



Project “More Women in European Politics – More Women in 2014”

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Base Line Study

Partner 1

BALKAN ASSIST ASSOCIATION

Bulgaria

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Base Line Study on the Situation on Women in Politics
Framework
Bulgaria

SUMMARY



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1. INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

1.1 Government Policies

In Bulgaria there is a Law on Protection from Discrimination, but there is no Law on Gender Equality

- After the EU accession attempts to push such a Law were terminated;
- The absence of Law on Gender Equality leads to lack of institutional mechanism engaged with issues of gender equality and no public funding policies;
- The State is committed to the implementation of policies for equal opportunities with the creation of a National Council on Gender Equality. The last report of activities of the Council (14 March 2012) made it clear that "capacity building through training and seminars" and "public awareness" were the main activities taken and measured as "outcome indicators". In addition, the financial subsistence of the activities came exclusively from European programs that are simply required to conduct such policies.

1.2 Political Party Policies

- In the management level of the political parties and their internal party structures / committees the stereotypical gender differentiation between "soft" and "hard" areas of competence is observed (even in parties where there is a "women fraction");
- At the state level, the issue of gender equality is driven ideologically and financially exclusively by European policies and programs. The effect of the "Europeanization of gender equality" at the national level is visible and replicated across party politics. The tendency of placing women in electable positions is gradually declining (European elections, national parliamentary elections and local elections).

1.3 NGO Policies

- Given "the legacy of socialism," feminism as an ideology and political activism ever since ambiguously interpreted in the context of the anticommunist discourse. This is the reason why the activities of women's NGOs in Bulgaria consolidate more about sensitive topics like "violence against women" and "social exclusion and the feminisation of poverty".
- NGOs develop the themes of political participation of women in decision-making as project ideas, which means we have no sustainable mechanisms for financial support for the participation of women in decision-making established, but also dependence on external (international) funding of the organizations.

2. SOCIAL CONTEXT

2.1 National dimensions of gender equality in the European context

- According to the Gender Equality Index , Bulgaria (37) is before the last place in the EU-27 (54). The smallest differences are in the domains of power: 2 points in the political sub-domain and 5 points in the economic sub-domain. The difference of 10 percentage points in the participation rate, however, remained for a decade.
- Even though in Bulgaria women with higher education were 7 percent more than men, which significantly differs from country EU27, gender segregation in education remains high. An effect of this trend is the pay gap by gender in education - 14% in the financial and over 25% in health sector.

2.2 Public attitudes to politics and women's participation in politics

- The lack of interest in politics and discredited public image of the state government in Bulgaria is directly related to the lack of interest in political participation by women with management potential

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and capacity as they choose other fields for realization. The deep distrust of the educational institutions to political and civic engagement and education of the young generation also contributes efficiently to the preservation and reproduction of these processes.

– Public opinion indicates that stereotypes about women's participation in decision-making and underestimation of the qualities and abilities of women are caused mainly by gender inequality in politics and the achievement of equality depends on institutional arrangements. Only about 20% of people believe that the measures taken to achieve gender equality are effective.

3. TRENDS IN THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES

3.1 Parliament

– The presence of women in the Bulgarian Parliament has slowly been increasing over the last 23 years, whereas at the beginning of the 21st century it increased almost twice: from 14% to 27%. Since then, almost no change in the proportion of MPs by sex could be observed, in the last Parliaments it is about 23%, which is still far from the internationally defined objective: 40% of all involved in the processes of decision-making are women.

– In the beginning of the democratic transition, women in parliament had little or no party and / or management experience. This situation began to change in the last parliaments where parties are placing women with political or management experience in areas outside of politics in electable positions. This trend is affecting the age and occupational profile of women elected MPs (between 35-51 years) with a variety of professions (business, engineering, and humanitarian).

– Data from the last two parliaments is showing that leadership positions in committees and delegations are subject to the stereotypes of "hard" and "soft" policies. Moreover, in the current Parliament this process deepens and women are placed in leadership positions in only 4 of the 20 standing committees - all in the field of socio-cultural sphere.

– Voting results of the recent parliamentary elections show that 8% more women voted for the major parties, but this has nothing to do neither with the political orientation of the parties (left / right), nor with the party candidates' sex.

3.2 Government and public administration

– There is a dynamic in the sex ratio in the Bulgarian governments after the democratic changes and the last two governments after 2009 marked a slight increase in the number of women ministers.

– There is a positive trend over the years in the ministries in the socio-cultural sphere headed by women, and especially in infrastructure and economic spheres where Bulgaria is 20% ahead compared to EU- 27.

– Despite this result, there is a consistency in the isolation of women in economic and financial portfolio by the two coalition governments headed by the Socialist party, which is not typical of the other two parties in the early 2000s that formed government.

– In the last decade there has been a gradual increase in the number of women in the first level of the state administration, which at this time is close to 40% and is 10% more than the national average in EU-27. Same even higher trend (over 50%) is also true for the second level of the state administration.

– Slow changes in the growing number of women in decision-making after 2005 could be observed in public administration at the local level. The percentage of women governors is similar to those of women MPs - about 20 per cent.

3.3 Local Authorities

– The positive trends in the participation of women in leadership positions at the national level are not repeated locally. Moreover, women mayors are only 11%, which is two times less than the percentage

of women in parliament. The number of women elected mayors remained almost unchanged over the past three governmental mandates.

– Bulgaria is not an exception to the EU-27 trend for the number of women in local government is lower than that of women involved in the processes of decision-making at the national level. Bulgaria lags behind with women councilors who are currently a quarter of all municipal councilors.

– Current local government:

- 75% of women were elected mayors of municipalities with population less than 25,000 people. It should be mentioned, however, that the current mayor of the capital of the country is a woman.
- Only 3 of 28 women were appointed by independent nomination committees.
- Almost all women mayors are in the poorer northern part of the country.

– Local government enjoys almost twice higher public trust than the central government.

3.4 European Parliament

– The "Europeanisation" and putting gender equality more in the international activities of the country is evident by the gender parity in elected MEPs (2007-2009) and (2009-now).

– Political parties usually nominate in electable places women who enjoy / would enjoy public approval because of their professional experience and qualifications outside politics or well known individuals with political experience, who enjoy a non-political approval.

– The professional competences of women MEPs in this Parliament are mainly in the fields of humanitarian and social sciences. These specific areas less frequently include conflicts of interests (especially financial and economic) and controversial assessment of management skills on the part of public opinion. This is still an obstacle to changing the status quo in the national parliament for the limited participation of women in the "soft" policies.

– Gender differences in voting for the EP are smaller than those for NA - 3 points, again in favour of women.

– More women than men said they vote for the EP as it is their civic duty and more men than women indicated that they vote for the European Parliament to support the party they like.

– The lack of confidence and dissatisfaction with politics in general is one of the main reasons for half of the Bulgarian citizens to abstain from EP voting, without distinction by gender.

4. CONCLUSIONS

1. Regarding legislation

Bulgaria has no Act on Equal Opportunities of Women and Men, but after 2007 an Action Plan on Equal Opportunities of Women and Men is adopted each year to outline the issues of women's participation in decision-making; however, no real measures (quotas, funded initiatives, etc.) have been taken.

2. Regarding electoral political participation of women

Women are more active voters than men (8% more female voters), their vote is equally divided between left and right parties unlike 10 years ago when more women voted for the BSP. It is doubtful whether women became more oriented to the right, more likely the reason for this is slight disappointment by the right policies of the BSP, and a vote for charismatic male persons - as such had been perceived the ex tzar Simeon the Second, leader of the NMSP and ex premier Boyko Borisov. But women as a whole do not support nationalistic parties - their vote is 20 % less compared to male vote for the nationalist parties like Attack.

At the EU level, the big issue is not so much the gender differences in voting patterns but the general dissatisfaction with politics outlined by women and men equally as the main reason not to vote.

3. Regarding women's political representation

- No substantial differences with the EU. No increase in percentage of women, participating in governing bodies
- The highest the level of representation, the more women are included - the highest percentage of women is in the EP (40% of Bulgarian MEPs are women), next comes the NP (about 23%), the female representation is lowest on the local level - only 11% of mayors are women.
- There are specific political functions regarded as "male" one - national security, economy etc and other regarded as "female" like social and cultural. It is interesting that in recent years the infrastructural policies had been delegated to women, unlike the situation in the EU.
- There is a distinct territorial disproportion of the political representation of women in the local government - more women are mayors in the small settlements - up to 25 000 inhabitants; and enormous underrepresentation of women in the Southern part of Bulgaria - a fact, requiring a special explanation.

4. The discrepancy between higher electoral political participation of women and their underrepresentation in political bodies shows that there is a need of elaborating specific policies which would guarantee the inclusion of more women in the governing bodies.

