

The Role of Women in Political Sphere France, Albania and Estonia

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Introduction

There are two different dimensions of the role of women in politics: right to vote¹ and likeliness to be elected. In this short report, we will focus on the status of women in France, Albania, and Estonia. These three countries have been chosen because they stand for European diversity in terms of historical, political and social process. Thus, these different backgrounds may aid in shedding light on factors that encourage female participation in politics. The first source of discrimination is that women are less likely to be elected than men due to less frequent participation in the political field. The second source of discrimination is that once elected, women often do not hold important positions or responsibilities.



Two dimensions for women's participation in politics and two types of discrimination they face

Historically, women had to fight for the right to attend school and work as men before gaining the right to vote. The woman's fight to participate in political life goes far beyond the simple right to vote or any legislated representation quotas: women's participation in politics is the result of a snowball effect in the field of human rights.

¹ In different countries such as Spain or Italy and sometimes France, one of the most important arguments to refuse women the right to vote was that they would vote for conservative parties due to the influence of the Church.

Although Estonia and France are on an equal footing because both belong to the European Union, Estonia and France apply two different mechanisms to encourage participation of women. Although Estonia and Albania have a similar history in that respect, their evolution since the 1990s is quite different.

Country	Representation of Women ²	Legal mechanism	Electoral System
France	26,90%	Legislated quota	TRS
Albania	17,86%	Legislated quota	List PRR
Estonia	23,76%	No quota provision	List PR

Source: European Parliament, Directorate General for Internal Policies, “Electoral Gender Quota Systems and their Implementation in Europe Update 2013”, by Policy Department Citizens’ right and Constitutional Affairs”, 2013, [on-line accessed on 10th July], available at : <

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2013/493011/IPOL-FEMM_NT%282013%29493011_EN.pdf >

P.R.: Proportional Representation.

P.R.R.: Proportional Regional Representation.

T.R.S.: Two – round system.

These three countries agree that women are underrepresented in the political sphere. In the table above, three statements can be underlined. First of all, these three countries are far from reaching 50% representation in the political sphere. According to the World Economic Forum³, France is in 21st position of 35 countries; Albania is 29th and Estonia 17th. Secondly, the quota method seems inefficient if you have a look at each result. Estonia has a roughly better percentage of women in political sphere compared to Albania without using quota method. Finally, a proportional system is potentially better for the likelihood of women to hold political positions, even if, on this table, electoral mechanisms do not seem so predictive of this. The positive effect of proportional electoral system on women’s representation is a well-known theory studied in particular by Drude Dahlerup⁴. Indeed, in plurality-majority system, there is a double monopoly. On the one hand, each party presents one candidate (per constituency)

² It corresponds to women’s representation for the latest elections: 2012 (France), 2013 (Albania), 2015 (Estonia).

³ HARRIS Chris, “Where is the best place in Europe for women?”, *Euronews*, October 2014, [on-line accessed on 10th July], available at: < <http://www.euronews.com/2014/10/28/world-economic-forum-gender-equality-report/> >

⁴ DAHLERUP Drude, “Quotas as a “Fast Track” to Equal Representation for Women”, *International Feminist journal of Politics*, Volume 7, Issue 1, 2005, p.26-48.

evicting sometimes probable women to compete inside some parties. On the other hand, a single political force retains all the votes at the end. On the contrary, in the proportional system, party-list are required which can make appear women figures which would not have appeared in the plurality-majority system.

In this report, we will focus on different scales as the presence of women in municipalities is quite different from representation in Parliament or Executive government. Then, based on implementation of a quota, we will attempt to find differences between France and Albania and means to implement a quota: through legislation, regulations or constitutional change. In the same way, sanctions foreseen in case of noncompliance are diverse: rejection of lists, financial incentives or penalties which are more or less efficient. That is why we will consider the following question: **Why does discrimination continue?**

I) First Case Study : France

Short historical background

During the “French State” also known as “Vichy France”, the predominant ideology consisted in assigning women to the role of housewife. In 1944, Charles De Gaulle, the French General granted women right to vote and to be eligible. In the French Constitution, article 17 declares “*Women can vote and are eligible under the same conditions as men* (Personal translation)”. This order was published on April 21th 1944. In 1957, the Treaty Establishing the European Economic Community declared it compulsory for the six signatory states (Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and West Germany) to ensure equality between men and women in the work place. In 1999, in France, a constitutional reform was passed to give women and men an equal stance in the political sphere. Today, French efforts towards male-female parity can be seen as a tool to generate public interest in politics in times of crisis representation.

Some figures

Once elected, women often do not hold political positions with extensive responsibility or influence. The figures below illustrate a tendency for women to hold less important political positions (such as Regional councillor or Mayor) than men. Women are also underrepresented

in executive responsibilities and in Parliament (33, 10% and 77, 90% respectively for Deputy job and Senator). In the appendix, the diagram puts into relief the same idea: the more women are represented in political sphere, the less they hold high responsibilities.

	Last Elections	% of women
Regional councillors	2010	48%
European parliamentarians	2014	45.90%
Deputy	2012	26.90%
Senators	2011	22.10%
Mayors	2014	16%

Source: INSEE, National Institute for Statistic and Economics Studies, "Participation à la vie politique", [on-line accessed on 10th July], available at: < http://www.insee.fr/fr/regions/nord-pas-de-calais/default.asp?page=themes/ouvrages/parite2006/7_5.htm >

In total, French Parliament is only about 10% women. There is a distortion between number of women in municipal councils and number in executive positions.

Analysis of legal mechanisms to promote women participation

A constitutional reform was affected in 1999 to change article 3 and 4 to urge parity, although the word "parity" had not been widely used. At article 3, par. 5, it is mentioned that: "*The law encourages the equal access of women and men for electoral mandates and eligible offices (personal translation)*". The principle of article 3 was to fix at 40% the percentage of candidates who were women for the next municipal elections in 2001. During these elections, the number of women elected reached 47.5 % inside municipals councils. The 2001 law also implied a more or less important financial help from State to political parties which had respected the parity law in their candidatures.

More recently in 2007, French legislature imposed alternation in lists - known as the zipper-system (a man followed by a woman followed by a man) and raised the quota to 50% for 2007 municipal elections and also for next departmental, regional, parliamentary and European elections. During the last departmental French elections in 2014, it is suggested that the necessity to respect a 50%-50% led some parties to make alliances in order to use the same women to count for multiple parties quotas. Consequently, the parity law was criticized due to ensuing confusion in which lists combine different political parties.

According to Mona Ozouf⁵, French historian, this constitutional reform broke with the principle of equality because it introduced differences and undermined universalism. The argument went that, paradoxically, by insisting on sex-based differentiation, parity would exacerbate and strengthen barriers between men and women. Furthermore, women do not represent 50% of French society but 52% so that such a law can be seen as simply a statistical tool. The idea of the Republic stems from the idea that rights of the individual do not come from beauty, wealth or sex. And finally, quotas would insult or humiliate those who benefit from it by implying they did not deserve their position.

Why does discrimination carry on?

Despite this parity legislation, the French electoral system has not succeeded in achieving equality between women and men in political representation. Different gatekeepers can explain this situation.

First, as Maurice Duverger⁶ suggested, the question of women's participation in politics involves deep social beliefs, often unconscious or repressed, so that it is sometimes difficult not to consider a probable distrust from voters towards female candidatures. Subsequently, once women are elected, positions are not equally distributed. For example, in departmental councils women previously held positions which dealt with "elderly people", "childhood-family", "exclusion", which corresponds to the extrapolation in public life of tasks which are traditionally assigned to women in private sphere⁷. This demonstrates that stereotypes are ingrained in the public mentality. But such an assertion is not only cynicism; it is also the result of future and probable destiny interiorized by people. For instance, many women simply ask to hold political positions which deal with "childhood-family", "education affairs"...

Secondly, if associations, such as "l'Observatoire de la parité régionale Nord-Pas-De-Calais" created in 2001, have played a great role in the fight against discrimination, nevertheless, on average, women are less frequently invited on television programs than men and remained underrepresented (below 25% compared to men) in radio⁸. To a certain extent, the media sphere reproduces the "masculine domination"⁹ that is experienced in political life.

⁵ OZOUF Mona, "Mona Ozouf, historienne", *L'Express*, Paris, 11 février 1999, [on-line accessed on 10th July], available at : <http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/politique/mona-ozouf-historienne_492511.html>

⁶ DUVERGER Maurice, *La participation des femmes à la vie politique*, UNESCO, Paris, 1955, p.9, p.89.

⁷ Observatoire de la parité, Nord-Pas-de-Calais, [on-line], available at : <<http://www.parite5962.org/?p=1704>>

⁸ ACHIN Catherine, Professor of Political Sciences in Paris, Conference, 24th October 2014, [on-line accessed on 10th July], available at : <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DY3MNrjPh9Y>>

⁹ BOURDIEU Pierre, *La domination masculine*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1998, 134 pages.

Another explanation lies in the concept of competitiveness. The obligation to create electoral lists which respect parity often overturned the ranking in parties list. This phenomenon turns to some men's disadvantage who henceforth hold non-eligible positions. A specialist of gender issues in politics, Catherine Achin¹⁰, observed that often the strategy of these men is to advance their own lists in the first round of elections. That is why, sometimes, men tend to reserve candidatures for themselves simply out of competitiveness and not necessarily due to misogynistic undertones.

II) Second Case Study: Albania

Historical background

During the socialist era, it has been suggested that women were much better represented in political life. In the 1990s, civil society played a crucial role in raising awareness about the need for women to be elected to public and political responsibilities. Current day media and NGOs such as *Millennium* and *Federation of Albanian Women* continue to play this role. Consequently, women's representation and participation is a known issue in Albanian society. However, though some powerful positions are held by women, including the current speaker of Parliament; female involvement in the political sphere remains marginal. For example, in June 2013 Parliamentary elections, only 25 out of 140 parliamentarians, or 7%, were women.

Legal mechanisms in Albanian society

As Albania is not part of the European Union, its incentives are different from those of the French. For instance, Albania has based its development of equality between men and women in the political sphere on the Beijing Plan for Action¹¹ but also on the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

¹⁰ ACHIN Catherine, *Ibid.*

¹¹ Организация Объединённых Наций, Пекинская декларация и Платформа действий, Структура Организации Объединённых Наций по вопросам гендерного равенства и расширения прав и возможностей женщины, четвертая Всемирная конференция по положению женщин, [on-line], available at : < <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20R.pdf> >

In December 2008, Albania implemented an organic law through its Electoral Code and a simple law entitled “Law on Gender Equality in Society (LGES)” stipulated that in national elections: “For each electoral zone, at least 30% of the multi-member list *and/or* one of the first three names on the multi-member list must be from each gender¹²”. By writing “and/or”, the Electoral Code generated a blurred legal framework. Instead of putting more women on their lists, the parties chose to pay the fine of 39 000 Lek (about 300 USD) connected with not fulfilling the quota. This is a pernicious effect created by the quota law.

Consequently, though the LGE called for women’s participation, regulation mechanisms did not accompany an enforced quota method.

Balance

If quota provisions in Albania are a means for changing reality and mentality, the 30% of the party list is a very weak attempt, and does not reflect the ability of women¹³. In other words, quota aims at quantity instead of aiming at quality. So the fact that a quota of 30% and not 40% or 50% had been chosen should be questioned. Indeed, such a figure can send a negative signal for Albanian society: does it mean that on average only 30% of Albanian women are capable to enter in politics? It is certainly not the case and neither the spirit of the quota law, notwithstanding, such a figure indubitably places women in an inferior position compared to men. This percentage can also be interpreted as an intermediate step for a later and wider representation of women in high responsibilities. Indeed, the use of 30% can be seen as a more natural process towards a fair and equal representation between men and women contrary to the mechanic and statistical use of 50% quota. In any case, the use of quota method seems inescapable for Albania because of not a single party chose voluntarily to include women before the introduction of the quota law.

At the end of the day, Albanian experience appears to illustrate the need to include a formula of “rank order” (zipper-system, alternating names) in the legal framework, which would guarantee the election of 30% women in elected bodies. Compared to France, Albania seems to have chosen a more modest approach. Some consider the 50% quota as an artificial catapult for

¹² Article 67, par. 6 of the 2012 Electoral Albanian Code.

¹³ EKERSTEDT Malin, “Albanian election: parties chose fines over women”, ”, *Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation*, June 2013, [on-line accessed on 10th July], available at, < <http://kvinnatillkvinna.se/en/2013/06/24/albanian-election-parties-chose-fines-over-women/> >

women. Instead of imposing 50% quota, a lower quota could also progressively make society aware of the reason women should entered politics¹⁴.

Why does discrimination carry on?

First of all, a negative effect of Albanian electoral reform is that parties did not place women in winnable positions on candidate lists.

Furthermore, few Albanian women are involved in politics and not due to a lack of interest. Education in Albanian society is based on gender- stereotypes which do not help girls with self-confidence, and girls continue to censor themselves as they become women. A report of UN Women published in 2013 clearly pointed out the lack of gender equality objectives in the National Strategy on Pre-university Education (2009-2013) which entail a cruel but true reality “[in the current Albanian society] *discrimination against girls and women in the area of education continues*¹⁵”. Another article gives the key explanation of this discrimination: “*by forcing [girls] to leave school when they become teenagers*¹⁶”. Consequently, women’s participation in politics is also a question of empowerment and knowledge. If the benefits of female engagement in politics are known, the number of women who will involve themselves not only in politics but also in other factions may be higher.

So, as in the French situation, the quota continues to be accompanied by doubts. This skepticism can fade as soon as the use of language evolves. Let us understand this bone of contention with the difference between “quota” and “parity” which is in reality more symbolical and political difference rather than a semantical one. Indeed, “quota” and “parity” have the same goal. Nevertheless, “parity” essentially refers to the word used by United –Nations through the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995 and later by European Union. On the contrary, “quota” conveys a quantitative vision and is in contradiction with the idea of universalism in a Republican government. Nevertheless, the importance of language for women’s representation goes far beyond that point. The issue lies in sexist remarks, doubts or verbalized discredit concerning the competence of women, thus often curtailing engagement in politics. An aspect of male domination is illustrated by a rude and violent language, publicly or

¹⁴ DHEMBO Elona, "Women in politics and decision-making in Albania: a qualitative analysis", *Article already quoted*.

¹⁵ United Nations Women, National Report on the implementation of the Beijing + 20 Action Plan for Action (Albania), February 2013, [on-line accessed on 10th July], available at: < http://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/59/national_reviews/albania_review_beijing20.ashx >, p.18-19.

¹⁶ EKERSTEDT Malin, *Article already quoted*.

privately expressed, against women¹⁷. So, linguistic change has the potential to considerably improve gender equality.

III) Third Case Study: Estonia

The Estonian panorama

According to Estonian national Electoral Committee, the number of women in the national parliament has grown from 12.9% in 1991 to 19.8% in 2011¹⁸. These figures seem to be quite similar those of current Albania. Is there an “Allergy to feminism” across Central and Eastern Europe as Jasmina Lukic wrote¹⁹? Albania and Estonia processes are different despite their common history and similar numbers of women in the contemporary political landscape. Today, the situation seems quite good if we examine female role in political parties (about 48%). Furthermore, Estonia counts over 200 womens organizations that are active in promoting gender equality²⁰.

An Estonian paradox

Among these three case studies, Estonia is the only country which has not implemented a quota system. Thus, we might think women are less represented in Estonia political life. However, according to figures quoted in the introduction, that is not the case. Estonia is simply using a more natural way to encourage women to participate in politics. It may seem paradoxical, but one explanation is that mentality in Estonia is different and does not need a law to set aside a certain amount of space for women to participate in politics. Even more

¹⁷ ERBAS Isa, “Participation of the women of Albania in politics and their rights”, *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, Vol.3, n°6, november 2014, MCSER Publishing, Rome, Italy, [on-line], available at: < <http://www.mcser.org/journal/index.php/ajis/article/viewFile/4884/4726> >

¹⁸ European Parliament, Directorate General for Internal Policies, *Already quoted*.

¹⁹ LUKIC Jasmina, *Women and citizenship in Central and Eastern Europe*, Ashgate, London: MPG books, 2006, p.288.

²⁰ International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), *Introducing Quotas: Discourses and Lobbying Strategies Used by the Women’s Movement*, [on-line accessed on 10th July], available at: < http://www.idea.int/publications/quotas_europe/upload/Quotas_Europe_Chapter_5.pdf >

paradoxical is that, on one hand, thanks to a more feminist mentality, Estonian women enjoy a more advanced position than they do in Western countries. However, the Estonian²¹ gender pay gap is nearly 28%: the largest in the EU. Despite this mentality, recognition of women is limited, and women's voices are seldom heard or taken into account²².

Law Framework

In 1996, a gender equality department was established within the Ministry of Social Affairs. Its role consists in developing a broadly understood gender equality. In May 2004, the Gender Equality Act was created²³. The act focuses on all areas of life including the workplace, the educational field, and female participation in politics. This legislative framework is powerful because it succeeds in influencing behavioral change by offering protection when discrimination is attributable to traditional stereotypes²⁴. According to this law, on the labor market, women's opportunities cannot be limited for being considered future mother. Thus, it obliges employers to promote gender equality. In the political field, it is strictly mentioned: "*State and local government authorities are required to promote gender equality systematically and purposefully* (Chap. 3. Para. 9²⁵)". In the chapter 4, the Act also gives the right to claim for damage if discrimination based on sexual difference can be proved. Recently in 2013, the Estonian Government established the "Gender Equality Council" which is an advisory body to the Government. Its role consists in giving advices to the Government to fulfill objectives of gender equality.

Why does discrimination carry on?

Despite a novel way to fight discrimination, some factors continue to bar women's participation in politics.

²¹ OTOCKI Tomasz, "Estonia: How much Equality", *New Eastern Europe*, October 2014, [on-line], Available at: <<http://neweasterneurope.eu/articles-and-commentary/1367-estonia-how-much-equality>>

²² BIIN Helen, "Country Report based on Research and Dialogue with political parties", From International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), February-April 2015, [on-line], available at: <http://www.idea.int/parties/upload/Estonia_laid_out.pdf>

²³ International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), *Introducing Quotas: Discourses and Lobbying Strategies Used by the Women's Movement*, [on-line], available at: <http://www.idea.int/publications/quotas_europe/upload/Quotas_Europe_Chapter_5.pdf>

²⁴ European Commission, "Gender equality and women's rights", International Cooperation and Development, 2013, [on-line accessed on 10th July], available at <https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/gender-equality-and-womens-rights-empowerment-estonia_en>

²⁵ English version of Gender Equality Act, [on -line], available at: <<https://www.riigiteataja.ee>>

Many people have difficulties in believing in female potential and legitimacy, sometimes including women. In a report published by World Bank, a woman member of the Estonian Parliament declares the biggest obstacle in politics is “*being female and mother*” and she adds: “*evenings at home rather than at meetings*”²⁶. This testimony is an illustration of the already mentioned future and probable destiny interiorized by women which can sometimes force them to conform to masculine ideal. Quota will not resolve constraints and symbolic violence women are imposing to themselves. Another feature in language which reflects the lack of trust in women’s involvement in politics is the “but, however” attitude. People agree with female participation in politics but they cannot avoid using the term “However” or “But” in their discourse on it which clearly show their lack of total consent. They agree with women’s participation if only they are competent, if they are necessary, if they are this or that... This “however attitude” can sometimes be seen as a result of quota laws. “Quota” is a short word, a striking one, like a key to create a perfect equality. But in reality, this arithmetic equality sounds rather absurd. Thus, the juridic reform would be more efficient if it is accompanied by a change of behaviour, language and attitudes.

Another socio-historical explanation is that the concept of gender equality is not fully understood by many people. Some of them see gender equality as “something impolite to men”²⁷. During the Soviet period, gender equality was also promoted but had a different meaning and a different ideology. Soviet discourse attempted to create a gender neutral citizenship to homogenize male and female roles so that stereotypes were less intense.

Finally, as highlighted in the introduction, the electoral system and rules adopted by parties seem to influence involvement of women. For instance, the unchanging composition of a party can’t really benefit for a turnover which would be able to introduce women figures. Conversely, the turnover can damage women in politics. According to the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU), the continuing financial crisis in Europe have produced a substitution of dominant coalition of parties by another in different european countries such as Estonia. Most of the times, incumbent and marginal seat lost (typically held by women) are not replaced by other women from new coalition parties²⁸. It is mainly due to unfavorable attitudes from political parties towards women in, at least, two different cases. First, because women are not placed in winnable positions on party lists. It was the case for latest Albanian elections in 2009, 2011 and

²⁶ ROSENBLUTH Frances, KALLA Joshua, DAWN Teele, “The female political career 2015”, *World Bank*, [on-line accessed on 10th July], available at: < http://www.womeninparliaments.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Final_13012015_The-Female-Political-Career.pdf >

²⁷ IDEA, *Introducing Quotas: Discourses and Lobbying Strategies Used by the Women’s Movement*, *Already quoted*.

²⁸ Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), “Women in Parliament in 2011”, 2011, [on-line accessed on 10th July], available at: < <http://www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/wmnpersp11-e.pdf> >

2013 which did not apply the zipper system. Another negative strategy from political parties is to make women compete in a district where it is already known that they will not win. Denise Cacheux²⁹, who had become later the first woman quaestor in the National French Assembly, lost the 1978 legislative elections in a district where her party used to win just 20% of votes. Lastly, as indicated, the Proportional Representation (PR) system provides women with a better opportunity to increase representation, though the most important factor may be the district size.

Conclusion

Two main conclusions can be drawn. The first conclusion is a **statement**: there is a gap between letter and spirit of quota method. On one hand, the letter of parity law seems to better encourage equality between men and women. France and Albania apply this method with decent results. On the other hand, the idea behind the quota is not necessarily respected. Concurrence in political arena accompanied by a low number of women, and hypocrisy in which political parties prefer to pay a fine rather than respecting quota, as well as the lack of access to “electable” positions show that there is a way to go in ending discrimination against women in the political sphere.

As mentioned in introduction, these three countries belong to different historical, geographical and political processes which lead us to analyze them separately in order not to draw artificial parallels. So that, it is now easier to perceive the weight of different factors (historical, political, social...) which encourages or not women to participate in politics. The historical factor reflected in the common soviet legacy in Estonia and Albania does not seem so predictive to understand current differences in women’s participation in Albanian and Estonian political life. But values conveyed by history, like the idea of Republic and universalism in France, remain strong and crucial up to partly explain the diversity of trajectory for women’s political involvement in these three countries. The degree of civil society strength widens huge gap in terms of practices to foster women’s participation in Estonia and Albania. Let us mention, these two countries are respectively ranked in the 25th and 110th according to Transparency

²⁹ CACHEUX Denise, « 1945-2015 : 70 ans de vote des Françaises. Histoire, évolution et enjeux actuels », Conference organized at Sciences-Po Lille, Lille, France, April 15th 2015, about 120 minutes.

International Index in 2014³⁰. Finally, the political European environment generates some norms which have benefited for France as for Estonia. This last country became a legislative model in the European Union in terms of gender equality with its Gender Equality Act passed in 2004.

The second conclusion is **a desire**. If quota has indubitably shown some positive aspects, such a juridical, statistical and normative (so, questionable) tool have to be accompanied by mentality changes to be efficient. In these three countries, changes in favor of women's participation in politics would not have been prioritised without civil society - NGOs, activist and the media. If bottom-up approach has been used and proved its efficiency, it may be necessary to combine the bottom-up approach with a top-down one in order to make women more visible in politics, thus leading by example. Following a top-down approach, electoral system or parties could also evolve to make it easier for women to participate because they control electoral rules and the nominations.

The most important factor of change may lie in language and the discourse concerning the role of women. Linguistic practices and societal mentalities often lie in parallel. So, as long as language represents and perpetuates stereotypes, society cannot evolve towards equality between men and women. And language transformation takes time and effort.

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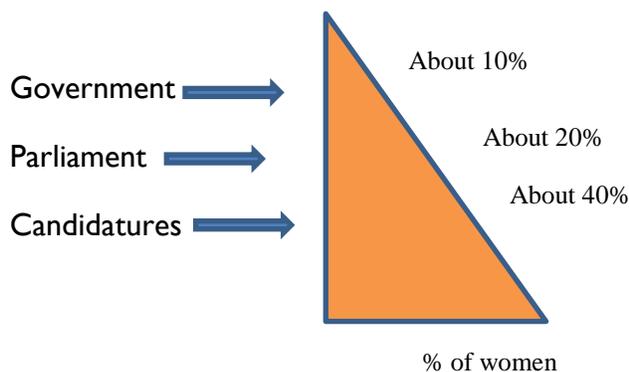
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Appendix



Generally, in many European countries, women’s participation in politics differs according to scale. Jobs that entail higher decision making capabilities often correspond to fewer women represented