

**Parliament
in Serbia from
the Perspective
of Women**



Parliament in Serbia from the Perspective of Women

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Preface

Working in partnership with the Serbian national and local authorities, independent institutions, national minority representatives, civil society and the media, the OSCE Mission to Serbia helps the host country to build strong, independent, accountable and effective democratic institutions, with the ultimate goal of Serbia attaining full domestic ownership of its reform achievements in the areas of the rule of law and human rights; security co-operation; democratization; and media.

The Parliament is a pillar of democratic processes and has been a trusted partner of the Mission since our early days in Serbia. Our activities aim at enhancing the capacities of the National Assembly and its working bodies, and at strengthening co-operation with the relevant stakeholders in the country and in the region. The nature of this partnership transcends difficult times and crises. Such was the case during the Covid-19 epidemics, when the Mission offered its assistance to support the National Assembly in adapting e-Parliament platform and securing other mechanisms that could enable the uninterrupted functioning of this pivotal democratic institution. Ultimately, the OSCE Mission to Serbia supports parliamentary control over the development and implementation of public policies and legislation. Throughout the years, we have supported the National Assembly and its members in establishing several informal parliamentary networks, tackling issues of crosscutting nature and fundamental importance for the functioning of a truly democratic system, including the Women's Parliamentary Network.

Moreover, women's equal representation at all levels of decision-making and the promotion of their participation is an important aspect of the OSCE's work and is a part of the organization's politically binding commitments for all member states. Not only does women's participation in politics advance gender equality – it also directly influences both the type of policy issues that are discussed and the type of solutions that are proposed. Therefore, women participation and gender mainstreaming are not goals *per se*: they are instrumental for equality, the rule of law and prosperity in any society.

The publication in front of you represents a unique synthesis of these two important areas of the Mission's long-term engagement – strengthening the parliament and gender equality. I invite you to explore how the two are fundamentally intertwined through substantial contributions of the authors of „Parliament in Serbia from the Perspective of Women“.

Ambassador Andrea Orizio
Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia

Introductory notes

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the renewal of parliamentarism in Serbia, which happened after the adoption of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia and the multi-party elections held in 1990. Jubilees are an opportunity not only for appropriate celebrations, but also to critically analyse the practice, assess the shortcomings and highlight the achievements. This is exactly the intention of the authors of this study in which the National Assembly's work on the promotion of gender equality is comprehensively monitored and analysed for the first time. This study is not only a kind of testimony about parliamentarism, but also the overview of the gender perspective in the parliamentary life of Serbia in the past period.

The main topics of interest are those that shape the content of parliamentary life, which are also particularly important for gender equality and relate to: representation of women in the National Assembly; women's campaigns (campaigns for women to go to the polls, campaigns in support of female candidates and media coverage of election campaigns); gender mainstreaming of legislation - integration of the gender perspective into legislation, especially in the areas emphasized by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (incentives, participation of women parliamentarians, resistance, results); adoption of a set of anti-discrimination laws, especially the Law on Gender Equality as a novelty in the legal system (initiatives, the course of the legislative process, the engagement of civil society and parliamentarians, resistance and results); women's parliamentary network as a specific type of activity of women parliamentarians (status in the National Assembly, manner of work, content of activities, cooperation with NGOs, initiatives, proposals) as well as other forms of activity of women parliamentarians in the National Assembly (institutional mechanisms, gender equality committee, public hearings, etc.); experiences and activities of women parliamentarians related to the promotion of gender equality (testimony of women

parliamentarians as actors in this process, their activities, the challenges they faced and the obstacles they encountered).

Given the diversity of thematic units, the methodological framework of this research is also diverse, while the applied methods are related to the research topic. The content analysis relies on the legal database ParagrafLex, data on the work of the National Assembly available on the Open Parliament website and the National Assembly website, research and publications dealing with the gender mainstreaming of legislation, the adoption of anti-discrimination laws, the Women's Parliamentary Network and the activities of women parliamentarians in the National Assembly. Google search, personal testimonials, publications and media monitoring have been used as sources for the research of women's election campaigns related to women's participation in elections, as well as for the campaign of support for women candidates on the electoral lists. The topic of the representation of women in the National Assembly relies on legislation and official data on the composition of the National Assembly until and including the 11th convocation, and on research. The in-depth interview is a source of knowledge about the activities undertaken by women parliamentarians and the obstacles they encountered in initiating the placement of gender equality on the parliamentary agenda and advocating for the integration of the gender perspective into laws. It is a valuable testimony of the actors directly participating in parliamentary life from different parliamentary convocations and different political parties.

In the context of women's views on parliamentarism in Serbia in the past 30 years, we should mention another jubilee, important for understanding the social activism of women, which has been a significant incentive, support and stronghold for the activity of women parliamentarians. It is the 20th anniversary of the Palić Initiatives, through which the planned, coordinated and continuous cooperation of politicians, parliamentarians, civil society activists, experts, trade union activists and journalists, both men and women, took place. Therefore, in anticipation of the Palić conference that is going to be held this year, we recall the conclusions of the previous Palić Initiatives.

Palić I (2000) - *Women's participation in elections and more women in parliaments*

1) Minimum 30% of women in political parties, on candidate lists and at all levels of decision-making; 2) Equal division of labour and responsibilities at home, in the government and state; 3) Equality in education, employment, earnings, career and pensions; 4) Life without the politics of war, nationalism, fear and violence against women; 5) Safe and legal abortion, free contraception and preventive health care for women, appropriate basic health care avail-

able for all; 6) Education based on the principles of equality, peace, solidarity and respect for diversity.

Palić II (2006) - *Women for European Serbia - a sustainable society that includes everyone and in which a high quality of everyday life will be achieved*

1) Peaceful solution of open problems; 2) Modernisation; 3) Europeanisation; 4) Sustainable development based on understanding the local context with focus on social partnership; 5) Rule of law; 6) Fight against poverty; 7) Society of social justice and social cohesion; 8) Respect for human/women's and minority rights (Roma women, refugee and displaced women and women from other minority and marginalised groups); 9) Democratisation; 10) Decentralisation; 11) Separation of church and state.

Palić III (2014) - *Women's platform for the development of Serbia*

1) Equal opportunities for access to justice and efficient and effective protection of rights; 2) Equal participation of women and men in the creation of policies and strategies in all areas of society, including the EU integration process; 3) Amendments to anti-discrimination legislation and the Law on Gender Equality; 4) Introduction of the gender perspective as a principle in the creation of all laws and policies in all areas of society; 5) Strengthening gender equality institutions; 6) Supervision and control over the implementation of regulations and responsibility for their implementation; 7) Adoption of new policies and strategies to improve the situation of women and promote gender equality and consistent and systematic gender mainstreaming of all development strategies and action plans at all levels; 8) Consistent and systematic introduction of gender budgeting at all levels, in all institutions; 9) Gender mainstreaming of all state institutions and regular revisions; 10) Gender mainstreaming of all development projects at the state, regional and local level; 11) Decent work and fair earnings.

This pioneering endeavour, supported by the OSCE Mission to Serbia, to which we hereby express our gratitude for their understanding and support, aimed to preserve the testimony of parliamentarism in Serbia from the perspective of women. We are handing it over to future researchers, wishing for continuation of the systematic monitoring of activities in this field.

Editor-in-Chief
Prof. Marijana Pajvančić, PhD

Lilijana Čičkarić, PhD¹

Representation of Women in the National Assembly of Serbia

By improving the regulatory framework and establishing institutional mechanisms for gender equality in the past two decades, Serbia has made progress in the processes of institutionalisation and creation of gender-sensitive public policies. This chapter deals with the issue of the representation of women in the institutions of parliamentary democracy, since it is a key indicator of the distribution of power in the political community and the positions that men and women have in the process of governance and decision-making².

The issue of gender equality has gradually entered the political discourse; gender issues have been included in the agendas of some political parties, but the descriptive representation of women, embodied in the growing number of women parliamentarians participating in the legislative decision-making process, has not been accompanied by substantive representation based on true recognition, marking, implementation and protection of women's interests in

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2 Pajvančić Marijana. 2007. Ravnopravnost polova – politički i ideološki kontekst. u: Lutovac Zoran (ur.) *Ideologija i političke stranke u Srbiji*. Beograd. Institut društvenih nauka. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. str. 284.

all spheres of social life. The participation of women in the political institutions in Serbia has increased, especially in the last decade, due to legislative changes and the introduction of gender quotas. However, women continue to occupy lower and less influential political positions compared to men. At the moment, there are only four of them in the outgoing Government of the Republic of Serbia, and there is not a single party in the Serbian Parliament that has a woman leader. Analysis of the programmes of leading parties indicates that gender equality issues are declaratively present, while party leaders and leadership still do not recognise the importance of issues such as discrimination against women in the labour market, media, professions, gender-based violence, misogyny, sexism in politics and public life.

In the three decades of the arduous process of establishing democratic institutions in Serbia, women have come a long way from complete marginalisation in political life to more than a third of the seats in the Serbian Parliament. However, we are witnessing that this is still not the critical mass necessary to constitute a substantive representation of women, which would result in adequate implementation of gender issues in the decision-making process, modernisation of the parliamentary environment, restoring confidence in democratic elections and representative democracy, promoting feminist values and insisting on larger participation of women in all segments of government. Through a chronological overview of the representation of women in political institutions over the past three decades, we will also follow the changes and development of the transitional Serbian society on the periphery of Europe.

1. Representation of women in parliamentary convocations and executive branch 1990-2006

In the 1980s, the political participation of women in the parliaments of the countries of socialist Europe was around 27%, which exceeded the participation of women in the national parliaments of the European Union by 12.5%³. In the political systems of these countries, a certain kind of positive discrimination was applied to women and members of national minorities. Thus, in the last convocation of the Assembly of the Republic of Serbia from 1986, the representation of women was 23.5%, while in the Assembly of AP Vojvodina it was 28.6%. In the period 1986-1990, in the Assemblies of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia, there were about 24%, Kosovo and Macedonia below 20% and Montenegro only 11.2%

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3 Čičkarić Lilijana. 2009. Žene u političkoj areni. Insajderke ili autsajderke?. *Sociologija*, vol. 51 no.4, str 345.

of women parliamentarians⁴. After the 1989 changes, the share of women dropped drastically to 8.4%, and that period is described in the literature as “masculinised democracy”. The patriarchal system of power remained intact, traditionalism was reproduced, “male democracies” were spreading, and women took on the role of losers in the transition⁵. War conflicts in the region, sanctions and economic devastation in Serbia have led to a drastic deterioration of the position of women in the labour market, rising unemployment, reduced access to capital, resources and knowledge, erosion of the state’s social role, rising poverty, violence and discrimination, which all together resulted in reducing the participation of women in institutional politics and public life⁶.

The first multi-party elections in 1990 brought a clear discrimination against women in the representative bodies of all former Yugoslav republics. Thus, a significant decline in the representation of women in the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia was recorded, since out of 4.9% of women candidates, only 1.6% were elected⁷. At the same time, women in Slovenia made up 18.5% of the candidates, and won 11.3% of the total number of seats in the elections. In Croatia, there were 6.0% of women candidates and 4.4% were elected to the Parliament. As regards other former Yugoslav republics, 4% of women were elected to the Parliament of Montenegro, 3.3% to the Parliament of Macedonia and 2.9% to the Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Women candidates were predominantly distributed in the constituencies in which the parties that nominated them did not have much chance of winning. Women were also placed at the bottom of the lists in the republics with the proportional election system, such as Montenegro, thus openly pushing forward male candidates. They were more often nominated by left and liberal parties, which was the case in Slovenia and Croatia, or by smaller parties, as well as those that did not have a significant chance in the elections. In Serbia, the Socialist Party nominated 246 candidates, including only seven women. The Democratic Party nominated 10 women, and the Green Party nominated nine⁸.

After the first multi-party elections, the number of women in the executive authorities dropped significantly. Women's participation in ministerial and senior government positions was either reduced to a minimum or completely absent, in all former republics. Thus, in Slo-



- 4 Pajvančić Marijana. 2006. Ravnopravnost polova – reprezentovanje u skupštinama i institucionalni mehanizmi – pet godina posle (2000-2005)., u Šijački Zorana (ur.) *Pet godina posle*. Novi Sad. Pokrajinski zavod za ravnopravnost polova.
- 5 Čičkarić Lilijana. 2009. Politička participacija i reprezentacija žena u zemljama postsocijalističke Evrope. *Sociološki pregled*. vol. XLIII. no.3, 343
- 6 Čičkarić Lilijana. 2009. Politička participacija i reprezentacija žena u zemljama postsocijalističke Evrope. *Sociološki pregled*. vol. XLIII. no.3, 432
- 7 Markov Slobodanka. 2001. *Pravo glasa žena*. Beograd. CESID
- 8 Markov Slobodanka. 2001. *Pravo glasa žena*. Beograd. CESID, str 84.

venia, out of 27 ministers, only two were women, and in Serbia, out of 20, one was a woman. Other republics did not have a single woman in a ministerial position.

During the 1990s, the trend of underrepresentation of women in parliaments continued. Thus, in 1992, the elections for the Assembly of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia brought an extremely low representation of women - only 2.94%⁹. It is characteristic that only one woman was elected to the Council of Republics that was in charge of the most important functions of the federal state. In 1996, 2.8% of women parliamentarians were elected to this Assembly, and again only one woman to the Council of Republics. In the 2000 convocation, there was a slight increase to 5.62% or only ten women parliamentarians. Only one woman was again elected to the Council of Republics, which meant the continuation of extreme discrimination in the exercise of the most important functions of government. Parliamentarians were elected according to the two-round majority electoral system in which the application of gender quotas as a measure of affirmative action was not possible.

The December 2000 elections brought a certain increase in the representation of women in the Serbian Parliament to 10.8% and only 6.7% in the Parliament of AP Vojvodina. An extremely high voter turnout (74.4%) in these elections, which had not been recorded in any previous elections, resulted also in a high turnout of women¹⁰. Later, women were given several more mandates (Social Democracy, New Democracy, Social Democratic Union), and the representation in the Republic Assembly was between 11 and 12%. Out of 250 nominated candidates of the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS), 14% or 35 women were elected¹¹. As many as 12 of the 17 DOS leaders signed a 30% women quota agreement, but only three of them complied with the agreement. Women have usually been candidates at the bottom of electoral lists. The situation in local parliaments was much worse. The share of women ranged from 2-11%. Out of 160 municipalities in Serbia, no women were elected in 24% of municipalities, and in 40 municipalities only one woman entered the assembly.

As regards party affiliation and the number of women candidates for members of the Serbian Parliament, it can be noticed that DOS gave approximately one sixth of the seats on its lists to women candidates, and the Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO) and the newly formed Democratic Socialist Party gave approximately the same number¹² (Table 1). The right-wing



9 Idem, p. 42.

10 Pajvančić Marijana. 2006. Ravnopravnost polova – reprezentovanje u skupštinama i institucionalni mehanizmi – pet godina posle (2000-2005)., u Šijački Zorana (ur.) *Pet godina posle*. Novi Sad. Pokrajinski zavod za ravnopravnost polova

11 Markov Slobodanka. 2001. *Pravo glasa žena*. Beograd. CESID, str 46.

12 Ibid.

Party of Serbian Unity, which nominated the highest number of women, did not award a single seat to a woman from its list after the election. The SPS gave only one seat to a woman, while most women who were both candidates and elected were found in the structure of DOS parliamentarians.

Table 1 - Representation of candidates for the NARS in 2000 by party

PARTY	NUMBER OF MEN	% OF MEN	NUMBER OF WOMEN	% OF WOMAN
SRS	228	91.2%	22	8.8%
SPO	218	87.2%	32	12.8%
SPS	237	94.8%	13	5.2%
DSP	117	86.67%	18	13.33%
JUL	139	89.68%	16	10.32%
SSJ	104	79.39%	27	20.61%
SDDP	99	90.83%	10	9.17%
DOS	215	86%	35	14%

Source: Markov Slobodanka. 2001. *Pravo glasa žena*. Beograd. Cesid.

At the beginning of 2000, the Group for Promotion of Women's Political Rights analysed the programmes of 16 political parties: SPS and 15 parties that then belonged to the opposition¹³. It was established that only the programmes of three political parties, the Democratic Party, the Social Democratic Union, the League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina, mentioned the problem of a small number of women in decision-making positions. Only three parties, the Democratic Alternative, the Democratic Party and the Civic Alliance of Serbia, included in their programmes the parts in which they addressed exclusively women. The most common areas to which women are associated in these programmes are social protection of families and children, population policy, reproductive rights, protection from domestic violence, protection of employed women and mothers through labour and social legislation.



13 Ibid, p. 47.

At the level of executive and administrative power, about 10% of women were elected in government offices, out of 15 ministers in the then republic government, only two were women, while all ministerial positions in the federal government were occupied by men. However, it should also be noted that in this period of transition of the political system, as never before or since, women were represented in high positions, such as the first women Rectors of the University of Belgrade and the University Novi Sad and the University of Arts in Belgrade, the Vice Governor of the National Bank of Serbia, the President of the Supreme Court, the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia. In addition, several women were appointed to the positions of presidents and vice presidents of municipal assemblies, and their share was increased in local executive and administrative bodies. This moment has never happened again in the history of parliamentary democracy in Serbia but indicated a trend towards greater participation of women in political institutions.

Various groups for women's political initiative and civil society organisations and women's movement organisations prepared the ground for the introduction of the first mechanisms for gender equality and anti-discrimination policy measures in Serbia. Underrepresented gender quotas on candidate lists were set for the first time in Serbia by the 2002 Law on Local Elections. By amending the Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, the Committee on Gender Equality was established in 2003 as a permanent working body of the National Assembly. It consisted of 10 women and 5 men from all parties, according to the number of seats won, who were tasked with reviewing laws and general acts, overseeing policy-making and law enforcement by the government and other bodies. As a measure of positive discrimination, underrepresented gender quotas on candidate lists were determined by the 2004 Law on the Election of Deputies to the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia and Deputies to the Assembly of AP Vojvodina¹⁴. In the same year, the Council for Gender Equality was established within the Government of the Republic of Serbia and consisted of 22 women and 2 men. Members were elected from the ranks of ministries (half of them) and from among academia and experts, and their tasks included multisectoral expertise, analysis of laws and regulations, creation of gender equality strategy and consideration of measures and actions to improve the situation of women in all spheres of society.

In the 2003 parliamentary election, out of 225 women nominated on party electoral lists, only 31 or 12.4% won seats¹⁵. Only one of the 6 vice-presidential seats in the parliament went to a



14 Pajvančić Marijana. 2006. Ravnopravnost polova – reprezentovanje u skupštinama i institucionalni mehanizmi – pet godina posle (2000-2005), u Šijački Zorana (ur.) *Pet godina posle*. Novi Sad. Pokrajinski zavod za ravnopravnost polova

15 *Žene i muškarci u Srbiji*. 2005. Beograd. Republički zavod za statistiku.

woman. Out of seven caucuses, only one was chaired by a woman. Out of 30 parliamentary committees, only five were chaired by women. In the Assembly of AP Vojvodina, 23 women or 19.2% were elected, and out of 20 committees, three were led by women. After the 2004 local election, in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, the representation of women in municipal assemblies increased to 23.29%¹⁶. According to a survey conducted in 167 municipalities in Serbia, including the city municipalities of Belgrade and Niš, only three municipalities in Serbia elected women to the position of mayor and 6 women to the position of municipality president (4%)¹⁷. There were 21 (13%) women presidents of municipal assemblies. The quota of 30% of women was met by only 17 municipalities in Serbia, while 11 municipalities had 10% or fewer women in their councils. The largest number of women councillors came from the DS (24%).

In the government of the Republic of Serbia, men were on both the presidential and vice-presidential positions, and out of 18 ministries, only one was headed by a woman. Since 2006, the same woman has been the Deputy Prime Minister. In the Government of AP Vojvodina, women headed 2 secretariats out of 17 existing ones. Only one parliamentary party had a woman in the leadership position - the Civic Alliance of Serbia (GSS). Four parties did not even have women in the positions of deputy presidents (SPO, DSS, SPS, NS). Only three parties (DS, LSV and GSS) had women's forums within party organisations. However, these forums did not have the power to make party decisions and did not participate in the candidacy or nomination of women for political office¹⁸.

Inconsistencies and shortcomings of the adopted legal provisions should be especially mentioned here, since they have rather large repercussions on the representation of women in parliaments, as Marijana Pajvančić argued, suggesting that legal regulations should be completed as soon as possible (Pajvančić, 2006). Firstly, on the list of candidates, every fourth place was reserved for the underrepresented gender. The application of this rule meant a quota of 25% of women on candidate lists. Secondly, the rule that the list must include at least 30% of the underrepresented gender allows the possibility of placing female candidates at the bottom of the candidate list. Thirdly, the rules for the distribution of seats won by the list (one third in the order of the list and two thirds at the suggestion of the list submitter, respecting the obli-

16 Pajvančić Marijana. 2006. *Ravnopravnost polova – reprezentovanje u skupštinama i institucionalni mehanizmi – pet godina posle (2000-2005)*, u Šijački Zorana (ur.) *Pet godina posle*. Novi Sad. Pokrajinski zavod za ravnopravnost polova

17 Andjelkovic-Kanzleiter Violeta. 2005. *Žene u lokalnoj samoupravi 2005*. Beograd. INDOK Centar. CESID: Direktorijum lokalnih samopurava u Srbiji.

18 Pajvančić Ana, Bačanović Višnja. 2010. *Kapaciteti političkih stranaka u Vojvodini za ostvarivanje rodne ravnopravnosti*. Novi Sad. Pokrajinski zavod za ravnopravnost polova. Vlada AP Vojvodine. Uprava za zajedničke poslove pokrajinskih organa.

gation to reserve every fourth place for the underrepresented gender) in practice allowed the non-compliance with the rule related to the first reserved place on the candidate list. And fourthly, the provisions on the termination of the mandate and the manner of filling the vacant position for councillor or member of parliament, in practice led to the complete *de facto* elimination of women in representative positions. As regards the rules on the election of deputies to the Assembly of AP Vojvodina, the shortcoming was the absence of positive discrimination measures for the election of half of the total number of deputies of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina elected by the majority electoral system.

2. Representation of women in the legislative and executive branches 2007-2020

During the first decade of the twenty-first century, women's organisations and the civil sector have continued to fight for the gender mainstreaming of institutions and increasing the participation of women in political life. The second phase of the introduction of mechanisms for gender equality began with the election of the Protector of Citizens in 2007 and the Deputy Protector of Citizens for Gender Equality in 2008. The Government also established the Gender Equality Sector in 2007 at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, which in 2008 grew into the Directorate for Gender Equality. At the provincial level, four mechanisms were also developed: The Committee on Gender Equality at the Assembly of AP Vojvodina, the Deputy Protector of Citizens for Gender Equality, the Institute for Gender Equality¹⁹ and the Secretariat for Labour, Employment and Gender Equality. The Government of the Republic of Serbia also adopted the first National Strategy for Improving the Position of Women and Promoting Gender Equality 2008-2014²⁰ and the accompanying Action Plan.

In the 2007 election, thanks to the new Law on Elections and the introduction of 30% underrepresented gender quota on the lists, 21.6% of women (54 out of 250 parliamentarians) entered the Serbian Parliament²¹. In the 7th convocation from June 2008, the woman Speaker of the National Assembly and three women Vice Presidents (50%) were elected. After a significant increase in the number of women in the Assembly of AP Vojvodina from 2003 to 2007, from 6.7% to 19.7%, the representation of women dropped to 14.16%, i.e. 17 out of 120



19 *Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 67/10

20 *Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 15/9

21 *Ravnopravnost polova*. 2009. Narodna skupština Republike Srbije. Beograd. Odsek za informativno-istraživačke poslove.

parliamentarians are women. The position of the Speaker of the Assembly of APV was given to a man, and 2 out of 3 Deputy Speakers were women²². There were 28.1% women in the local governments in Serbia. Only six are municipality presidents, and 20% are councillors in municipal assemblies²³.

Five women ministers (18.5%) were appointed in the Government of the Republic of Serbia. 22.7% of state secretaries and 42.6% of assistant ministers were women. In the judiciary, women held two-thirds of positions (about 64%), but mostly in municipal courts, and 40% of them were court presidents. Since 2000, women have been appointed to head the Supreme Court of Serbia. Since 2008, the Constitutional Court of Serbia has been headed by a woman, and women made up the majority of judges in that court (70%). One explanation, often given in response to the feminisation of the judiciary, is the decline of political prestige and power, the material devastation of courts, and the moral degradation of judicial practice in a state characterised by a corrupt and clientelistic system of government.

The number of women in representative bodies increased, but they still did not hold leading positions in the decision-making bodies of political parties whose members were delegated to the assembly. Men continued to lead almost all parliamentary groups and parliamentary committees. The low representation of women in the governing bodies of political organisations was a sign of the unwillingness of parties to introduce a gender-sensitive policy and to develop indicators for monitoring the results of the implementation of such a policy. Another big problem arose within party organisations. Extremely unfavourable attitude of women politicians towards party quotas, the strategy of denying gender stereotypes and insisting on gender neutrality derive from efforts to give loyalty to party interests an advantage over the agenda of women's primary interests.

Out of the seven political parties that in their Statutes provided for the establishment of the Women's Forum (SNS, SPS, DS, Dveri, SDS, LDP, LSV), this body was established at the local or national level in five parties (SNS, SPS, DS, Dveri, LSV)²⁴. A review of party documents on the websites of political parties reveals that the institutionalisation of the Women's Forum has progressed in the SPS, DS and LSV. However, these bodies could not influence the leadership of any party to accept the principle of nominating a larger number of women for political posi-



22 Pajvančić Ana, Bačanović Višnja. 2010. *Kapaciteti političkih stranaka u Vojvodini za ostvarivanje rodne ravnopravnosti*. Novi Sad. Pokrajinski zavod za ravnopravnost polova. Vlada AP Vojvodine. Uprava za zajedničke poslove pokrajinskih organa.

23 *Žene i muškarci u Srbiji*. 2008. Beograd. Republički zavod za statistiku.

24 Todorović Marija. 2016. *Zašto žene ne glasaju za žene?*. Beograd. Centar za istraživanje javnih politika, str. 4.

tions, nor could women politicians in these forums participate in party decision-making²⁵. In addition, the lack of cooperation and networking of women politicians with women's organisations and the feminist movement has resulted in a kind of ghettoization of women within political parties. Since all political parties in Serbia have leaders, authoritarian structures and traditional organisation, women do not receive support from party leaders and leadership, which prevents their climb to high positions in the party hierarchy.

In late April 2011, an amendment to the proposed Law on Amendments to the Law on Election of Deputies was adopted, stipulating that every third place on the electoral list must include the underrepresented gender; this amendment was supported by many woman representatives of political parties and NGOs. It was preparation for the May 2012 parliamentary election when women won the largest number of seats by that date: 12% in 2002, 20% in 2006 and 33% in 2012. 33.3% (84) of women parliamentarians entered the National Assembly, which positioned Serbia high in the region and 25th in the world. In this convocation, the Speaker, two Deputy Speakers and the Secretary General of the National Assembly were women. Out of the 15 parliamentary groups in the National Assembly, only one had a woman president (SPS), while in all other cases the parliamentary groups were headed by men. The largest parliamentary parties took care to meet the quota requirement in their parliamentary structures, while some parties significantly exceeded the statutory minimum participation of women (Table 2).



25 Pajvančić Ana, Baćanović Višnja. 2010. *Kapaciteti političkih stranaka u Vojvodini za ostvarivanje rodne ravnopravnosti*. Novi Sad. Pokrajinski zavod za ravnopravnost polova. Vlada AP Vojvodine. Uprava za zajedničke poslove pokrajinskih organa.

Table 2 - Share of women in the parliamentary groups of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia in 2012

PARLIAMENTARY GROUP	SHARE OF WOMEN, %
Serbian Progressive Party	35.9
Democratic Party	32.6
Socialist Party of Serbia	40.0
Democratic Party of Serbia - Vojislav Koštunica	38.1
United Regions of Serbia	46.7
Liberal Democratic Party	41.7
Party of United Pensioners of Serbia	33.3
Independent members of parliament	16.7
Social Democratic Party of Serbia	33.3
New Serbia	37.5
United Serbia	14.3
Together for Serbia	14.3
League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina	20.0
Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians	20.0
Serbian Renewal Movement - Christian Democratic Party of Serbia	20.0

Source: NARS records

The situation regarding the representation of women at the national level is reflected also at the local level. It is important to note that there has been progress in all towns and municipalities compared to the previous term when there were on average 18% women, and that in some municipalities the number of women in the local parliament has tripled (Tutin - from 10.81% to 32.43%), which is a consequence of the amendments to the Law on Local Elections. Women are underrepresented in representative bodies (23.9% of councillors), as well as in

executive bodies (15.17% in municipal councils), and in local community councils (13.24%)²⁶. 9.8% of women held the positions of mayor and municipality president, and only six women were presidents of municipal assemblies. Everything indicates that the application of quotas is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for a fair redistribution of political power.

In the early parliamentary elections in 2014, in accordance with the statutory quotas for underrepresented gender, one third of the candidates were women. They were barely visible during the election campaign and did not specifically address women's issues in their programmes. 34% of women entered the National Assembly of Serbia, 19% entered the Assembly of AP Vojvodina, and only four women (21%) were assigned to ministerial positions. Out of 169 mayors and presidents of municipalities in Serbia, only nine (5%) were women. 29% of women became councillors in municipal and town assemblies.²⁷ According to the data of the Working Group and the Expert Team for Gender Equality in the organisation of the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities (SCTM), 50 commissions for gender equality were established at the local level. The European charter for equality of women and men in local life was signed by ten local self-governments, while 81 local self-governments had a working body or person in charge of gender equality issues²⁸.

The findings of the 2013 survey on the control role of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, conducted by the Open Parliament, in which 38 women parliamentarians and 67 men parliamentarians participated, documented that men parliamentarians were more often in the positions of president, vice president and member of the presidency in their parties, 46.2% compared to 20.6%. Women parliamentarians are more often members of main and executive committees, 55.9% compared to 29.2%²⁹. Only 11% of women parliamentarians participated in 20 parliamentary committees. While the Committee on Kosovo and Metohija and the Committee on Defence did not have a single woman, women constituted the majority in the Committees on Culture, Labour and Human and Minority Rights. Uneven representation of women parliamentarians in different committees of the NARS indicates the patterns of gender segregation that manifest in the form of selective involvement of men and women parliamentarians in different thematic areas. Women parliamentarians were mainly represented in the committees focused on human rights, child and family protection, social policy, poverty, environmental protection, culture and information, while in the committees focused on security, finance, internal affairs,



26 Baćanović Višnja. 2012. *Žene i odlučivanje na lokalnom nivou, sa predlogom metodologije za praćenje*. Beograd. Uprava za rodnu ravnopravnost Ministarstva rada i socijalne politike Republike Srbije.

27 *Žene i muškarci u Republici Srbiji*. 2014. Beograd. Republički zavod za statistiku.

28 *Rodna ravnopravnost kroz SKGO akciju*. 2015. Stalna konferencija gradova i opština. Beograd. Savez gradova i opština Srbije.

29 *Otvoreni parlament*. Beograd. ISC.USAID. SeCons.

spatial planning, infrastructure and traffic, they account for a distinct minority. However, in 2014, for the first time in the history of Serbian parliamentarism, a woman was elected head of the parliamentary Committee on Defence and Internal Affairs³⁰.

The quotas have resulted in an increase in the number of women parliamentarians, but they are still no guarantee of better representation of women's interests. Serbia was in the 23rd place in terms of the number of female members of the Assembly; however, the problem of the impossibility of replacing a woman in parliament with another woman continued to exist. One of the important factors that has contributed to a better representation of women's interests is the establishment of an informal political body Women's Parliamentary Network, a group of 82 women parliamentarians from all political parties.³¹ The Network has managed to implement several important legislative changes, thus contributing to a greater role of women in the legislative and control functions of parliament.

The last, 11th convocation of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia from 2016 has the woman Speaker, two women Deputy Speakers and 85 women parliamentarians, as in the previous period. The parliamentary groups of the parties the League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina, Enough is Enough and the Serbian Progressive Party have the highest number of female members. The fact that the percentage of women in the six parliamentary groups is below 30% shows that there are certain inconsistencies in the legislative framework allowing that the quota from the electoral lists after the distribution of seats is not respected in the parliamentary groups. All parliamentary groups are headed by men, and with the exception of three parliamentary committees with a majority of female members, the principle of equal representation of both sexes is respected in other committees. Three committees have more female than male members: the Committee on Human and Minority Rights and Gender Equality has 14 women out of 17 members, the Committee on Culture and Information has 12 out of 17 and the Committee on the Rights of the Child has 18 out of 24. Women lead eight out of 20 committees (40%), while the position of deputy president is occupied by women in ten committees (50%)³².

At the local level, the underrepresentation of women among municipality presidents and mayors is still very noticeable (6.6%), while among councillors of municipal and city assemblies there are 31.2% women³³. Women are the least represented as judges in higher public prosecutor's



30 Čičkarić Lilijana. 2016. *Žene i politika iz rodne perspektive*. Beograd. Institut društvenih nauka.

31 See more in the article about the Women's Parliamentary Network.

32 Todorović Marija. 2016. *Zašto žene ne glasaju za žene?*. Beograd. Centar za istraživanje javnih politika str. 7.

33 *Žene i muškarci u Republici Srbiji*. 2017. Beograd. Republički zavod za statistiku.

offices (32%), and the most represented in basic courts and courts of special jurisdiction (75%). It is important to mention that since 2012 two women have held high positions in the government structure: the Governor of the National Bank of Serbia and the State Prosecutor. Their loyalty to the ruling party, while holding extremely influential public functions, has never been questioned. From the mid-2017, a woman who was the Minister of Public Administration and Local Self-Government became the Prime Minister in the Serbian Government that had only four women in ministerial positions. The situation is not nearly the same in the executive and legislative spheres. In the executive branch, where the greatest power is concentrated, the percentage of women still does not exceed 20%. On the other hand, the weakening of power and the derogation of parliamentary functions over the past decade have been accompanied by an increase in the number of women parliamentarians, thanks to the quota mechanism. According to the latest amendments to the election laws, a month before calling the new parliamentary and local elections in 2020, the 40% quota for underrepresented gender on the electoral lists was set, which is not in line with the standard practice in democratic systems.

3. Regional and European perspective

The trend of low parliamentary participation of women was present during the 1990s in all countries of the Balkan region. In Slovenia, their participation dropped to 13%, in Croatia to 4.5%, in Montenegro to 3.3%, in Bosnia and Herzegovina to 2.9% and in Serbia to 1.6%³⁴. Women's participation in the executive branch was also underrepresented in all transitional societies in the region, as well as in Central, East and Southeast Europe. The participation of women in the positions of ministers and deputy ministers ranged from 1.3% in Uzbekistan and Ukraine, through 10.6% in the Czech Republic, 15.6% in Slovakia, 17.6% in Latvia, to 19% in Croatia and 20% in Macedonia.

In 2004, Slovenia was the first country in the region that became a member of the European Union. In the 1990s, it had between 7.8% and 13% women in the National Assembly, so that at the time of accession it was at the very bottom among the Member States. Later, that number successively increased, so that in the 2014 convocation, there were 32 women, and the last convocation from 2018 included 36% of women. In the first multi-party elections in 1990, only 4.6% of women were elected to the Croatian Parliament, significantly less than during



34 Čičkarić Lilijana. 2009. Politička participacija i reprezentacija žena u zemljama postsocijalističke Evrope. *Sociološki pregled*. vol. XLIII. no.3, 343-35.9

the communist regime when the share of women in parliament varied from 18 to 20%³⁵. In early 2000, women held 21.9% of the seats, and in 2003 that percentage dropped to 17.8%. In December 2011, there were 39 women (25.5%) in the Croatian Parliament. In the last, ninth convocation, there is a decline again because women got about 20% of active seats. The specificity that makes Croatia different from all other countries in the region and beyond is that a woman won the male candidate in the 2014 presidential election.

After the 1992 election, 8.2% of women entered the Parliament of Montenegro. A decline to 5.1% was recorded in 1998, while the 2001 election brought an increase to 10.4%³⁶. During the 2000s, women participated with 13.3%, in 2016 the percentage increased to 18.5%, which is a result of the previously introduced quota system in 2012, so that 30% of women entered the last convocation of the Parliament of Montenegro. In the first general multi-party elections in Macedonia in 1990, only five women parliamentarians were elected (4%)³⁷. In the second parliamentary election in 1994, only four women were elected, which placed Macedonia at the bottom of the European list. The first real changes in women's participation and representation occurred after the 2002 election, when the percentage of women parliamentarians rose to 17.5%, and after the 2008 election a sharp jump to 32.5% was recorded. In the last convocation of the Assembly of Northern Macedonia, 33.1% of women were elected.

In the early 1990s, women held only seven seats in the Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2.92%), and 5% at the local level³⁸. In the first post-war elections at the state level, the representation of women did not change significantly. The women's quota was first introduced in BiH after the 1997 local elections by the Interim Election Commission, organised by the OSCE, which meant that each political party must put at least three women on the electoral lists, among the first ten candidates. Thus, in the next election in 1998, the situation changed significantly, so in the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina women got 26% of seats, in the House of Representatives of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina they got 15% of seats, in the National Assembly of the Republic of Srpska 22.8% of seats, and at cantonal level 18.46% of seats. The 2000 election introduced a model of open lists, which drastically worsened the situation and reduced the chances of women winning seats. They got 4.76% in the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 17.4% in the House of Representatives of the Federa-



35 Omanović Anesa. 2015. Zastupljenost žena u politici. Istraživanje Hrvatska, Srbija, Crna Gora, Makedonija i BiH. Sarajevo. Heinrich Boell Stiftung. InfoHouse, str. 6.

36 Idem, p. 17.

37 Idem, p. 21.

38 Idem, p. 22.

tion of Bosnia and Herzegovina and 14.86% in the National Assembly of the Republic of Srpska. After harmonisation with the Law on Gender Equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the general election in 2014, 19.90% of women were elected at all levels of government. Even today, the share of women at all levels does not exceed 20%, which is mostly attributed to the type of electoral system.

A comparative overview of women's participation in the parliaments of the Western Balkans in the period 2016-2019 shows that Northern Macedonia has made the most progress with 40% of women in parliament and represents a leader in the region along with Serbia and Kosovo (Table 3).

As regards the participation of women in ministerial positions in the governments of these countries in the period 2016-2019, the situation is different. Albania takes the first place with 50% of women in the executive branch, while Kosovo is at the bottom of the table (Table 4).

Table 3 Women in the national parliaments of the Western Balkans in the period 2016-2019 (%)								
	2016		2017		2018		2019	
	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M
Albania	21	79	28	72	30	70	29	71
BiH	21	79	21	79	21	79	17	83
Kosovo	33	67	33	67	31	69	32	68
Montenegro	19	81	21	79	24	76	23	77
North Macedonia	35	65	31	69	38	62	40	60
Serbia	34	66	36	64	38	62	37	63

Source: Gačanica et al. 2019. *Women's Rights in Western Balkans*. Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation.

Table 4
Women in ministerial positions in the Western Balkans in the period 2016-2019

	2016		2017		2018		2019	
	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M
Albania	40	60	50	50	50	50	50	50
BiH	14	86	25	75	22	78	/	/
Kosovo	5	95	12	88	5	95	10	90
Montenegro	18	82	18	82	25	75	22	78
North Macedonia	10	90	15	85	18	82	22	78
Serbia	21	79	21	79	19	81	19	81

Source: Gačanica et al. 2019. *Women's Rights in Western Balkans*. Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation.

The situation is worst at the local level. Only 4-7% of mayoral positions are held by women in all countries. The percentage of women in the position of the president of assembly is smallest in BiH - 4%, and highest in Northern Macedonia - 33% and Kosovo - 35%³⁹.

A comparison of the situation in the region with the participation of women in the parliaments of the European Union and in the EU Parliament after the 2019 election shows certain specificities. Out of 28 parliaments in EU countries, 11 have applied gender quotas in the election for the EU Parliament. Thus, the number of elected women parliamentarians increased from 36% in 2014 to 41% in 2019. As regards the leading of European Parliament Committees, women lead 100% of socio-cultural, 50% of basic and 33% of economic and infrastructure committees⁴⁰.

However, the situation with the national parliaments of EU countries is worse. Only 10 EU countries practice systemic quotas in parliamentary elections (Belgium, Ireland, Spain, France, Croatia, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Estonia). The share of women in the parliaments of



39 Gačanica Lejla, Miftati Edita, Vrbaški Sofija, Mann Lory. 2019. *Women's Rights in Western Balkans*. Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation.

40 Gender Equality in Parliaments Across the EU and the European Parliament in 2019. 2019. European Institute for Gender Equality. Vilnius. EIGE. <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/factsheet-gender-equality-parliaments-across-eu-and-european-parliament-2019> - accessed on 13 March 2020

EU countries is about 30%, in the Nordic countries about 44%, while at the global level it is 25%⁴¹. The EU national parliaments have gender equality bodies in 71% of cases, but very few (12) have the full capacity for making legal decisions. Childcare is organised in 46% of parliaments, intra-parliamentary initiatives for gender equality are organised in 68% of parliaments, and various extra-parliamentary initiatives are developed in 56% of parliaments. As many as 23 national parliaments are led by men, and seven EU countries have not yet ratified the Istanbul Convention. A significant number of countries (21) have bodies that monitor the implementation of national plans and programmes for the gender mainstreaming of institutions⁴².

Despite obvious improvements in the participation of women in the parliamentary life of EU countries and the region, open questions remain as to whether decisions that are relevant to gender equality are really made in parliaments, i.e. whether gender equality is promoted substantially or only symbolically. Parliamentary practice in Serbia faces the same issues. With the newly adopted statutory quotas of 40% of women in the National Assembly, will the women parliamentarians really break through the glass ceiling and adequately represent the interests of women?

Concluding considerations

Although women have been present in the parliamentary life of Serbia since 1945, when they were granted the right to vote, most politicians continue to give misogynistic comments about the obligatory underrepresented gender quotas on electoral lists. Prejudices are not removed by the mere fact that there are 34% of women parliamentarians in the National Assembly. Research on women in the National Assembly shows that it is more difficult for them to enter parliament, that they are less represented in the positions of parliamentary groups and are less likely to lead parliamentary committees. Every fifth woman parliamentarian has been exposed to some kind of political violence, embodied in ridicule and unequal treatment in parliaments or has been directly discriminated against several times⁴³. The majority of women parliamentarians have also pointed out one very important fact: that the application of gender quotas in the executive branch and the increased number of women in the positions of ministers



41 Women in Politics: 2020. 2020. Inter-parliamentary Union - UNWomen Map. Geneva. <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/infographics/2020-03/women-in-politics-2020> - accessed on 19 April 2020.

42 Gender Equality in Parliaments Across the EU and the European Parliament in 2019. 2019. European Institute for Gender Equality. Vilnius. EIGE. <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/factsheet-gender-equality-parliaments-across-eu-and-european-parliament-2019> - accessed on 13 March 2020

43 Otvoreni parlament. Beograd. ISC.USAID. SeCons, 2014.

and deputy ministers are also very important for strengthening their position. This is a way of establishing a key factor that accelerates the process of gender mainstreaming, the triangle of power or the strategic partnership of women at all levels of decision-making⁴⁴.

As regards gender equality within political parties, the conclusion is that all these years they have not been promoters of this idea. Although most parties declaratively accept the gender equality agenda, in practice they do not apply these principles. The defects of all political parties are the lack of recognition of the female electorate, the refusal to recruit women to leading positions in the highest bodies of the parties and the lack of support for women to run and be nominated for political office. There has been some progress in the implementation of gender quotas in a smaller number of parties, but their implementation in party bodies is still questionable. The gender equality agenda is also very rarely present in party documents. The absence of women in leadership positions is noticeable, because only the Democratic Party of Serbia had a woman at the head of the organisation for a short period of time. Although we do not have enough relevant data, some research studies reveal that there is approximately one third of women in the executive boards of parties, and that each of the parties has only one woman in the position of party vice president, except for the Democratic Party where there were two women⁴⁵. The marginalisation and neutralisation of women in political parties is a process that is very difficult to eradicate because it stems from the socio-cultural matrix, which implies that women in politics are seen as a disturbing factor. They are persistent, thorough, less corrupt and less susceptible to bribe, more careful and precise, less prone to behind-the-scenes actions and informal political struggles, due to which they are usually removed from the scene when there is a division of political functions.

The parliamentary practice of all countries in the region has repeatedly confirmed that the actions of women in parliaments lack a common platform; in fact, they follow orders and act in line with the policies and decisions of their parties or parliamentary groups. Women themselves remain blind to the consequences of gender discrimination and loyally support the decisions adopted by their parties, ignoring the interests and needs of women. This scenario is also present in the Serbian parliament and bodies of executive branch, where we face the major phenomenon of women in high positions often being deprived of political power and influence, which rightfully belong to them and are replaced by party loyalty and subservience with the aim of achieving personal benefits to the detriment of women's interests.



44 Čičkarić Lilijana. 2016. *Žene i politika iz rodne perspektive*. Beograd. Institut društvenih nauka, str. 74.

45 Todorović Marija. 2016. *Zašto žene ne glasaju za žene?*. Beograd. Centar za istraživanje javnih politika.

Finally, the issue of substantive representation of women in parliament is among the key ones in considering the increasing of women's participation in politics. The many times repeated truth is that descriptive representation is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for substantive representation. The solution should be sought primarily in changing the process of the nomination and candidacy of women for political positions by appointing to key positions in parliament and government the female actors who are firm in their feminist views and who would not make decisions that conflict with women's interests. They have a role to initiate change, propose laws, work on proposals, encourage others to act in that direction, cooperate with other actors and pave the way for the successful realisation of women's political interests.

In recent years, we have witnessed the passive role of women parliamentarians who refuse to take responsibility as key actors in the political process in charge of changing the parliamentary climate in favour of gender-sensitive decision-making. Insisting on party loyalty to the detriment of women's interests in moments when key decisions are made to improve their position is inadmissible from an ethical point of view and mirrors a corrupt and deeply morally stumbled Serbian society. Why did women, who were in situations of political power, do nothing concerning women's solidarity, empowerment and activism? This scenario is based on the dual role of women in a game in which party loyalty always takes precedence over women's interests. Therefore, the issue of substantive representation puts in the foreground the greater presence of women politicians who see the fulfilment of their duties primarily through the fight for gender equality and the protection of women's rights and interests. It is not acceptable to have only a critical mass in parliament, if it is instrumentalised for the purpose of party agendas and is not based on established political power and women's participation in decision-making. Substantive representation implies the feminisation of political space and the construction of gender relations within the institutions of representative democracy, which will be based on the equal participation of women and men in the distribution of political power.