

WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN EUROPEAN UNION COUNTRIES PARLIAMENTS (RESEARCH NOTE)

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Abstract: There are large differences in number of women MPs in EU countries parliaments. Some countries try to regulate this by determining quotas of women in the electoral lists, but in some cases the percentage of women elected is high without any regulations. There are also differences in the citizens standards of life depending on the state. The aim of the paper was to compare the women participation in the lower or in the single house of parliament of 28 countries belonging to EU. Beside this calculation, the comparison of Human Development Index (HDI) was compared in correlation to women presence in the government.

Keywords: European Union parliaments, the lower house, women MP, human development index

INTRODUCTION

Almost 20% of the world's parliamentary seats are now occupied by women. Europe, Africa and Asia follow with around 19-20% of total seats. Arab states still trail behind, with less than 12% women parliamentarians [IPU 2012]¹.

Parliaments all around the world try to regulate the number of female MP's by legislated quota implementation to election. According to IPU women continued to fare better when either legislated or voluntary quotas were used. In

¹ Inter-Parliamentary Union website: <http://www.ipu.org/english/home.htm>

2012, electoral quotas were used in 22 countries holding elections. European countries have made substantial improvements over the past 10 years. The region now has an average of 23,2 per cent women MPs, up from 17,4 per cent in 2002 [IPU 2012]. But there are countries which proved that quotas are not necessary to gain seats by women in national parliament.

The Human Development Index (HDI) is a summary of human development in the world and implies whether a country is developed, still developing, or underdeveloped based on some factors such as life expectancy, education, literacy, gross domestic product per capita. This index measures the average achievement in three dimensions of human development – long and healthy life, access to knowledge and decent standard of living and is commonly used to countries comparison [Atkinson et al. 2005; Głodowska 2011]. The results of the HDI are yearly published, and in those ratings the highest developed countries score well in terms of women's economic empowerment, but not all of them record progress in terms of women's political empowerment.

The aim of the paper was to compare the women participation in the lower or in the single house of parliament of European Union countries and to compare Human Development Index (HDI) in correlation to women presence in the national government. The purpose was to evaluate if women participation in the parliament was still not satisfied, if differ in high developed countries and if the legislative quotas are needed to improve those proportions.

Data were collected from various sources. Actual percentage of women MP's in European Union countries (and Croatia - member of EU from July 1st 2013) were evaluated on the basis on the official websites of parliaments and Inter-Parliamentary Union website. Obtained data were often confirmed by parliaments contact person to make corrections up to date. Population size data was collected on the basis of CIA database [CIA World Factbook]. Human Development Indices were taken from Human Development Report [UNDP 2013]. HDI value enables to classify countries in the world into four tiers. The same was applied within EU countries, which were divided for classes according to HDI mean value [Kompa 2009]. Four classes were received (Table 1).

Table 1. Levels of development of EU countries according to HDI value.

| Level of development | Criterion |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Class – Very high level of development | $HDI \geq HDI_{MEAN}^U$ |
| 2. Class – High level of development | $HDI_{MEAN} \leq HDI < HDI_{MEAN}^U$ |
| 3. Class – Medium level of development | $HDI_{MEAN}^L \leq HDI < HDI_{MEAN}$ |
| 4. Class – Low level of development | $HDI < HDI_{MEAN}^L$ |

Note: HDI – the value of HDI for the country, HDI_{MEAN} – the value of the average HDI for 28 countries: 0.862; HDI_{MEAN}^L – the value of the average HDI for the countries for which: $HDI < HDI_{MEAN}$: 0,824; HDI_{MEAN}^U – the value of the average HDI for the countries for which: $HDI > HDI_{MEAN}$: 0.825

Source: Own elaboration.

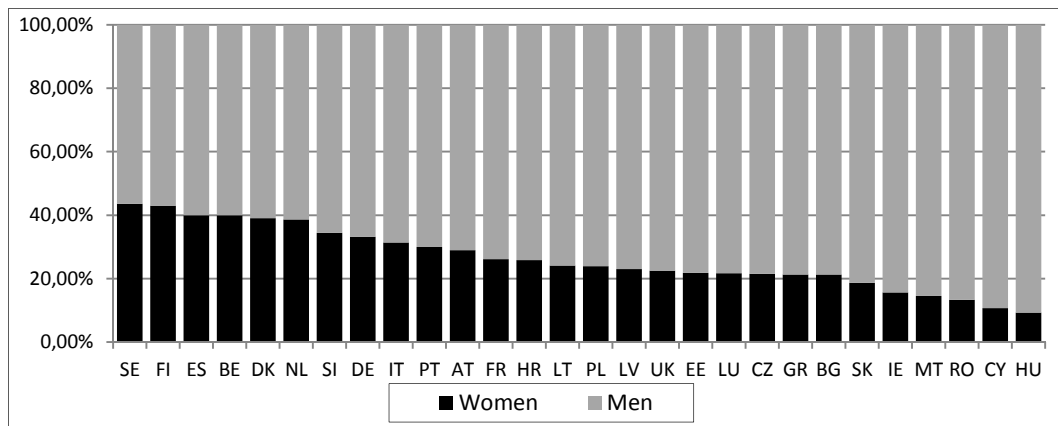
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Total number of parliament members is varied depending on the EU Member State and there is different number of citizens per one member of parliament.

European Union countries parliaments are differently composed having one or two houses (lower and upper house). From all 28 Member States exactly half (14) parliaments are unicameral and half are bicameral. Only members of single or lower house was taken under consideration and legislated quotas were examined in countries where the law were adopted before the date of last election.

Women to men ratio in parliaments shown on the Figure 1. presents disproportion of female deputies to male MP's. The highest percentage of women in national parliaments is in Sweden (43,55%), then in Finland (43,00%), Spain (40,00%), Belgium (40,00%), Denmark (39,11%) and Netherlands (38,67%). The lowest percentage is in Hungary (9,33%) and Cyprus (10,71%).

Fig. 1. Women to men ratio in parliaments



Source: Own elaboration

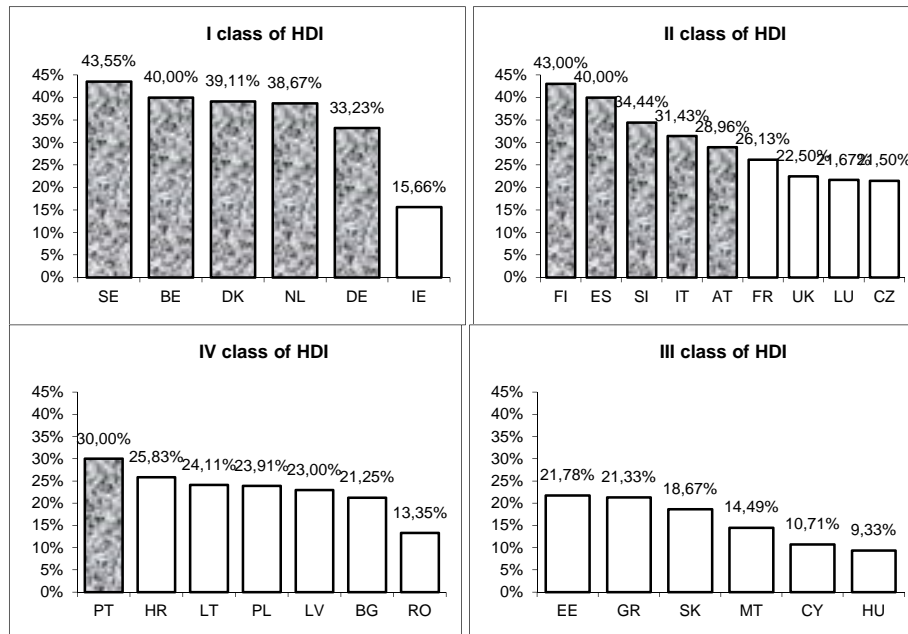
Among Member States with the highest share of women in the lower or single house of parliament only two (Belgium and Spain) adopted legislated quotas to the electoral lists. Scandinavian countries are leaders in that field, but while Sweden has voluntary political party's quotas, in Denmark there is no quotas at all. The other countries have different types of legislated quota.

Research frequently attributes the high representation of women in politics to the introduction of gender quotas [Dahlerup, Drude 2006]. Although gender quotas have been introduced in Sweden, this discourse is misleading since quota provisions were first introduced in the 1980s, at a time women occupied more than

30 per cent of seats in parliament [Freidenvall 2006]. France achieved its highest participation rate for women, 12 years after the adoption of a gender parity law. In some countries, like United Kingdom it is still very fierce debate about quota legislation, many parties demand it for years [Sawyer et al.2006].

According to Human Development Report 2013 all EU countries are very high developed (the first group consist of 47), except Bulgaria and Romania which belongs to the second group of high developed countries. Four human development classes were calculated for Member States and the percentage of women in parliaments was compared (Figure 2).

Fig. 2. Percent of women in parliaments in four classes of Human Development Index calculated for European Union countries.

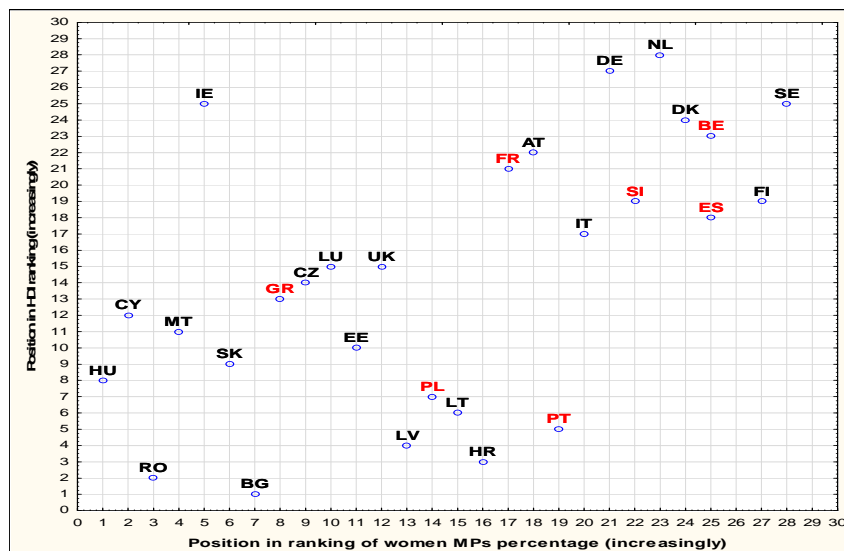


Source: Own elaboration. White columns indicate women percent value below the average for the 28 Member States.

In the first class (very high human development) there are almost all countries with women percentage above the mean value (which is equal to 26,34%) except the Ireland. In high developed countries more women are elected to parliament mainly because of better education which helps to remove social inequalities. In the second class most countries have above average percentage of women in parliaments. Surprisingly, in the 3rd class there are parliaments with the lowest women presence. From the 4th class countries only Portugal is above mean value – which means that only that country has more than 26,34% of women in parliament.

On the Figure 3 are shown countries in order of HDI value and rank of percent of women in parliament (both increasingly). Calculated Spearman's rank correlation coefficient for 28 countries was equal to 0,57 and was statistically significant. The higher HDI rank the higher percentage of women in parliament of the Member State. Countries with the legislated quotas were not on the very top, except Belgium which was ranked quite high. The leaders were Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, Denmark. Romania and Bulgaria had the smallest HDI value and the lowest position in women percentage ranking. The apparent outlier is Ireland – having not enough women in the parliament and in the same time very high human development.

Fig.3. Positions in rankings: women percent in parliaments and HDI index.



Source: Own elaboration. Countries marked grey adopted legislated quotas.

CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of our research we can conclude that the highest percent of women participation in EU parliaments is still in the Scandinavian countries (Sweden, Finland) and the lowest is in Hungary, then in Cyprus and Romania. It is correlation between HDI value and women MP's percentage in national parliaments - countries with the higher women representation in parliament also have the highest human development index. Less developed countries are still not convinced to elect women to government. Legislative quotas are not necessary to

receive higher percent of women contribution in the lower house of the parliament but voluntary political parties quotas might be very helpful to optimize women MP's/men MP's ratio.

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