Beate (ed.), *Handbuch politische Partizipation von Frauen in Europa*, Opladen: Leske & Budrich 1998.

From the early 1970's until present feminist political scientists have criticised individualist approaches explaining the under-representation of women as being inadequate. Mainly they use a "magic triangle" (Fig. 1) to identify systematic linkages and factors that determine political behaviour. They argue that socio-economic structure, political culture and institutions are three interlinked factors that determine political participation. The actual line of action undertaken by female political actors will be influenced by these factors. Conversely, women politicians can, for a start, work to improve these conditions in order to enhance their representation and achieve their goals.

### Political Culture

The political culture of a country represents a core factor that influences the political participation of women. As the "subjective dimension of politics" political culture encompasses the entire body of politically relevant opinions, attitudes and values of the members of a nation, which are moulded and passed on in the course of political socialisation. Embedded therein are social orientations towards the political role of women and – linked thereto – views on women's participation in politics.

The assumption that countries with more traditional values typically have low female representation in their parliaments while on the other hand countries with a more egalitarian culture show a relatively high level of female representation is now largely confirmed by statistical evidence (see Table 2). The **Nordic countries** in particular are characterised by an **egalitarian political culture** that has paved the way for women's entry into politics as well as into influential decision-making positions. Only in the Scandinavian countries, with the exception of Norway, full civil rights were granted to both men and women at the same time. Consequently, from the very beginning democratic politics in these countries could not develop into a purely male domain. Moreover, **the influence of the Catholic Church, which is generally hostile towards emancipation**, is nearly absent in these countries since the Nordic countries are predominantly influenced by Protestantism. This is also true of the party landscape: women are far better represented, both as members and deputies, in the left, liberal and social democratic parties than in the right wing and christian democratic parties, which have conservative gender roles also embedded in their policy programme.

Whereas the political culture in the **Netherlands** as well as in **Germany is increasingly egalitarian in**

character, the remaining EU Member States reveal a political culture that continues to be **rather patriarchal**. Especially Portugal (franchise for women: 1974), Greece (1952) and Belgium (1948) stand out with their traditional attitudes towards women in politics.

### Socio-Structural Factors

Other important factors influencing political participation are individual prerequisites from the socio-structural realm, particularly education and The "socio-economic standard model" for political participation valid until today states a positive correlation between individual resource endowment and political participation. In other words: the higher the level of education, the more skilled the profession and the higher the income, the greater the chances of political involvement.

European surveys have shown that with an increasing level of education, the "gender gap" in interest in institutionalised politics decreases significantly. At the same time, subjective political competence is enhanced. Furthermore, employed women and men show a greater interest in political participation. Similarly, the representation of women in parliament is positively linked to the extent of gainful employment among women. The **Nordic countries** show a **generally high level of employment among women**, whereas countries with a medium or low level of representation of women in parliament are characterised by a medium or low level of female employment. However, even with an equal level of education and employment, women tend to show lower levels of political interest and subjective competence.

### Institutional Factors

Finally, institutional conditions also play an important role. This for one has to do with the **party system** (two- or multi-party system) and particularly with **patterns of political recruitment and career advancement** as well as with the **electoral system**. Thus, numerous studies have since demonstrated that systems of proportional representation foster the candidature and electoral prospects of women, whereas majoritarian electoral systems on the other hand, are less favourable.

The above ranking of parliamentary representation

**Table 2: Representation of women in the national parliaments of the EU-15**

Country (Election Year)	Total number of parliamentarians	Number of women among them	Percentage of Women MPs
Sweden (2002)	349	157	45,0
Denmark (2001)	179	68	38,0
Finland (2003)	200	75	37,5
Netherlands (2003)	150	55	36,7
Belgium (1999)	150	53	35,3
Germany (2002)	603	194	32,3
Spain (2000)	350	99	28,3
Austria (1999)	150	38	27,9
Portugal (2002)	230	44	19,1
Great Britain (2001)	659	118	17,9
Luxemburg (1999)	60	10	16,7
Ireland (2002)	166	22	13,3
France (2002)	577	70	12,1
Italy (2001)	630	62	9,8
Greece (2000)	300	26	8,7
<b>EU-15</b>	4753	1091	23
<b>European Parliament</b>	626	194	31

Source: Compiled on the basis of data provided by the Inter-Parliamentary Union

of women in the EU-15 again confirms this result: the three countries in which the national parliaments are elected on the basis of majoritarian systems of voting, namely Great Britain, Ireland and France, rank among the countries with the lowest proportion of women.

Lesser chances of women being nominated in the case of **majoritarian electoral systems** are generally attributed to a **strong candidate-centred orientation** of the system. Contrary to the list system, the electorate in majoritarian voting has to decide directly on one candidate, male or female, from the constituency concerned and unfortunately doubts

about the political competences of women still exist. In addition, the severe intra-party rivalry for safe constituencies reduces the chances of women for being nominated as candidates in the first place. Nevertheless, without the political will backing it, even a **system of proportional representation** does not guarantee a strong presence of women in parliament. To be sure, systems of proportional representation provide the **advantage of a quota system** guaranteeing a certain number of nominations on party lists for women, but these quotas have to fix a relevant proportion of the seats, have to furthermore be binding and explicitly reserve promising places on the party list for women. Unfortunately, these conditions are far from always being fulfilled by European parties; insofar even this form of positive discrimination does not automatically result in a higher proportion of women in parliament.

**France's experience** with its Parité Law is thought-provoking. This law obliges the parties to nominate as many women as men for single-member constituencies. Yet the proportion of female candidates in the last elections only reached about one fourth: the parties preferred to pay the penalties set down in the law rather than to nominate a sufficient number of women. On the other hand, countries such as Finland and Denmark demonstrate that the renunciation of quotas does not necessarily result in marginal female representation.

Thus, extreme differences in the level of political participation and representation of women may be attributed to the **distinctively national mix of cultural, institutional and socio-structural factors influencing the process**. Nevertheless, in comparative analysis, political culture turns out to be the most important predictor of participatory opportunities for women. A look at the accession states duly confirms this.

This insight offers an important starting point for pursuing a successful policy of gender equality both at the national and European levels, namely by contributing to a **change in attitudes** among both women and men, which implies greater receptiveness towards social justice and political equality. Even though the relevance of equal political participation of women for democracy has been recognized as being of essential importance, only half-hearted and mainly symbolic policies attempting to promote the participation of women have been accomplished so far.

## The Development of Women's Participation in Central and Eastern Europe after the regime change

In the course of the regime transformation, when parliaments and governments in Eastern Europe gained real decision-making powers and the old power centres in the communist parties disintegrated, the relatively high representation of women in these bodies was no longer guaranteed by reserved quotas and unified lists of candidates. The wave of free elections **at the beginning of the nineties** brought a **distinct decline in women's participation** in elected political bodies. Since the mid-nineties however, the proportion of women in the legislative bodies is on the increase again, though their proportion has remained static at around 10% in some countries such as Hungary or Romania (cf. Fig. 2). Still, politics in this region is often regarded as a dirty, corrupt and therefore useless business that is unsuitable for women. To a certain extent this may be attributed to the political culture characterised by the traditional antagonism of "state vs. society" that prevailed during the period of real socialism, namely the division into state and society, WE and THEY. Partially, this impression is owed to the dynamic political circumstances in the course of the transformation.

### Parties

Party systems in Central and Eastern Europe are still in a state of flux and heavily fragmented. Party identification and membership numbers are generally low. Party politics appears to attract only a few. Data on party membership in

**Table 3: Women in political parties in Central and Eastern Europe**

Country	Proportion of women in political parties
Czech Republic	25 – 50%
Estonia	29 – 57%
Slovakia	25 – 26%
Slovenia	18 – 33%

Source: Country reports in Hoecker/Fuchs, forthcoming

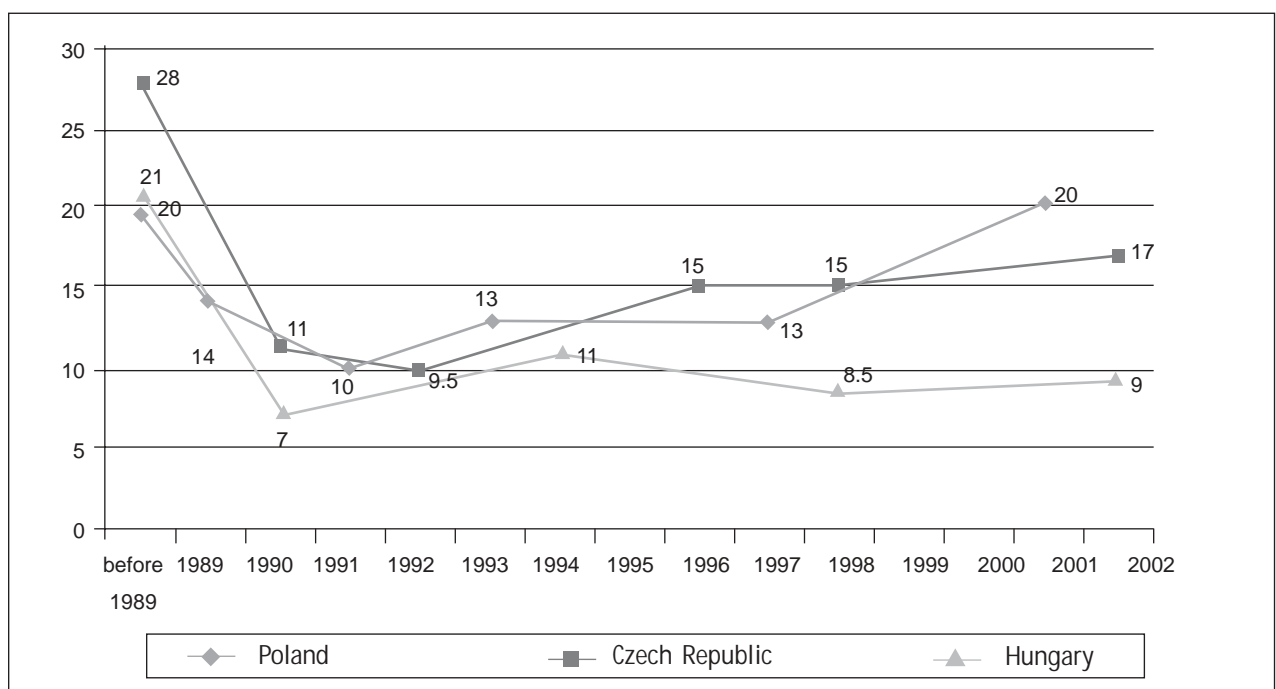
the region is scattered and incomplete. However, where data is available, **the proportion of women participating varies between one-fourth and one-third** (cf. Table 3). In some countries such as Slovakia and the Czech Republic, christian democratic parties report 50% women among their members. In general, liberal, left-wing and post-communist parties are more attractive to women than right-wing or nationalist parties.

Compared to their share of membership, women are under-represented in **top party positions** or party executives. We can observe the typical funnel effect: the higher the position, the lower the proportion of women represented. Where stable party structures are still lacking, there are for the most part no formalised, transparent nomination procedures for candidate lists. **Women's quotas** for electoral lists only exist in some left-wing parties in Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia as well as for party posts in the Czech Republic and Hungary. They were to an extent introduced under pressure from the Socialist International, yet constitute for the most part only a low proportion (for instance 25%). In addition, it is not determined in advance as to where female candidates are to be placed on the list. Furthermore, Czech women from the Social Democratic Party report that women predominantly only stand against one another while competing for party posts, thereby

fulfilling the low quota, but never extending the proportion of women beyond that.

In some Eastern European states, women's **parties** have been established. This is primarily true of the succession states of the **Soviet Union** ("Women of Russia" is perhaps the best-known and most successful party with a traditional, non-feminist agenda). Structural factors such as the presidential system and the personalised electoral system encouraged women to establish a new channel of influence in the form of their own party. In **Lithuania**, the first Prime Minister Kazimiera Prunskiene founded a women's party after she was stripped of influence by her former colleagues from the opposition; however she only succeeded in winning a direct mandate. In **Bulgaria**, Czar Simenon Saksoburgotski entered into an alliance with the anti-establishment Party of Bulgarian Women in order to quickly build up a nation-wide structure of well-known male and female candidates in 2001. In **Poland**, the coalition "Women against the Difficulties of Life" temporarily won a parliamentary seat. In **Hungary**, the women's party with its vague party manifesto and without any clearly defined target group is but a marginal phenomenon. The more the political parties are open to women and the more they provide opportunities to women for political involvement, the lower the need – so it seems – for a women's party.

**Figure 2: Women in the parliaments of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland since 1989 (in percentage)**





## Parliaments

On average, the percentage of women in the national parliaments of the new Eastern European Member States as well as Romania and Bulgaria currently stands at 16% - higher than in the new Southern Member States, Malta and Cyprus, but lower than the average of 23% in the 15 older EU-states. All the same, these figures are relative: Bulgaria has as many women MPs as Austria, Estonia as many as Great Britain and Hungary as many as Italy.

Where relevant data is available it can be seen that women parliamentarians tend more towards social or, so to say, "soft" commissions, or rather that they are pushed into these commissions, whereas committees for economic affairs or those dealing with basic state functions are dominated by men. Generally, there is an over-representation of women parliamentarians in the left or post-communist parties, but there also is a noteworthy percentage of women represented in populist or christian-fundamentalist parties – the League of Polish Families with women making up one-fourth of the party's total number of parliamentarians being a case in point. A change of government can open up possibilities for women. As mentioned earlier, the Bulgarian Czar Simeon Saksoburgotski co-opted the "Party of the Bulgarian Women" into his own movement

"Simeon II" in order to win the elections. It however remains to be seen whether Bulgarian women politicians will succeed in seizing this opportunity to secure real and effective power.

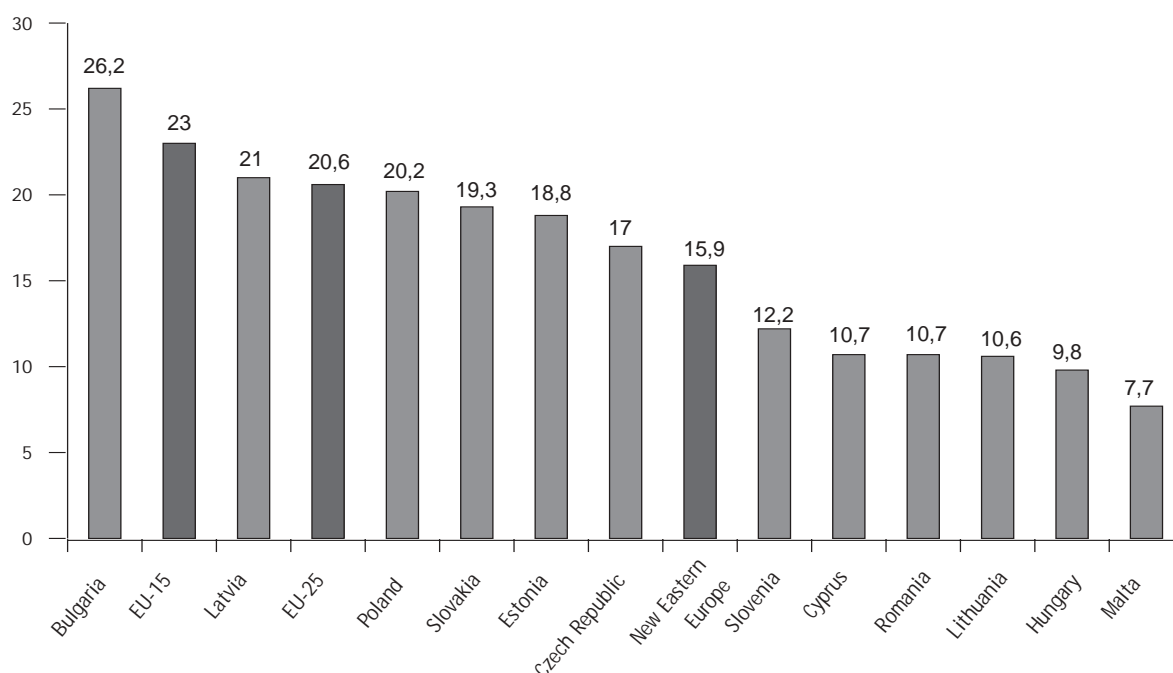
In the case of the **regional parliaments** and **municipal councils** (cf. Table 4) no discernable pattern has emerged in the region yet. But we can certainly observe the well-known funnel effect: the larger the community or town, the less likely it is that a woman will be elected mayor. Often it is the smaller rural communities that show a marginal proportion of women in their legislatures, while in the larger, more progressive cities, women sometimes achieve "Scandinavian" proportions of the seats.

## Governments

If we compare the situation of women in the national governments with that in the parliaments of Eastern Europe, then certain contradictions come to light (cf. Table 5).

On the whole, the participation of women in governments is somewhat lower than in the parliaments. Nevertheless, there are some countries with a strong minority of women parliamentarians –

Figure 3: Percentage of women in the parliaments of the accession states



such as Slovakia and Estonia – where no or just one ministerial post is occupied by a woman. At the other end of the spectrum is Bulgaria with a relatively strong representation: one-fifth of all ministerial posts in this country are occupied by women. Is there no systematic **connection between parliamentary and government elites?** One could hypothesize that the nomination of women as ministers serves as a good instrument of "symbolic politics" ("we are doing something"). Without any political crisis looming ahead and without any political pressure worth mentioning from below, there is no need to appoint women to government – equal share of political power for women can remain a mere lip service. This could perhaps also explain the strange decline in the percentage of female ministers by 20% since the beginning of 2003.

A good 50% of female ministers head "typically feminine" departments such as social affairs, health or culture. The other 50%, however, occupy posts like that of Foreign Minister, Minister for European Integration, Finance or Law. It indeed appears that gender competence stereotypes do not have as much of an impact when a woman is to be appointed minister as in parliament when women are nominated to committees.

The representation of women in the Eastern European countries may be ever so meagre and the

object of severe criticism from women academics in the individual countries, yet it must also be brought to mind that stereotyping in the EU-15 is far stronger and that it is very seldom that women there secure prestigious ministerial posts.

## Explanatory Approaches under Scrutiny

On the whole, the political role of women in the new Member States is only marginal and far away from a state of balanced representation. To what extent do the factors mentioned in the "magic triangle" introduced earlier account for this situation?

### Political Culture

The political culture in Central and Eastern Europe is often described as being predominantly paternalistic and elitist, this posing a tremendous obstacle to the political participation of women. **Traditional gender roles** are very much accepted in the region, but they also coexist with the **image of the working woman**. Socialism did not effect a change in gender roles but instead added the female socialist worker to the image of the traditional mother. Male roles in turn remained untouched or were strengthened by the image of the strong socialist industrial worker. All this converged into the reality of the 'Super-Woman and the Double Burden' (as the title of a book published in 1992 goes). Today, traditional gender roles are for the most part re-conjured by the media and by popular culture. Strong religious ties, particularly with the Catholic Church, have a negative influence on women being accepted in political roles. What is more, a **liberal-individualistic discourse** impedes the discussion on the structural disadvantages faced by women.

But on the other hand, traditions, values, and opinions are also always contended, they can contradict each other and extremely divergent norms can exist side by side in a society. In cases where extremely conservative values prevail, ways and means to confront them politically could occur. The egalitarian traditions widely prevalent in the region could contribute to this end. In large parts of society, social equality is a recognised value. Moreover, with the exception of Bulgaria, in all the countries with an above-average representation of women in parliament, the right to vote was granted to men and women at the same time after World War I in the course of national independence.

**Table 4: Proportion of women in regional politics**

Country	Regional parliaments
Bulgaria	23%
Estonia	28,3%
Latvia	63%
Lithuania	21,8%
Poland	14,4%
Romania	5%
Slovakia	n. a. (4,4% women mayors, 17,5% female village heads)
Slovenia	11,8%
Czech Republic	13,9%
Hungary	n. a. (5,8% women mayors, 12,8% female village heads)

Source: Country reports in Hoecker/Fuchs, forthcoming

Table 5: Women in the national governments of the accession states, November 2003

Country	Proportion of women represented in the government	Department	There are ... women than in parliament
Estonia	7,1% (1 out of 14)	Social Affairs	a lot less
Lithuania	21,4% (3 out of 14)	Finance, Social Affairs, Culture	more
Romania	9,1% (2 out of 22)	Law, Labour	somewhat more
Hungary	11,1% (2 out of 18)	Home Affairs, Gender Equality	somewhat more
Slovenia	17,7% (3 out of 17)	Culture, Regional Development, Economic Affairs	more
Latvia	16,7% (3 out of 18)	Foreign Affairs, Culture, Social Affairs	somewhat less
Bulgaria	23,8% (5 out of 21)	European Integration, Social Affairs, Environment, Economic Affairs, without portfolio	somewhat less
Czech Republic	11,8% (2 out of 17)	Education, Health	less
Poland	12,5% (2 out of 16)	Education, European Integration	less
Slovakia	0% (0 out of 16)	--	a lot less
Total Eastern Europe	13,3% (23 out of 173)	One half traditional, the other half spanning the entire spectrum	less
Turkey	4% (1 out of 25)	Without portfolio	as many
Cyprus	8,3% (1 out of 12)	Health	somewhat less
Malta	7,7% (1 out of 13)	For the island of Gozo	as many
Total (combined)	11,7% (26 out of 223)		less

This, again, points to the importance of historical traditions.

### Socio-Economic Factors

Women in the post-communist countries have profited immensely from the expansion in education in the post-war period, and this even earlier than their counterparts in Western Europe. Since the 1960s, young women are equally or even better qualified than men. Further, what was typical of the real socialist countries was the high rate of employment. This rate, however, fell for both men and women in the course of the far-reaching economic transformation, for instance due to longer

periods of training and early retirement, so that employment levels in the meantime have dropped below the average for the EU-15.

The gender gap in employment and unemployment is generally less pronounced than with the EU-15 since the activity rate for men in the new Member States is below average (cf. Table 6). On the whole, as regards the "socio-economic standard model", this provides good preconditions for the political participation and representation of women. But on the other hand, the employment structure in these countries is highly gender-segregated, with women clearly dominating in the badly paid professions with low prestige in the health, education and social welfare sectors. Income differences between women and men are far higher in Central and

**Table 6: Activity rates and unemployment rates among women and men in the accession states (in percent)\***

Country	Activity rate		Unemployment rate	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Bulgaria	57,5	66,4	17,4	18,7
Estonia	64,4	74,6	8,4	9,8
Latvia	63,9	74,1	11,8	13,7
Lithuania	65,8	62,7	13,0	13,3
Poland	58,7	70,6	20,9	19,1
Romania	56,6	70,4	6,6	7,3
Slovakia	63,2	76,7	18,8	18,4
Slovenia	63,0	72,5	6,4	5,7
Czech Republic	62,8	78,7	9,0	5,9
Hungary	52,9	67,7	5,1	6,0
The New Ten**	59,5	72,3	15,6	14,2
EU-15	60,9	78,4	8,7	6,9
EU-25	60,7	77,4	9,9	8,0

\* For women and men between 15 and 64 years. Source: Commission of the European Communities: Employment in Europe 2003, Luxembourg 2003.

\*\* Without Bulgaria and Romania, but including Malta and Cyprus

Eastern Europe than in the West. Women here more often lack professional resources they can mobilise as well as important networks that come along with top professional management posts. Yet, where women succeed in reaching the top professional levels, they can make the transition to top political positions through the practical recruitment policies of political parties. This has been demonstrated in the case of Bulgaria. On the whole the point to be noted is: although women in the region are well-educated, they are at a disadvantage due to other socio-economic factors.

### Institutional Factors

The region has witnessed the development of **multi-party systems** with systems of proportional representation. Comparative analyses from the 80s and 90s have shown that the system of proportional representation supports the representation of women. In elections under the system of proportional representation, it is more the party that is elected rather than the person, therefore the parties have an interest in presenting a balanced ballot

that draws votes from various sections of society. It is more for this reason that women are nominated. However, a fair and transparent process of nomination is only possible where party structures are stable. The usual party practice is to assign the top positions on the ballot predominantly to men, even if women constitute a relatively high proportion of the members. Women, if at all nominated, often find themselves relegated to less secure positions towards the bottom of the list.

In some countries it is possible to cast a **preferential vote**, that is to say, voters can vote for a certain person on the list. This way, voters can make a more specific choice. This practice of preferential votes has varying consequences for women: while women in Latvia, for instance, are "pushed down" the list, they are often "moved up" in Poland and their chances of being elected are greater than those of their male colleagues. Recent research comparing the effects of the varying electoral systems – majoritarian and proportional representation – in the countries of Eastern Europe (Hungary, Ukraine, Russia) shows that women need not necessarily fare worse than men in majoritarian voting where the personality component plays a dominant role.

This constitutes an important argument in favour of preferential votes. Thus, it is not left to the parties to decide through their nomination procedure – however transparent and formal it may be – which of the candidates has realistic chances of being voted in. Rather it is left to the electorate to decide. Fixed quotas may provide a solution, but they have only been adopted in a few left or social democratic parties as watered-down versions. Apparently, in the other political camps they still stand discredited, with references being made to experiences with quotas in real socialism.

Besides the electoral system, political recruitment and career patterns constitute another important institutional factor. Such patterns also discriminate against women in the Eastern European accession states and favour men. Thus, availability is an important prerequisite for full-time political activity. But women are not always available, for they have a double burden to bear and must show their party colleagues and the general public that their children - or their husbands' laundry for that matter - do not suffer neglect on account of their political engagement.

Informal male networks have considerable power and are exclusive. A blatant form of sexism can be observed in political conflict which often seeks to damage personal integrity. In this connection, further studies on the divergent career paths of male and female politicians in the states undergoing transformation are desirable.

### Scope for Political Action to Increase the Political Participation of Women

At all levels of the magic triangle there are avenues for action open to political actors, both male and female, that are aimed at increasing women's participation in politics. In this process, short and long-term measures are combined to advantage.

Without doubt, the task that is widest in scope and most long-term in its intent is contributing to a **change of attitude** to encourage potential female political actors, thereby positively influencing political culture. Measures to break down stereotypes in the media, campaigns to create gender sensitivity and focused political education are among the courses of action needed to achieve this end.

However, without **social pressure** and the promotion of these new values from civil society, by

women's organisations and progressive party members, this task cannot be achieved. Parties can make an active contribution essentially in a second area relating to institutional factors: apart from mobilising and supporting women politicians, they can contribute to an increased involvement and election of women by **binding quotas**. Likewise, **statutory regulations** for designing lists and nominating a certain percentage of women are also useful mechanisms. Negotiations for acceptance into the European Union illustrate quite well the struggle of the implementation of institutional rules that pertain to gender equality policy. On the whole, the adoption of the "gender acquis" is expected to improve the socio-economic position of women, strengthen their social and political engagement and formulate political measures for both women and men in a way that ensures greater gender equality (cf. Fig. 4).

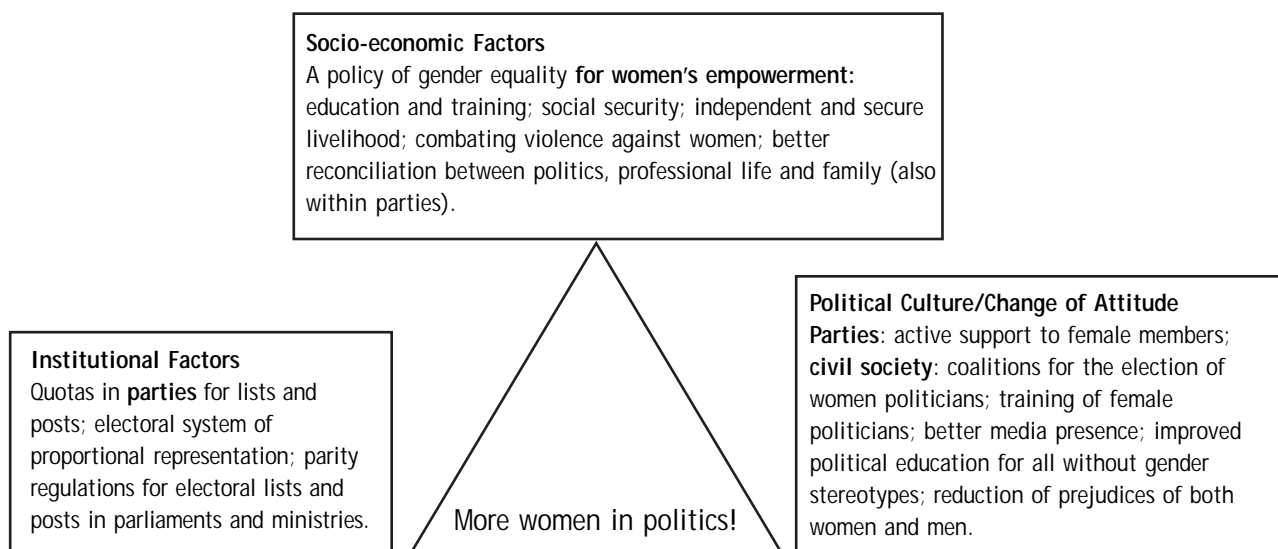
The following sections are devoted to the experience gained so far with these avenues of action. In view of the forthcoming elections to the European Parliament, they will also highlight possible prospects.

### The Accession Process and the Gender Equality Policy of the European Union

To date there are **no legal instruments** that make a **balanced political representation** of women and men mandatory within the EU and its Member States. For this reason, the accession will not have a direct impact on the political participation of women.

The situation, however, is different in the case of the gender equality policy, which rests on three pillars and is of a binding nature primarily in **the area of gainful employment** (cf. Fig. 5). Today 10 directives form part of this policy in the area of the so-called secondary law: the directive against discrimination, access to employment and to social security, maternity protection and parental leave, whereas the European Court of Justice has first and foremost addressed the issues of equal pay and indirect discrimination in concrete terms. At present a draft for a new directive is being discussed, which is to ban discrimination in the access to services. Relevant here are, among others, insurance services. The second pillar is constituted by various action programmes such as the framework programmes for equal opportunities or the programme for combatting violence against women, Daphne. Finally, the third pillar consists of **gender mainstreaming**, which the Commission in 1996 declared

Figure 4: Measures for enhancing the political participation of women



to be a binding obligation across the entire range of its policies. Gender mainstreaming is the systematic integration of gender-related issues (priorities, needs, impacts) in all policy areas and government institutions in order to support equality between men and women. The concept is demanding and requires several preconditions. Its implementation in the individual countries and its integration into the policies of the EU varies greatly.

*"Gender mainstreaming entails the re-organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of decision-making processes in all policy areas and fields of work of an organisation. The objective of gender mainstreaming is to bring in the gender perspective into all processes of decision-making and utilise all decision-making processes for the realisation of equality between the sexes" [Barbara Stiegler: Wie Gender in den Mainstream kommt: Konzepte, Argumente und Praxisbeispiele zur EU-Strategie des Gender Mainstreaming (How Gender enters the Mainstream: Concepts, Arguments and Practical Examples of the EU Strategy on Gender Mainstreaming), Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Bonn 2000, p.8].*

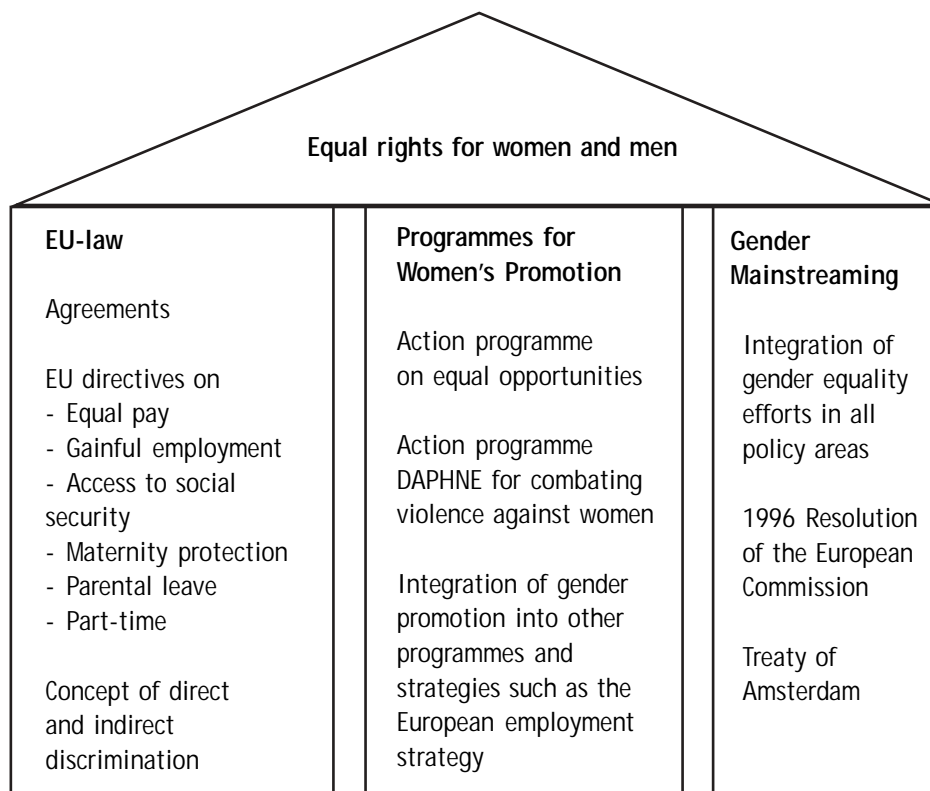
Nevertheless, during the accession negotiations gender-related issues or gender mainstreaming neither appeared in important documents such as the Agenda

2000 nor in the so called Law-Screening, which was used to indicate beforehand the extent to which national legislation would need to be adjusted to EU law. If the candidates delayed adopting the "gender acquis" or even refused to adopt it temporarily, they were only mildly and briefly reproached, as has for instance been documented in the **Progress Report 2001 for Poland:**

"Further work is also required to align Poland's legislation with the acquis on equal treatment for women and men."

Thus, though all **EU directives** have technically been transposed into **national law, regulations for implementation** are often either inadequate or altogether lacking. The implicit message of the accession negotiations was clear: equal rights for women and men, whether in politics or in the professional life, are not so important. This is, at least in part, attributable to the fact that gender mainstreaming and the principle of equal rights are poorly anchored in the Enlargement Directorate-General IA. Given the fact that the European Convention (the convention designing a constitution for Europe) had a 84% male component and that the standards represented by the Amsterdam Treaty were incorporated into the draft constitution only as result of lobbying by women's organisations, it seems unwarranted to speak of "achievements" or an "acquis communautaire" in gender equality: nothing here may be taken for granted, nothing has been achieved for the long-term.

Figure 5: The pillars of the EU gender equality policy



On the other hand, negotiations for accession have set off a **process of politicisation of Eastern European women's organisations** and women parliamentarians. Increasingly, these organisations have come to realise that the EU with its *acquis* and its policies could provide a political opportunity structure for them to pursue and legitimise their own agenda. Depending on what had so far been achieved in the respective country, the usefulness of the *acquis* has been variously assessed: thus Slovenian women tended to be more sceptical and feared an attack on the high social standards already achieved, whereas for Polish women, on the other hand, the reference to standards prevailing in the EU proved to be a core line of argumentation.

Only thanks to the political pressure and joint action between NGOs, civil society and lobby groups of the accession states on the one hand and those of the EU-15 on the other, the implementation of the gender equality directives has not been postponed in favour of a "quick accession". Women's groups and organisations now have the opportunity to utilize these existing networks for political demands and campaigns aimed at increasing the political participation of women.

What were the strategies and mechanisms for a

gender equality policy available in the accession states on the eve of their accession on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2004 (cf. Table 7)?

The resources a national "gender equality machinery" is actually endowed with are heavily dependent on the political situation, with a change of government having a disproportionately large impact on powers and structures, since gender equality institutions are looked upon as some sort of "ideological battleground". Lack of funds and a low degree of authority can render institutions that technically exist useless and ineffectual in practical implementation.

Even if what has actually been achieved does not measure up to the expectations, hopeful developments for a gender equality policy and gender mainstreaming have emerged during the bilateral preparations for participation in the action programmes, for instance with the Joint Inclusion Papers and the Joint Assessment Papers on the European Employment Strategy.

The more the EU is perceived as a system of multi-level governance, the easier it will be for women's organisations and networks to set realistic goals. Infusing the existing regulations of the EU gender

**Table 7: Gender equality policy in the accession states as of early 2003**

<b>Romania</b> <b>Malta</b> <b>Cyprus</b>	<b>Lack of or poor basic instruments</b> The gender acquis has only been partially adopted (ROM) or adopted without any structures for implementation (MT, CYP); Only Malta has a gender equality secretariat in its Social Affairs Ministry, whereas Romania has a weak consultative body and a department in its Ministry of Social Affairs.
<b>Bulgaria</b> <b>Latvia</b> <b>Czech Republic</b> <b>Bulgaria</b> <b>Hungary</b> <b>Slovakia</b>	<b>Fairly strong instruments</b> Concepts for an equal opportunity policy have been postulated by the government (Bulgaria: Gender Equality Act passed) but not implemented, or rather, no funds have been allocated to do so. Departments for consultation and coordination of gender equality have been set up primarily in the labour and social affairs ministries.
<b>Estonia</b> <b>Poland</b> <b>Slovenia</b> <b>Lithuania</b>	<b>Strong instruments for a gender equality policy</b> A Gender Equality Law (LIT, SLO) exists or there are advanced drafts for the same (PL, EST). Non-partisan women's groups in the parliaments (except for SLO). Departments for consultation and coordination of gender equality instruments have been set up primarily in the labour and social affairs ministries. A separate office for equal opportunities has been instituted with the government (in EST under the social affairs ministry).

Factors considered: degree to which the "gender acquis" is implemented, existence of a government concept for equal opportunities, laws for gender equality, parliamentary institutions for equal opportunities, institutional anchoring, and powers vested in monitoring, coordination and implementation authorities as well as their cooperation with NGOs.

Source: Hoecker/Fuchs, forthcoming.

equality policy with life and insisting on their implementation will remain an on-going task. The greater the success in improving the structural conditions therewith, the greater the chances of ensuring balanced participation and representation of both sexes.

### **"Vote for Women!" – Coalitions for the Election of Women**

In Eastern Europe, demands for an enhanced presence and participation of women in politics didn't come from female party members or politicians themselves, although their share had declined drastically after the transition. The issue was raised rather by **women's organisations and movements** in the region, which were slowly developing. In other words, the impulses emanated from civil society groups which sought to influence political society in a constructive way. In many cases, women's organisations deal with practical gender needs, that is, issues of immediate concern in these countries, such as female poverty, the labour market, violence against women and women's rights. Some organisations concluded from this work that direct

influence on political decisions and correspondingly a better women's representation is necessary. Since the late 1990's, the region has witnessed the emergence of various **committees for the election of women**, as for instance in Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Estonia.

The idea of a women's election committee, which calls for the nomination and election of female candidates irrespective of their party affiliation, comes from Croatia where the non-governmental organisation "Babe – Be active, Be emancipated" initiated the first such action programme in 1997. After similar women's election coalitions went into action, the percentage of women members in the Polish parliament rose from 13% to 20.2% in 2001, while in Slovakia there was an increase from 12.7% to 19.3% in 2002. The dissemination of this idea clearly shows the importance of **international networking** which is realised through regional coalitions such as KARAT and which receives at least start-up financing from foreign foundations. A feature of such coalitions is the strict division between coalition members and the female candidates in order to increase the integrity of the coalition and the credibility of its agenda. This is particularly important in a field such as politics which is often perceived as being



corrupt and where each is striving to secure the maximum possible benefit for him- or herself.

These coalitions raise **demands on various levels**. They call upon parties to introduce quotas for nominations and for the arrangement of lists, and to encourage women to take up party work in increasing numbers. Parliamentarians who are well-disposed towards such coalitions introduce bills for electoral laws in parliament, which provide for a minimum presence of both sexes on the list of candidates, or are modelled on the French Parité Law. However, at the forefront of their efforts is the exceptionally strong appeal they send out to the voters, both male and female, to vote for women and basically to vote for them irrespective of their party affiliations. Thus, if the electorate takes the matter into its own hands, it can get round party structures that are hardly conducive to the greater representation of women. A prerequisite for such a strategy are personalised electoral systems or preferential voting, that is, the possibility of voting for specific individuals on the party list, of listing a female candidate even twice and striking another off the list etc. Such regulations are part of the electoral systems of the majority of the Eastern European accession states. (In Germany such options are available only in some of the federal states, the "Bundesländer", with the proportion of women in parliament otherwise being decided by the party's nomination assembly in conjunction with the results of the individual parties in the elections).

The arguments put forth by the women's election coalitions reveal a combination of primarily two **modes of reasoning in support of the political participation of women** (cf. Table 1, p.5). The election of women is a matter of equality and justice. But to achieve this, existing discriminations must be fought, which is why certain gender-specific political demands have been made. Thus, in 2001, the **Polish women's election coalition**, for instance, called for quotas for political bodies, an anti-discrimination law, speedy harmonisation of Polish law with EU legislation and effective mechanisms against discrimination on the labour market, adoption of a law to provide protection against violence in the family, at the workplace and in social life, protection of the family through the creation of mechanisms for sharing and dividing family rights and obligations in a spirit of partnership, sex education, a Pro Choice legislation or at least the re-introduction of social grounds for an abortion. The **methods of campaigning** employed by these coalitions are for the most part tried and tested election campaign methods

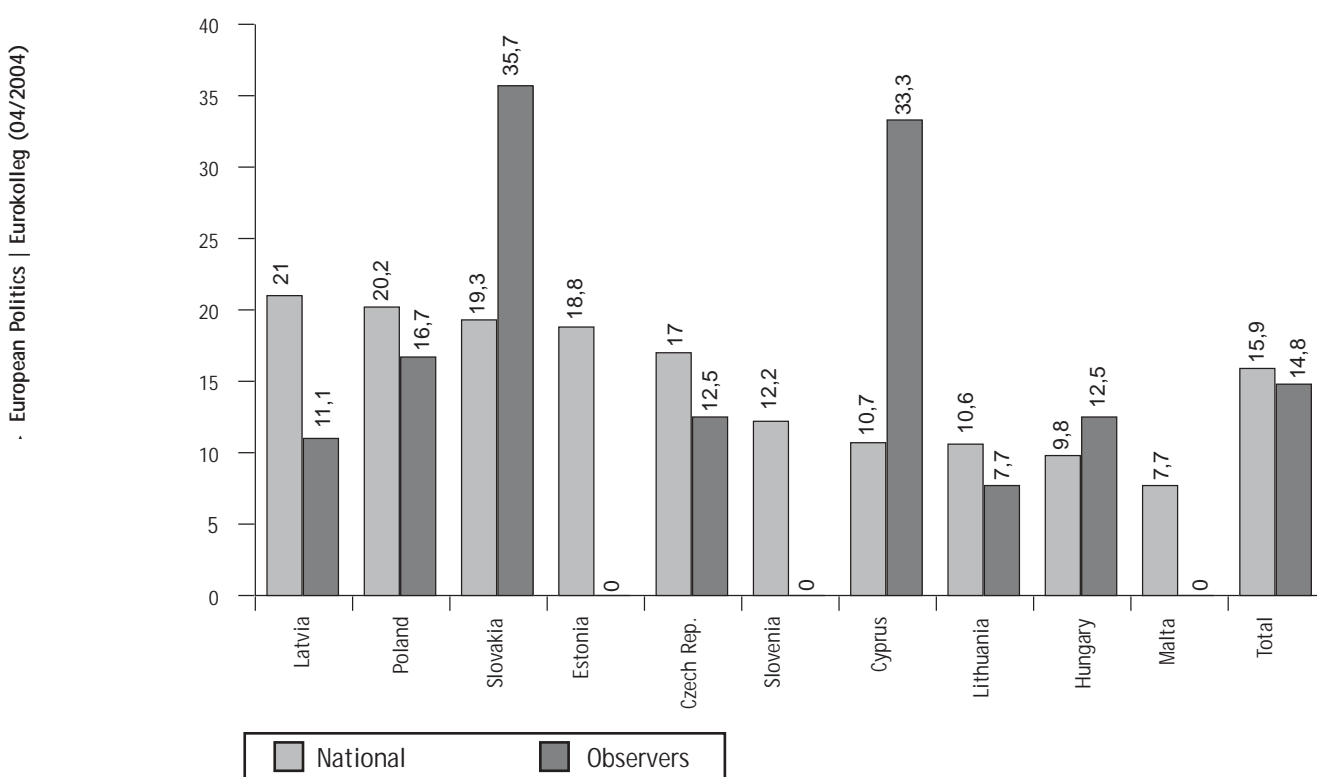
also employed by political parties. The demands made by these coalitions are disseminated through various channels such as the Internet and publications, through intensive contacts with the media, through posters and stickers. "Election touchstones" are also deployed: voters are asked to grill their candidates and only vote for those who have proved to be pro-women and pro-gender equality. Then, finally, there is also the classic panel discussion during which the candidate is sounded out. And last but not least, there is the long-term and enduring instrument of training (future) women politicians, particularly from distant areas or smaller towns. The issues covered by this training range from information on political institutions through preparing meetings to grooming future female politicians for an assured appearance before the media. Such measures of classical political education are to be more vigorously supported in future.

#### **Prior to the European Elections of 2004**

In June 2004, for the first time all 25 EU Member States will come together to elect a parliament – a joint act that constitutes a significant step in the process of mental and political-cultural integration. The elections mark a first test for the further development of equality between the sexes in an enlarged Union. With a share of 31% among the members of the European Parliament, the representation of women here is on the whole better than in the national parliaments. Thus, for instance, 40% of the French members in the European Parliament are women as against 12% in the National Assembly. Although there is no uniform electoral system for the European Parliament, elections everywhere (except in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland) are on the basis of the **proportional representation system**. Way back in 1998, the EP had adopted certain basic principles for a common electoral system. However, there has been opposition from Great Britain which does not want to be pressured into adopting the proportional representation system. Six countries – Germany, Greece, France, Great Britain, Portugal and Spain – only have closed lists whereas the other states have open lists that can be changed by voters. The election procedures in the new Member States are still not precisely known, but it may be assumed that they will be based on the proportional representation system.

Since May 2003 there are observers in the EP that are delegated by national parliaments. With their

16 Figure 6: Proportion of women in the national parliaments and as observers in the European Parliament



experience, they will have good chances in the elections. However, women account for only 24 (14.8%) of the 162 mandates (cf. Fig. 6). In this respect the national parliaments are obviously more conservative than their electorates who have voted in a larger percentage of women into their national parliaments.

This is a bad omen for the European elections, which is why the **European Women's Lobby (EWL)** has called for action. It launched its campaign in October 2003 with the declaration: "European Elections 2004: Women demand an equal share", and directs its demands to the parties, which can play a crucial role in improving women's representation. These parties are called upon to nominate an equal proportion of men and women and place them in a way that also enables the female half to get elected.

Further, the parties are also called upon to include the realisation of women's rights in their election manifesto. An appeal has been sent out to the European Parliament (EP) to pass a new resolution for a uniform electoral law, which would include the principle of parity and also to adopt rules that ensure a fair and balanced access of women MEPs to high-level posts and

chairmanships within the parliament. Here again, all types of arguments are put forth in support of the political participation of women: it is a question of justice, but additionally, men and women also have different interests which must be equally represented on behalf of both halves of the population. This, the EWL argues, would result in an overall improvement in the quality of political decisions. A much demanded *lobbying kit* brought out by the EWL provides its member organisations with facts and arguments so they can bring their influence to bear on the national parties. Already the EWL has official member organisations in Latvia, Bulgaria and Hungary and it expects to have partner organisations in all the new Member States in the course of the year 2004. Specific appeals to the electorate come from the national organisations since there is no uniformity in the election procedure. In Latvia an attempt to introduce quotas into electoral laws for the European Parliament failed. It may be assumed that most of the nominations for the electoral lists have already been made. The next step would be focussed lobbying for a larger number of **women in the European Commission**, especially from the accession states.

## Future Prospects

What do the coming years hold in store for the institutional political participation of women in the new Member States: what are the developments that are likely or probable? Let us bring to mind the fact that the merely marginal role women play in politics is the outcome of

1. social inequality which in turn is closely linked to the gender specific division of labour and traditional notions of gender roles related thereto;
2. the patriarchal political culture, that is to say, traditional views on the role of women in society and politics;
3. political career patterns oriented at the male biography, as well as the organisational and communication structures of political institutions that are shaped for men.

Of the above three factors, the political culture has the greatest impact. It is for this reason that changes must first be effected here.

Despite some recent initiatives for promoting the political participation of women, there is nevertheless no strong women's movement that legitimises the gender equality issue and entrenches it in public consciousness. And since "pressure from below" – as experiences in the EU Member States have shown – constitutes a *conditio sine qua non* for democratising gender relations, it is unlikely that the obvious power imbalance between the sexes both in politics and society will undergo a fundamental change in the near future.

Yet it could also be possible that the political participation and representation of women based on equality is achieved in the near future, even if only gradually. As a possible consequence of the obligation towards an active policy of gender equality and gender mainstreaming within the framework of the EU, equality between the sexes may be accorded far greater importance in future than has hitherto been the case. Specific measures for the promotion of women's

participation (such as the introduction of quotas) will change **old patterns of elite recruitment**, thereby ultimately also increasing the representation of women in parliaments and governments. However, this can only be achieved if the pressure of integrating into the EU, that is to say a top-down approach, is combined with the pressure from below, that is, a bottom-up approach. For this, what is needed is a **networked European women's movement** and staying power. To change traditional conceptions of gender roles and role assignment and to render gender equality policy an unquestionable part of the political agenda, **long-term processes of learning and change** are needed. In any process, any **resistance** to the redistribution of power, influence and recognition should not be underestimated.

Finally, there is also a third possible variant if European integration should evolve in the direction of a European confederation and the surrender of powers to European authorities: namely that women dominate political institutions at the national level. Due to the Europeanisation of politics, engagement in – progressively weakening – traditional institutions would hardly appear attractive to men, because of which they will quit the field and leave it entirely to women. It is obvious that this scenario would not only apply to the accession countries but to all EU Member States as well.

Basically, what we are referring to here are long-term changes that go hand in hand with redistribution and therefore by their very nature are given to conflict. Women players who seek an equal share of political power must strive to achieve democratic equations at **all levels of the magic triangle**: at the level of the social structure, the political culture and the political institutions. Whether they wish to improve the economic, social or (party) political situation of women, their chances of success are all the greater, the better their networking, the more strategic and foresighted their action and the more they learn from each other or adapt successful action programmes to their own country, as in the case of the coalitions for the election of women.

**Useful Internet Links**

<b>Relevant websites at the European level</b>	
European Parliament	<a href="http://www.europarl.eu.int/home/default_de.htm">www.europarl.eu.int/home/default_de.htm</a>
NCEO - Network of Parliamentary Committees for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in the European Union (with links to the websites of national parliaments and governments)	<a href="http://www.europarl.eu.int/comparl/femm/ccec/members/default_en.htm">www.europarl.eu.int/comparl/femm/ccec/members/default_en.htm</a>
European Commission, Directorate General for Employment and Social Affairs, Equality between Men and Women	<a href="http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/equ_opp/index_de.htm">europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/equ_opp/index_de.htm</a>
Inter-parliamentary Union, overview of the proportion of women in parliaments	<a href="http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm">www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm</a>
European Data Bank for women in management positions (data up to 2001, more up-to-date data for the Federal Republic of Germany)	<a href="http://www.db-decision.de">www.db-decision.de</a>
European Women's Lobby	<a href="http://www.womenlobby.org">www.womenlobby.org</a>
Gender-Politik-Online Internet portal for the central issues of social scientific research in gender studies	<a href="http://www.fu-berlin.de/gpo/index.htm">www.fu-berlin.de/gpo/index.htm</a>
<b>Relevant websites of regional networks and national women's organisations</b>	
Karat Coalition of South Eastern and Eastern European women's organisations	<a href="http://www.karat.org">www.karat.org</a>
Network of East-West-Women	<a href="http://www.neww.org">www.neww.org</a>
B.a.B.e. (BE ACTIVE, BE EMANCIPATED) – Women's Human Rights Group	<a href="http://www.babe.hr">www.babe.hr</a>
Women's Issues Information Centre Poland	<a href="http://www.oska.org.pl">www.oska.org.pl</a>
Aspekt Slovakia	<a href="http://www.aspekt.sk">www.aspekt.sk</a>
Gender Studies Czech Republic	<a href="http://www.feminismus.cz">www.feminismus.cz</a>
NANE – Women's Rights Association Hungary	<a href="http://www.nane.hu">www.nane.hu</a>
Women's Alliance for Development, Bulgaria	<a href="http://www.women-bg.bg">www.women-bg.bg</a>
Women's Issues Information Center Lithuania	<a href="http://lygus.lt/ITC/">lygus.lt/ITC/</a>
AnA – Society for Feminist Analyses, Romania	<a href="http://www.anasaf.ro/english/index(eng).html">www.anasaf.ro/english/index(eng).html</a>
Slovenian Women's Organisations	<a href="http://www.uem-rs.si/eng/non.html">www.uem-rs.si/eng/non.html</a>
Women in Estonia	<a href="http://www.undp.ee/gender/">www.undp.ee/gender/</a>

Gesine Fuchs & Beate Hoecker

## **Without Women merely a Half-Democracy The Political Participation of Women in the East European Accession States**

**W**omen have just marginal or average representation both in the EU-15 as well as in the new Member States: in the parliaments on the whole, they constitute an average of 23%, in the European Parliament a higher 31% and in the parliaments of the new members a mere 16%.

In political practice there are three arguments that are time and again advanced in support of women in decision-making: firstly, justice and equality demand it; secondly, women must have the opportunity to assert certain interests specific to their sex; and, thirdly, the gap in power and position must be broken down in favour of women.

Gender-sensitive research on participation uses a "magic triangle" of factors to explain the under-representation of women. These factors include socio-economic structures, political culture and institutional factors.

Since the mid-90s, the percentage of women in the Eastern European parliaments is once again on the increase and currently ranges between 9.8% in Hungary and 26.2% in Bulgaria. The proportion of women in the governments was on an average 13.3% in November 2003, with one-half of the women heading "atypical" ministries.

Studies have shown that an elitist-patriarchal political culture in particular poses an obstacle to the increased participation of women. Additionally, women politicians are put to further disadvantage due to gender specific divisions of labour, low incomes and political career and recruitment patterns conceived for men.

Political courses of action for increasing women's share of representation are available at all levels. Among these is a consistent policy of gender equality in education and social security. Through the active promotion of women and through political education without gender stereotypes, parties and civil society can help bring about a change in attitude. The proportional representation system and quotas improve women's electoral chances. In some countries, coalitions for the election of women - emerging from civil society - have drawn a good response with their appeals for votes for women. National and international women's organisations and women politicians contesting the elections to the European Parliament can draw upon this tradition. Yet, gender equality in political positions of power and influence can only be gradually achieved. Top-down measures must be accompanied by pressure from below, coming from a networked European women's movement.