

Comparative Perspective on Women's Representation in the Executive and Legislative Powers in Romania and Croatia

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With the fall of the Communist regimes people have been faced not only with new economic and political realities but also with the possibility of having to accept new identities of defend old ones. Members of the ex-communist states are feeling insecure about the worth of their citizenship and one important group of those who feel threatened are women. They are not viewed as mature political subjects but rather as reproducers of the nation and national culture which results in their extreme invisibility on the political arena

The purpose of the present paper is to investigate to what extent women are active participants in politics in two post-communist societies, namely Romania and Croatia, and what are the main causes of their under-representation, to what extent we can talk about affirmative policies for women in these two countries. We shall take into account statistical data concerning women's representation in the executive and legislative powers covering the period of the present and previous legislature. As we shall see the data shows significant differences between the two countries which we shall try to analyze with regard to possible factors responsible for these differences.

The paper will be structured as follows: we will start by making some remarks on the issue of women's representation, and then turn to the particular cases individually and chronologically by firstly considering the Romanian case and finally compare it to the Croatian case.

General remarks concerning women's representation in the decision-making process

The problem of women's representation in politics has become an issue among a large number of scholars who have elaborated various theories concerning women's under-representation in politics. However it has been widely accepted that although variations may occur from one country to another there are some universally applicable factors which lead to a significantly low number of women involved in the decision-making process.

Among such factors (although the prominence with which they influence women's representation may vary) we could list the highly masculinized model of both political life as well as the elected governmental bodies, the lack of party support, the low level of co-operation with other organizations besides the political ones, the lack of political

education and means for changing implementing a training system, and last but not least the nature of the electoral system. Due to the limited length of the present article we shall only take into the scope of our work the lack of party support and the low level of co-operation between the political bodies and other organizations, with particular regard to NGOs as long as the data regarding these issues is more easily comparable with respect to the two countries which will be presented. In so far as the electoral systems of the two countries are concerned we shall briefly describe them at the beginning of each section but given the similar natures of these systems we shall not make any direct reference them.

The case of Romania (1996-2000)

Although women were in a large number members of different parties their number varying between 20 % and 55 % from the total number of members of the parliamentary and non-parliamentary political parties they usually hold background positions, demanding a large amount of work, thoroughness, competence; they have restricted access to the leading and decisional positions within the parties, both at the national and the regional levels.

Women's access to the leading positions of the political parties by the system of the imposed percentage is practically ignored even by those parties which stipulate this clause in their statute; there are no sanctions stipulated against the non-observance of this clause (such as PD, the Democrat Party or PSDR, The Romanian Social Democrat Party).

The quota system is not stipulated by any of the political parties participating in the 1996 elections. Party leaders seem to argue against the quota system by claiming what Dahlerup states: "quotas imply that politicians are elected because of their gender, not because of their qualifications, and that more qualified candidates are pushed aside".

The networks of women's organizations and structures within the political parties have poor efficiency, most of them being underdeveloped (they generally concentrate within the big cities in the developed counties; in rural areas they have practically no influence at all). Moreover from among the total number of parliamentary political parties between 1996-2000 (counting 7 parties and coalitions) only 3 have organizations for women, namely PDSR, The Romanian Social Democracy Party, PD and PSDR.

The electoral system for electing the members of the two houses of the parliament is proportional which is maybe one of the few legal procedures which may be favorable to women's higher representation at the legislative level since it has been argued that the proportional system presents more advantage for women to get elected as opposed to the majoritarian representation system since the political parties must compete with each other and win more than one seat per district which leads to their necessity of "going further down [...] the lists where women are usually listed".

Women's low representation at various levels of decision during the last four years can be easily noticed by examining the data below:

Parliament

Total average: 5.5 %

- In the Chamber of Deputies: 24 women deputies - 7 %
- In the Senate: 2 women senators - 1.4 %
- Permanent parliamentary commissions: 2 chairwomen
- Senate - The Human Rights Commission - chairwoman, senator, from the PDSR party.
- Joint parliamentary Commission for the European Integration - The Chamber of Deputies and the Senate - chairwoman, deputy from the Democratic Party.
- There is no woman in the Permanent Offices and no woman leader of a parliamentary group.
- 1 woman vice-president of the Chamber of Deputies.

Government

- No woman minister
- 5 women secretary of state
- 3 women - Prime Minister's staff
- 2 women - directors in the Government's General Secretariat

There is no woman in decisional positions at the following levels: The Legislative Council, The Constitutional Court, The Court of Accounts, The Council of Concurrence, The Service of External Information, The Romanian Service of Information, The Service of Special Telecommunications.

In order to comment on the data we shall again refer to the already stated two factors that will be taken into account, namely the party politics and the lack of communication with women's organizations. For the sake of clarity they will be discussed each individually.

Party politics before and during the elections was not favorable to women from several points of view: as already mentioned women were not recruited and placed on election lists, or in many cases when they were, they were not placed at the top of the list. Another strategy used by the parties was to have women candidates in counties where it was unlikely that the respective party would win any seat (for instance the case of PDSR placing women in the top position of the lists in the two counties with more than 90% Hungarians where it was evident that PDSR could not win any seat given the fact that during all the elections starting from 1990 data proved that more than 90% of the Hungarians vote for UDMR, the Democratic Union of Hungarians from Romania).

In so far as the impact of the civil society is concerned there seems to have been a total lack of dialogue representing two directions: on the one hand out of the 47 NGO's dealing with women's issues only 6 deal directly with the problem of women's representation at the decision-making level and there was a lack of communication and co-operation even

among those 6, while on the other there was a clear tendency before 1996 of ignoring civil society as such by the Romanian governing bodies.

Another factor responsible for the above mentioned data especially with regard to the number of women in the executive power was the political color of the ruling coalition (CDR, Romanian Democratic Convention) which was formed around the Peasants' Party which claims to maintain and reintroduce the traditional family values politics reflected in the figures of elected women belonging to the ruling coalition: none in the Senate out of 53 senators and 7 in the Chamber of Deputies. The explanation can be extended to cover also the non-representation of women in the government (no ministerial seat being held by a woman).

The figures after the 2000 elections show a slightly improved situation of women's representation especially at the government level. We shall try to compare the data and to identify the factors which may have caused the difference.

Parliament

Total average: 8,45

- In the Chamber of Deputies: 33 women deputies - 9,56%
- In the Senate: 8 women senators - 5, 71%
- Permanent parliamentary commissions: have not yet been established

Government

- 5 women ministers (Ministry of European Integration, Ministry of Justice, Ministry for Small and Medium-sized and Co-operation, Ministry of Education and Research, Ministry of Health and Family)
- 5 women secretary of stat
- 4 women - Prime Minister's staff
- 3 women - directors in the Government's General Secretariat

The still low representation of women has been explained by taking into account the same factors listed for the 1996 elections, namely the party politics has not witnessed any major change with regard to women. There was only one party wich has introduced quotas for women but in the text of the statute women and young were represented under the same article: "at all levels of the ANCD at least 1/3 of the members have to be women and young people. In cases when this number does not reach 1/3 of all the members their number will be increased with new members". However the text itself is ambiguous leading to various interpretations such as how many of the young and women have actually to be women? The party however did not get more that 5% of the valid votes and thus did not enter the parliament. No other party has established any quotas for women's representation.

The slight increase of women's representations can be explained by taking into account two factors: on the one hand during the 1996-2000 legislature there was an increasing tendency of co-operation with various NGOs which promote women's rights and women's equal chances to be represented in the decision-making bodies although

there is still a tendency of collaborating with the Human Rights NGOs rather than with women's organizations. The number of NGOs dealing with women's issues has raised from 43 to 60, but the number of those who deal with health, equal employment and education opportunity still constitute the large majority: only 8 deal directly with the issue of women's inclusion into politics.

On the other the parties with the greatest majority in the parliament are PDSR, PRM, PD and PNL which have all policies concerning women's role in politics as opposed to the previously ruling Peasants' Party whose statute and program did not stipulate any affirmative party policy regarding women. (16). The ruling party (PDSR) holds 155 seats in the Chamber of Deputies out of which 18 are women, which makes 11% while at the executive level one can notice a significant increase, percentage of women ministers increasing with 14%. (17). Also it is important to notice the fact that it is for the first time in post-communist Romania that women were appointed as ministers outside the social welfare posts (Ministry of European Integration, Justice and Ministry for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises).

The Case of Croatia

As we have already stated given the fact that the nature of the Croatian electoral system does not present major differences with the Romanian model (In Croatia for the House of Counties the electoral system being proportional whereas for the house of Representatives eighty are elected under a proportional system and 28 in one-member constituencies according to a simple majority system - thus the easily notice a lot of similarities but also some differences which we shall try to explain in what follows.

The total percentage of women in parliament is not very different comparing the results of the previous elections in the two countries: 5,5% in Romania versus the 6,8% of the parliamentary seats occupied by women in Croatia. However although the situation is similar in comparing the total percentage Croatian women are much better represented in the Upper House, the House of Representatives 4,4% compared to 1,4% in Romania. Also if one were to examine the situation in the government, Croatian 1997 government had 2 women ministers which was not the case of Romania.

Parliament

- Total average: 6,88%
- In the House of Representatives: 12 women deputies -7,8 %
- In the House of Counties: 3 women senators - 4,4 % (Croatian Women's web-page located at: <http://members.tripod.com/CROWWOMEN/arihiva.htm>)

Permanent Parliament Committees

- 2 chairwomen

Government

- 4 women ministers (Deputy Prime Minister - Humanitarian Affairs; Deputy Prime Minister - Social Affairs; Minister of European Integration, Minister of Science and Technology) out of a total of 29 ministries

It has been explained that the "situation in the elected political bodies reflects the situation in the political parties". It seems again that as in the Romanian case the political parties do not consider women's representation as an important issue and do not implement any positive measures concerning women.

Nevertheless as opposed to Romania where for the 1996 elections there were no special measures for women in the political platform of the political parties, in Croatia due to the efforts of women's groups for the elections in 1997, several political parties have developed women's programs. But it seems as they are only meant to attract votes for after the elections these programs are not upheld¹). Similarly with Romania in the party hierarchy men still held the highest positions while the percentage of women in the governing bodies of political parties range between 0- 28,57%. Only two parties have a women's quota (for 30% women), but it is not implemented on all levels of their organization²). Yet another common aspect with the Romanian case is the fact that women's sections are still not established for most of the parties and also the fact that state mechanisms do not work into this direction either. Also the ruling coalition HDZ (Croatian Democratic Union) has as stated goal the issue of family which should be in the center of all politics with particular attention given to maternity and demographic expansion which inevitably leads to the reinforcement of women's traditional role which is that of wife and mother and thus leading to her confinement to the private space and insufficient policies for advancing towards the public sphere and implicitly politics.

But unlike the Romanian case NGOs which deal with women's representation seem to be much more actively involved into the matter of representation by forming the so-called Women's Ad Hoc coalition which comprised 18 NGOs whose aim was to monitor and influence the elections by encouraging women politicians in their work.

Also at the level of the executive body Croatia enjoys a greater women representation compared to Romania although we should not neglect that two of these functions are held in the social welfare fields (see the data above).

After January 3, 2000

As the figures below show the number of women tripled in the House of Representatives after the 2000 elections while the total average of women holding seats in the parliament has raised with almost 10% (more precisely with 9,78%) but in the House of Counties the number did not increase significantly (from 5,71% to 7%) which reflects once again that although important steps have been made with regard to the party politics concerning women's inclusion in the electoral lists still the higher the level the lower the number of women who have access to power.

Parliament

- Total average: 16,05%
- In the House of Representatives: 31 women deputies - 20 %
- In the House of Counties: 4 women senators - 6 % (Women in National Parliaments: <http://ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>)

Government

- 2 women ministers (Deputy Prime Minister - Social Affairs, Minister of Health)
- 1 government secretary
- 1 government spokeswoman

As an important similarity with the Romanian results we could list the fact that elections were won by a majority formed with two parties which have paid particular attention to women's issues and thus including more women in the lists: SDP (Social Democratic Party) and HSLs (Croatian Social Liberals). Although neither of the two have introduced special quotas for women SDP's program stipulates that "SDP seeks more equal participation of women in politics [...] and it will try to achieve the inclusion of obligatory participation of women in politics by the introduction of quotas" whereas the HSLs's statute mentions that "women should equally participate in the decision-making process and that quotas should be guaranteed by the law.

Nevertheless the number of women ministers has decreased from 4 to 2 which proves to be contradictory to the above mentioned goals of the ruling parties, from this point of view Romania's situation with respect to the number of women in the executive power being considerably more desirable 5 ministries being led by women.

The role of the NGOs shows once more to have had an important impact on the current representation of women in the Croatian politics: the number of NGOs dealing directly with matters involving women's implication and active participation in politics is much higher than in Romania, out of a total number of 25 NGOs for women 9 are mainly militating for women's becoming political actors and they have been actively involved in the pre-election process while the Ad Hoc Association was again militating for women's higher representation.

In lieu of conclusion

Although in both countries the number of women represented at the legislative and executive level has increased after the elections of 2000 as compared to the previous legislature it is still considerably low as compared to the female population of the two analyzed countries (in both cases it is above 51% and therefore it represents a majority).

Non-governmental organizations' reports concerning affirmative policies for women's taking part in the decision-making process recommend in both cases the elaboration of a governmental strategy or measures for promoting equal opportunity for women, developing programs which will oblige the governments to appoint a certain

percentage of women in leading positions and support women NGOs which promote participation of women in politics.

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Index of women participation to social life (WPI) - *National Human Development Report - Romania. UNDP, 1998*

Elections 2000 – “Pro Democratia” Final Report

Web resources

Women's Political Participation -Be Active, Be Emancipated: <http://www.babe.hr/en>

Croatian Democratic Union's official web-page: <http://hdz.hr/hr/onama/index.htm>

Social Democratic Party's official web-page: <http://www.sdp.hr/prog.html>

Croatian Social Liberals' official web-page: <http://hsls.hr>

<http://members.tripod.com/~CROWWOMEN/Groups1.htm>