



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

Agreement number: JUST/2012/FRAC/AG/2695

## Base Line Study

### Partner 10

## ALLIANCE OF WOMEN IN SLOVAKIA

### Slovakia

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## **Representation of Women in Politics in the Slovak Republic**

### *Quantitative and Qualitative Perspective*

Zuzana Maďarová

When talking about political representation of women in Slovakia it is necessary to point out the year 2010 when the country was led for the first time by a female Prime Minister. Iveta Radičová<sup>1</sup> was a former Minister of Work, Social Affairs and Family and the first female candidate who got enough votes to get into the second round of presidential election in 2009. She gained massive voters' support that was proven by rank voting, and was authorized to build a government. However the premier Radičová led the Slovak Republic just shortly. The National Council of the Slovak Republic passed a vote of nonconfidence against the premier in October 2011. The reason was the inability of the ruling coalition that consisted of four center-right parties<sup>2</sup> to get an agreement on the issue of the European Stabilization Mechanism. The president Ivan Gašparovič removed her from office while simultaneously entrusting her to lead the government until the early elections that took place on the 10<sup>th</sup> of March 2012. Iveta Radičová announced that she was not going to run in the upcoming elections and that she was leaving politics.

It seems that early end of Radičová's government together with the way how her political career and leadership position was represented by journalists, experts and politicians strengthen masculine style of politics, which was mirrored in the election campaign 2012 (see Maďarová – Ostertágová, 2012) and probably on the political parties' lists as well. The winner of the elections was the party Smer – sociálna demokracia (Smer-SD) and Iveta Radičová was replaced by a former Primer Minister (2006 – 2010) Robert Fico. The current government consists of one political party and except of one woman, who is a Minister of Health, it is only male. In the National Council of the Slovak Republic there are 16 % of women. As it is claimed

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<sup>1</sup> She was running for the party Slovenská demokratická kresťanská únia – demokratická strana (SDKÚ-DS).

<sup>2</sup> The government consisted of four parties: Slovenská demokratická kresťanská únia – demokratická strana – SDKÚ-DS, Kresťanskodemokratické hnutie – KDH, Most-Híd, Sloboda a solidarita – SaS.



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in *The Report on Gender Equality 2011* (2011), long-term marginalization of women in high politics is one of the most visible and internationally most criticized problems of the Slovak Republic, but at the same time this problem is one of those less discussed and remains unsolved. Already in 2008 The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) suggested to adopt temporary compensatory measures in Slovakia to fasten the process of achieving gender equality, predominantly on the high decision-making level, but till now no steps have been done. The current number of women MPs is supposed to double to achieve 30% critical mass (*Súhrnná správa...*, 2011).

In this paper I will discuss representation of women in politics and decision-making from quantitative and qualitative perspective. I start with chronology of quantitative representation of women on different levels of politics. For a more complex picture of the issue I continue with qualitative aspects of political representation of women in Slovakia, as well as with social and political obstacles women need to face when they decide to enter the public sphere. Based on the data there are several suggestions how to improve the situation of marginalization of women in politics in Slovakia in a broader context of gender equality.

### **Political representation of women in international and national documents**

The sociologist Jarmila Filadelfiová claimed in 2002 that despite of many international obligations gender equality is not part of the long-term public interest in Slovakia. Unfortunately eleven years later there is no major change in this field. International obligations and NGOs have the most distinctive impact on gender equality (not only) in the field of political and public life.

Significant influence on gender equality politics in Slovakia had the *Beijing Action Plan* (1995), which stimulated the first national documents on gender equality (since 1997), as well as the CEDAW Treaty that has been used by feminist NGOs as one of the most important advocacy tools. The CEDAW Committee criticized Slovakia repeatedly for low political representation of women at all the levels and suggested to adopt temporary compensatory measures with exact time plan. No actions have been done so far.

Currently there are two basic national documents regarding gender equality – *The National Gender Equality Strategy 2009-2013* and *The National Gender Equality Action Plan*



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2010-2013. While the Strategy defines frames, basic problematic fields and goals, the Action Plan is supposed to state particular steps how to achieve these goals with exact time plans for all the actions. One of the goals is to achieve equal representation of women and men in politics and decision-making, while among tools are e. g. compensatory measures; financial mechanism to motivate political parties to adopt quota system for their lists; analyses of legislation in various European countries to prepare a base for an election law changes in Slovakia (2013); discussion with political parties about their inner gender equality policies; social campaign to raise awareness about a need for more women in politics and decision-making, etc. Even though there is supposed to be an evaluation this year and preparation of the new Strategy as well as the Action Plan, it is possible to conclude that almost none of these activities have been done. No analyses has been presented so far, no legislative changes have been done, no positive action or compensatory measures or financial mechanisms for political parties have been adopted or even suggested. Struggles to achieve gender equality in politics and decision making are completely formal without real activities. Those who try to open discussion about political representation of women and to achieve gender equality in this field are mostly Slovak NGOs and international organizations and institutions. It is inevitable for the Slovak government to cooperate in evaluations of the Strategy and the Action Plan with NGOs and to discuss their comments and suggestions for new documents. At the same time a mechanism is supposed to be established to control how the Action Plan activities are fulfilled.

### **Political representation of women from quantitative perspective**

Gender Equality Index published by the European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE) also confirmed that political representation of women in Slovakia is one of the most biting problems. Six core domains were taken into account: work, money, knowledge, time, power, health; and two satellite domains: violence and intersecting inequalities. In every domain from 1 (the worst) to 100 (gender equality achieved) points were distributed according to several indicators. The smallest progress in regards with gender equality has been achieved in Slovakia in political and economic power of women. Where the EU score was 38, the Slovak score was 33,1. Political



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power of women was even lower than economic one. (*Gender Equality Index – Country Profiles*, 2013)

### *Representation of women in local and regional politics*

There is slightly growing number of women in local politics, at the moment 22,6% of all the mayors are women. When comparing to the national and regional level of politics, here the women representation is the highest, but still does not reach the critical mass 30%. Women are successful mostly in villages and smaller cities; bigger cities – mostly county seats – are ruled by men. (*Súhrnná správa...*, 2011, pp. 39) As the sociologist Zora Bútorová claimed, it is caused by the fact that people in countryside know each other better and the position of political parties is not so strong there. (Piško, 2010) It seems that political parties and their ways of setting the election lists is disadvantaging for women.

**Table 1**

### **Rate of women mayors in Slovakia**

	<b>Total Number of Mayors</b>	<b>Number of Women</b>	<b>Rate of Women (%)</b>
<b>1994</b>	2750	418	15,2
<b>1998</b>	2766	484	17,5
<b>2002</b>	2913	541	18,6
<b>2006</b>	2905	601	20,7
<b>2010</b>	2927	622	21,2

Source: Filadelfiová – Bútorová: *Parlamentné voľby v rodovej perspektíve*. 2011, pp. 368

Compared with local politics, the situation in regional politics is even worse situation. None of the regional self-government has been ever led by a woman. Rate of female members of regional parliaments is very low with slightly increasing tendency in long-term perspective. In 2001 there were 12,7% of women in regional parliaments, four years later the rate of women was 14,3% and after the election in 2009 there was 15,4% of female members of regional parliaments. As *The Report on Gender Equality 2011* explains, this situation might be a result of weaker economic



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power of women who cannot afford as expensive election campaigns as men can do; another factor might be that women usually run for marginalized parties or as nonpartisan politicians.

**Table 2**

**Representation of women among candidates, governors and members of regional parliaments**

Election Year		2001			2005			2009		
		Total Number	Number of Women	Rate of Women	Total Number	Number of Women	Rate of Women	Total Number	Number of Women	Rate of Women
Mayors	Candidates	133	13	9,8	64	7	10,9	57	5	8,8
	Elected	8	0	0	8	0	0	8	0	0
Members of Municipal Councils	Candidates	3976	690	17,3	2833	526	18,6	3473	708	20,4
	Elected	401	51	12,7	412	59	14,3	408	63	15,4

Source: *Súhrnná správa rodovej rovnosti 2011*. 2011, pp. 38.

*Representation of Women in National Politics*

Representation of women in the National Council of the Slovak Republic has no increasing tendency. The highest number of women in the parliament was in 2002 when it was slightly more than 19%. After the next election the rate of women fell down to 16% – the same rate as it is nowadays. The number of women in the parliament fell down after the election in 2012 even though there was the highest number of women candidates so far – 26,2%. An important factor is not just the rate of women candidates but the position of women on the political parties’ lists as well. And one of the problems is the rule the higher you go on the list the fewer women you find.

**Table 3**

**Representation of women among candidates in the national elections and MPs**





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Election year	Number of Political Parties	Number of Candidates			Number of Mps	
		Total Number	Number of Women	Rate of Women (%)	Number of Women	Rate of Women (%)
1994	18	1 929	N	N	22	14,7
1998	17	1 618	274	16,9	19	12,7
2002	25	2 618	604	23,1	29	19,3
2006	21	2 340	532	22,7	24	16
2010	18	2 397	545	22,8	23	15,3
2012	26	2 967	778	26,2	24	16

N = Data unavailable.

Source: *Súhrnná správa rodovej rovnosti 2011*. 2011, pp. 37

**Table 4**

**Rate of women and their position on the political parties' lists in the national election 2010**



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<b>Number of Men</b>	123	126	123	116	121	131	740
<b>Number of Women</b>	27	24	27	34	29	19	160
<b>Rate of Women (%)</b>	18	16	18	22,7	19,3	12,7	17,8
<b>Position of Women on the Lists*</b>							
<b>1 – 10</b>	1 (10)	2 (1;3)	1 (4)	2 (5; 6)	0	1 (2)	7
<b>11 – 20</b>	2 (17;18)	1 (18)	2 (12; 14)	2 (17; 19)	1 (12)	1 (14)	9
<b>21 – 30</b>	1 (22)	3 (23; 26; 27)	2 (21; 28)	2 (29; 30)	2 (22;28)	0	10
<b>An Average Position of all the Women Candidates**</b>	76,9	68,2	80,9	86,2	77,7	92,6x	
<b>Rate of Elected Women</b>							
<b>Rate of Elected Women (%)</b>	16,1	21,4	18,2	13,3	0	11,1	15,3
<b>Number of Elected Women (Number of all the MPs)</b>	10 (62)	6 (28)	4 (22)	2 (15)	0 (14)	1 (9)	23 (150)
<b>Rank voting</b>							
<b>Rate of Rank Votes for a Political Party (%)</b>	72,79	72,6	68,09	82,88	77,12	73,74	73,55
<b>An Average Number of Rank Votes for one Voter</b>	3	2,83	2,86	2,97	3,11	2,82	2,95
<b>Rate of Preference Votes for Women in Comparison to all the Candidates (%)</b>	5,6	45,8	13,1	7,3	14,5	25,6	15,9
<b>Rate of Preference Votes for Women in Comparison to all the MPs</b>	4,8	49,8	11,4	0	10,5	30,3	15

\* Numbers in brackets stand for particular position of women on the list (in the first thirty places).

\*\* An average position of women is counted as an average of all the positions of women and men on the list. Since there are 150 places, number lower than 75 means better than average position.

Source: Bútorová – Filadelfiová: *Parlamentné voľby v rodovej perspektíve*. 2011, pp. 193.

According to American political scientist Richard Matland an open list system might be disadvantaging for women candidates (Kobová, 2007). In Slovakia open list system means that voters may give maximum four rank votes within one political party and so change the order of the candidates on the list. When political parties do not want to adopt compensatory measures to increase number of women on their lists, rank voting is one of a few tools to strengthen chances





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of women to get into the parliament (Bútorová – Filadelfiová, 2011). So the question is if rank voting really helps women candidates.

In 2012 rank voting was used by 80,6% voters compared with 73,6% voters in 2010. So the number of people who decide to change the candidates’ order is increasing but at the same time the most of the rank votes are given to the party list leaders. Compared with 2010 the number of rank votes for women running for center-right political parties (those parties that were a part of Iveta Radičová’s government) decreased and some sociologists consider this phenomenon a possible cause of “Radičová’s effect”. This “effect” is explained in two ways: on the one hand one part of SDKÚ-DS (Radičová run for this party in 2010) constituency might be disappointed by the fact that they lost a trustful politician after Radičová decided to leave party politics, on the other hand another part of SDKÚ-DS constituency that was critical towards Radičová’s government might be discouraged from or not motivated enough to support women in politics. And this pattern might be spread on other parties of former Radičová’s government as well. The current governmental party Smer-SD is the only party in which rank voting for women did not increase or decrease but is very low in the long-term perspective. (Bútorová – Gyárfášová – Slosiarik 2013)

**Table 5**

**Representation of women among candidates and MPs in the national election 2012**

Political Party	Smer-SD	KDH	OEaNO	Most-Híd	SDKÚ-DS	SaS	Total number
<b>Candidates</b>							
<b>Number of Men</b>	123	123	87	115	118	121	687
<b>Number of Women</b>	27	27	23	33	31	28	169
<b>Rate of Women (%)</b>	18	18	20,9	22,3	20,8	18,8	19,7
<b>Position of Women*</b>							
<b>1 – 10</b>	0	1 (8)	2 (3; 7)	0	1 (3)	2 (6; 8)	6
<b>11 – 20</b>	2 (11;12)	1 (17)	3 (13; 15; 17)	3 (15; 17; 19)	1 (11)	1 (11)	11
<b>21 – 30</b>	2 (21; 29)	2 (23; 27)	2 (28; 30)	3 (24; 27; 29)	2 (28; 30)	1 (29)	12
<b>An Average Position of all the Women Candidates**</b>	79,19	87,11	64,65	74,64	72,77	81,53	x



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<b>An Average Position of all the Men Candidates**</b>	74,69	72,95	67,57	75,77	76,65	74,6	x
<b>Women MPs</b>							
<b>Rate of Women MPs (%)</b>	18,1	12,5	25	0	18,2	9,1	16
<b>Number of Women MPs (Number of all the MPs)</b>	15 (83)	2 (16)	4 (16)	0 (13)	2 (11)	1 (11)	24 (150)
<b>Rank Voting</b>							
<b>Rank Votes for a Political Party (%)</b>	77,08	83,23	87,68	85,42	86,28	80,66	80,55
<b>An Average Number of Rank Votes Given by One Voter</b>	3,05	3,2	2,69	3,09	3,17	3,06	3,07
<b>Rank Votes for Women in Comparison to all the Candidates (%)</b>	4,8	12,8	19,1	8,5	35,3	11,1	10,6
<b>Rank Votes for Women in Comparison to all the MPs (%)</b>	4,3	10,7	18,3	0	40,8	6	8,62

\* Numbers in brackets stand for particular position of women in the List (in the first thirty places).

\*\* An average position of women is counted as an average of all the positions of women and men on the list.

Source: Bútorová – Gyárfášová – Slosiarik: *Verejná mienka a voličské správanie*. 2013, pp. 172.

Representation of women in the Slovak government is low in the long term. The situation did not change when the Prime Minister was a woman (2010-2012) or after the last election in 2012. After 2010 election when the government was led for the first time by a woman premier there was just one other woman in the 14-member government – the Minister of Justice Lucia Žitňanská. After the last election in 2012 there is just one woman – the Minister of Health Zuzana Zvolenská. From qualitative perspective it is obvious that after the last election not only representation of women decreased moreover the woman minister leads the Ministry of Health which stereotypically belongs to so called woman political agenda.



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**Table 6**

**Rate of women in the Slovak government**

Period	89-90	90-91	91-92	92-94	94-94	94-98	98-02	2002-06	2006-10	2010-12	2012-
Total Number of Seats	19	23	23	21	18	19	22	16	16	14	14
Number of Women	1	0	2	3	1	3;4	3;2	0; 2	1; 2	2	1
Rate of Women (%)	5,2	0	8,7	14,3	5,5	15,8 ; 21	13,6 ; 9	0 ; 12,5	6,3 ; 12,5	14,3	7,14

Source: *Súhrnná správa rodovej rovnosti 2011*. 2011, pp. 38.

*Representation of Women in European Politics*

The election to the European Parliament took place in Slovakia twice, every time with very little public interest. In June 2004 the turnout was just 16,99%, in June 2009 it reached 19,64%.

**Table 7**

**Representation of women among candidates and MPs in the European election 2009**

Political Party*	Smer -SD	SDKÚ -DS	SMK	KDH	ĽS- HZDS	SNS	SaS	SZ	KDS-OKS	KSS	SF
Number of Women Candidates	5	3	2**	2	5	1	3	7** *	2+0	2	7
Number of Women MPs	3***	0	1***	1***	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Number of MPs	5	2	2	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0

\* Parties/coalitions with more than 1% votes.

\*\* The list was lead by a woman.

\*\*\* Woman got the highest number of rank votes among all the candidates.

Source: Mesežnikov: *Politické strany na Slovensku vo voľbách do Európskeho parlamentu* 2009. 2009, pp. 11.

When comparing all the levels of politics it is obvious that the highest rate of women is on the European level. In 2004 representation of women was 36%, four years later it was 38%. As the sociologist Oľga Gyárfášová (2009, s. 81) explains, it is not a result of political parties' decision but a result of rank voting. Out of six parliamentary parties just one was led by a woman but in



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three parties women got majority of rank votes. Seven out of ten voters used a chance to give a rank vote – 71% male voters and 66% female voters. Women candidates got together 60% of rank votes given by women voters. (Gyárfášová, 2009, pp. 81)

### *Representation of Women in Decision Making*

**Table 8**

#### **Representation of women in civil service decision making**

		2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
<b>Constitutional Court Judges</b>	<b>Total Number</b>	11	10	13	13	13	13
	<b>Number of Women</b>	1	1	3	3	3	3
	<b>Rate of Women (%)</b>	9,1	10	23,1	23,1	23,1	23,1
<b>Bank Board of the Slovak National Bank</b>	<b>Total Number</b>	7	7	10	10	10	6*
	<b>Number of Women</b>	2	1	2	2	2	1*
	<b>Rate of Women (%)</b>	28,6	14,3	20	20	20	20
<b>University Rectors</b>	<b>Total Number</b>	30	33	33	33	33	33
	<b>Number of Women</b>	1	3	3	2	2	4
	<b>Rate of Women (%)</b>	3,3	9,1	9,1	6,1	6,1	12,1

\* Date 31. 10. 2010

Source: *Súhrnná správa rodovej rovnosti 2011*. 2011, pp. 39.

Representation of women in judiciary has its specificities in Slovakia. Out of all the judges 64% are women, however the higher position the lower number of women representatives. The specificity of the situation has its genesis in 90s' when lots of male judges left judiciary to find more profitable jobs within the legal system. (*Súhrnná správa...*, 2011, pp. 40)

In economic sphere there was a negative trend in 2011 even though Slovakia became a part of the European initiative with the aim of attaining a 30% objective of the under-represented



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sex in board-member positions in publicly listed companies in 2015 and 40% in 2020. In 2011 the rate of women in the highest executive positions in the publicly listed companies in Slovakia decreased from 22% (2010) to 15%. This trend went on in 2012 when the rate of women on publicly listed companies' executive positions was 13%. The Report on Gender Equality 2011 though drives attention to the fact that there is quite little number of companies listed in the European database (Database: Women and Men in Decisionmaking).

Table 9

Representation of women in executive positions of the listed companies

Year	2009	2010	2011	2012
Rate of Women in Executive Positions (%)	18	22	15	13

Source: *Súhrnná správa rodovej rovnosti 2012*. 2012, pp. 53.

### Political Representation of Women from Qualitative Perspective

Among the main obstacles that women need to face when they decide to enter the field of politics or when they are in the process of decision making whether or not to enter politics are gender stereotypes. Normative picture of an ideal woman combines three dimensions: a good mother and housewife; the one that can cheer others, a sympathetic person that can listen to others; a person whose attractiveness helps her to achieve success in public as well as private sphere.

At the same time there is a paradox shown by public opinion polls – on the one hand people want equal participation of women and men in political decision-making and on the other hand according to public it is not important for an ideal woman to participate in public life. According to the sociologists Bútorová, Gyárfášová a Filadelfiová (2008, pp. 289) this phenomenon might be explained as non-internalized support of political participation of women. Internalized gender stereotypes influenced also an image of Iveta Radičová's government in the media (see Ostertágová, 2011). It will be interesting to find out in what way the first female



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Prime Minister influenced the public opinion on women in politics. As the analyses of the election campaign 2012 suggests, an image of masculine politics has been strengthened, a man was constructed as an ideal politician and women were excluded from political sphere – physically and symbolically as well. (See Maďarová, 2012; Ostertágová, 2012)

Exclusion of women from political sphere is of course not a new phenomenon and it can be traced even in the beginning of the modern democracy in Slovakia – in the Velvet Revolution in 1989. As the narrative analyses of the interviews with female participants of the revolution suggests, the important part of “an ideal woman” or civil revolutionist was dissociation from politics. (See Maďarová, 2011) Many of the participants were active in the revolutionary movements (student, company, ecological or the national Verejnost’ proti násiliu /Public against Violence/) and in 90s’ were active in politics on local, national or federal level. A strong influence in this dissociation had a disappointment from politics after the revolution and in the last 20 years. An effort to dissociate from a “dirty” politics strengthens an image of politics as a male game where women do not belong to. At the same time even those women that articulated their own participation in the revolution were disadvantaged as well. The reason was a masculine language that does not offer a possibility for women to discuss their experiences and stress their activities without being symbolically punished. Some of the interviews suggest that if a woman was in a position of power in the period of the revolution and in 90s’ and she might have threatened position of men, she became a problem, “a burden in the eye” of male revolutionists. And nowadays social expectations suggest that if a woman did great things in the past, she is supposed to keep quiet about it or at least talk about it with modesty and wait until others praise her – that means in such a way that is appropriate for a woman. (Maďarová, 2011, pp. 46)

So the language problem is not just generic masculine that makes women invisible, but the male-stream discourse that excludes women from some spheres of society and assigns them certain characteristics as well. Language change is a long-term process and therefore it is important to look for ways how to thematize and express experiences of women in different situations – in this context on different levels of politics in various historical periods as well as nowadays. (Maďarová, 2011, pp. 47)

As the expectations from “an ideal woman” and “an ideal man” suggest as well as suggest gender-determined language, women are still assigned to the private sphere, respectively





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the private sphere is attributed to women – on symbolical as well as practical level. Gender Equality Index (2013) shows that in Slovakia there is a big problem with unequal distribution of private and business responsibilities between women and men. So women are overloaded by private responsibilities, caring of household, family, their paid work and many times social work as well. Primary responsibility for household and family is still on women’s shoulders and this fact can affect their decision to enter or not to enter politics. Moreover it seems that entering politics is not just their own decision but it needs to be approved by a partner/husband or other family members.

So when women decide to enter politics and run for a political party what are their opportunities? What obstacles they need to face and what might be helpful for them?

At first the majority election system on the regional level is disadvantaging for women, on the contrary in the national elections proportional representation system in combination with low 5% threshold might be supportive for women politicians. In both cases the way how political parties propose their lists – how many women they include and on what positions – is more than important.

Gender equality as well as particularly political representation of women is not a long-term and serious agenda of any political party in Slovakia. In case that gender equality has been a part of a manifesto, it has not been fulfilled in political practice. It is obvious from the fact that despite of all the appeals and suggestions by international institutions and organizations (e. g. CEDAW Committee) and pressure by the Slovak NGOs nothing has been done in this field. Since 2004 when the third bill regarding 30% quota on the political party lists and other compensatory measures was proposed (the first two bills were proposed in 2001 and 2002), no other bills were proposed. That time the bill was discussed with derisive reactions of both female and male MPs. The parliament did not respect the fact that the public would have wished to have more women in politics and it would have agreed with adopting compensatory measures as the poll conducted in 2002 showed (Holubová, 2010, pp. 9).

Political parties like to declare their struggle to achieve gender equality in politics as well as in their own parties, particular actions that would correspond with their declarations are though weak. Neither parties that have 30% quota for women on the list like the party Ľudová strana - Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko (ĽS-HZDS) cannot be rate well. Numerical view is maybe



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positive but the way of constituting lists is unformalized and centralized, so the candidates are chosen based on the party leader’s decision and this process does not head towards democracy and gender equality.

In retrospective view there was a case of the political party Aliancia nového občana (ANO) that in the national election 2006 had 30% quota for their list and positions on the lists were quite equally distributed. This party that presented itself as liberal and progressive opened the topic of political representation of women in the election campaign. It is possible to suppose that high rate of women within the party and on its list as well as support of gender equality in the society was understood as a part of their progressiveness.<sup>3</sup> It seems that women are better represented on the smaller political parties’ lists that confirms Joni Lovenduski’s theory about small parties appointing atypical candidates because their options to choose is limited (Kobová, 2007, pp. 24).

In the national election in 2012 predominantly women’s party was running for the first time. In the first twenty places on the list there was no man, the first male candidate occupied 21<sup>st</sup> position. However higher number of women on the party’s list was accompanied with gender stereotypical manifesto and party’s discourse. The name of the party was Robíme to pre deti – Slobodné fórum which means “We do it for children – Free forum” and the party’s agenda was in regard with family and children. Higher rate of women on the list was explained by the fact that politics needs to be “cleaned up” of dirt and corruption and that there is a need to support mothers, families with children, etc. So even in this case women were not unchained from the symbolical private sphere – they did not present themselves as politicians or experts but primarily mothers (we do it for children).

An important part in struggles for gender equality in politics has the Slovak NGOs that opened the topic of women in public sphere in late 1990s (Cviková – Juráňová, 2009, pp. 100). There were several issues of the first Slovak feminist cultural magazine *Aspekt* dedicated to this topic (Ženy a moc 1995, Strachy a bariéry 1996, Osobné je politické 1999, Patriarchát 2000-

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<sup>3</sup> Even though this party started its political life in a successful way – it was established in 2001 and in 2002 it became a part of the government – it was involved in big political scandals and after the national election 2006 it did not get into the parliament. Later on the party’s name and members have been changed and though de iure it is still the same party, de facto a completely new political party exists.



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2001) while the focus was more on the need of women’s and feminist agenda in the political practice than in the pure formal participation of women in politics. As it is stated in the book *Feministky pre začiatníčky* (Feminism for Beginners, ASPEKT 2009), representation of women in politics became relevant before the national election in 2002. More than 50 NGOs became a part of the initiative “Forum 2000” with the aim supporting women in politics and decision making. Among other activities there were declarations and appeals, lobby activities and trainings for women in all the regions of Slovakia to prepare women for work in politics and public sphere. (Bútorová et. al., 2002) Activities focused more on the quantitative aspects of political representation of women and less on the content of policies and this fact, according to Cviková and Juráňová (2009), caused that there was no deeper public discussion and reflection of gender asymmetry in the public sphere. The main problem was that the issue of political representation of women was not opened together with issues like gender stereotypes, gender determined distribution of paid and unpaid work, etc. Such an approach enabled oppositional actors to ask if women are competent or qualified enough to work in politics.

In 2002 there was another initiative<sup>4</sup> before the national election called “Hlasy žien” (Women Voices). As part of this initiative a qualitative research was conducted to find out how do women see their quality of life, what problems they need to face, who is responsible for the situation and who is supposed to solve it, if they are interested in politics and if they are going to vote. There was a social campaign to support higher participation of women (politicians as well as electorate) in the election as well as public discussions.

## Recommendations and Suggestions

Based on already mentioned problems, challenges and former actions I suggest focusing on these areas:

1. In 2013 there will be an evaluation of the national documents on gender equality and a preparation of *The National Gender Equality Strategy* as well as *The National Gender Equality*

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<sup>4</sup> The initiative was established by three organizations: Aliancia žien Slovenska, ASPEKT and Možnosť voľby.



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*Action Plan* for the next years. Therefore it is necessary to take part in the evaluation and preparation process and to draw attention to the fact that most of the obligations and actions have not been conducted. Regarding the international critique it is important not only to create documents and declare aims but also to make particular steps in achieving gender equality. Here it would be effective to create a mechanism of financing political parties in such a way that would mirrored their internal gender equality policies as well as their inner representation of women, applying quota system, etc.

2. In the process of evaluation of the current national documents as well as the process of preparation of new ones it is necessary to focus also on the legislative changes that would establish compensatory measures on different levels of politics (party politics, local, regional, national, European level).
3. To make initiatives effective it is needed to connect nongovernmental sector with politicians, political parties and state institutions. Such a coalition with clearly defined goals, particular priorities, suggestions and actions is supposed to be connected with the social campaign to gain also a public support and to mobilize public. A public discussion with all these actors is inevitable and needed.
4. One of the necessary actors in such a coalition is also women’s organizations within particular parties. Therefore it is necessary to start a discussion with these organizations, respectively women politicians from these organizations. This communication is an opportunity to find out what is a chance to adopt gender equality policies and quota system within the parties, where is a space for potential cooperation, what are party leaders’ positions, etc.
5. Make use of the fact that public asks for higher representation of women in politics (according to the polls) and start to persuade political parties that higher representation of women within parties and in the leadership positions might improve an image of a party, mobilize their electorate or attract new votes.
6. Support of the regional women politicians. Thematization of women’s experiences in politics might help other women in making decisions whether or not enter the public sphere as well as change the male-stream political discourse. Therefore it is important to make cases of successful women politicians, mayors and MPs public and visible. At the same time this is an



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opportunity to connect these politicians among themselves. To know each others’ activities might be supportive and might lead to regional, national or international cooperation. At the same time it might be supportive for some women in deciding whether or not to enter higher level politics.

7. The media are also important actors in this field so it would be useful to address those journalists that could help with thematization of regional politicians’ activities and with publishing stories and articles about political representation of women as well as with mobilization of the public.

8. Examples of good practice in political parties are more than hard to find in Slovakia so it would be more useful to find examples from other European countries where the political parties adopted gender equality inner policies and quota system. At the same time to use these examples in practice it is necessary to present them in Slovak parties, for instance through women politicians, women organizations within parties etc.

All these activities are supposed to be done and discussed in broader context of gender equality. In the public discussion as well as in the discussion with politicians and state institutions it is important to talk about political representation of women as an issue that is not isolated but closely connected with all the other topics like – gender division of public and private sphere, a need for equal gender distribution of responsibilities within a private sphere, a need for equal involvement in decision-making, a need for breaking gender stereotypes, a need for gender sensitive pedagogy and education, as well as other causes of discrimination in the society (age, sexual and gender identity, class, ethnicity, etc.). From the previous experiences it is obvious that to present the political representation of women as just a numerical problem does not lead towards public understanding and real changes. Moreover when we work in the post-socialist country where the quota system worked in the parliament before 1989 and there were bad experiences with formal support of gender equality but no real gender equality in practice. Therefore cooperation between the media, nongovernmental, governmental sector, political parties and politicians on the local, regional, national and European level is necessary.





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