

*Regional Women's Lobby For Peace, Security and Justice in
Southeast Europe*

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Women, Politics and Quotas in Southeast Europe.

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The Southeast Europe Context

The transition to democracy from socialism in SEE had a dramatic impact on the position of women in society. Under communism women carried the “double burden” of responsibility for both private and public lives. The socialist woman was considered an equal worker in the eyes of the state and most women worked full-time jobs. But this equality did not extend to private life; after work, women returned to the home where they had exclusive responsibility in caring for the home and children. The transition from communism to democracy was accompanied by a call for a return to “traditional” (often religious) values in these societies and women were pushed out of public and political life. This was noticeable in the political arena as the number of women in politics dropped radically in the first parliaments formed under democracy. Again, it must be stressed that although communism had high percentages of women in politics they were not in positions of decision-making or substantive power. Not only were women pushed out of politics and political parties, they were also the first to lose jobs in the economic reforms occurring under transition to a market economy.

Increasing the number of women in public office in the countries of the region is therefore a priority. Women in SEE have found themselves doubly jeopardized by dramatic changes in both the political and economic spheres of their countries. The solution to this problem is to find a way to legitimize gender equality concerns on legislative agendas. These concerns are well represented in the loss of essential sources of social protection by the state that have occurred during the transition to a market economy. Significant changes in laws regulating reproductive rights restricted women's freedom of choice. Few new affirmative action measures were implemented in the political sphere, and social protections concerning health care and childcare diminished. Legislative changes have not been gender-sensitive and have eroded women's rights protections, such as laws on social security, retirement and labour. Another significant problem has proven to be the opening of the region to the global economy. Combined with the ways that conflict has fuelled the growth of illicit markets in human trafficking and other economies exploitative of women, participation in public decision-making by women is all the more important in order to address these ills.

These economic and political changes have generated a new set of obstacles making it even more difficult for women to balance their desire to engage in the public sphere with their growing responsibilities in the private sphere. The political involvement of women is crucial if states are to address these issues, especially since present economic and social policies have profound impacts on women's lives in the future and to the development of society as a whole. However, it is not enough to simply increase the number of women in politics; their contribution must be substantive. Women politicians in SEE do not necessarily represent a gender equality agenda. They may be members of the social elite; or they may hold certain positions because of their personal connections with male politicians and consequently may be unable to represent the interests of women at the grassroots. It is important, therefore, to stress the connection between women politicians and their gender equality constituency, meaning that it is necessary to strengthen simultaneously the women's movement that is at the base of the women elected.

In addition to the economic and political difficulties that were experienced across the post-communist transitioning countries, the countries of southeast Europe all experienced some degree of conflict. Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo were all ravaged by years of bloody war, Serbia and Montenegro experienced the effects of the conflicts in the region first indirectly, and then directly with the NATO bombing as a result of the conflict in Kosovo. Albania experienced armed revolt and conflict following its economic collapse and fall into chaos in 1996-7. These conditions of conflict led to the militarization of these societies and the further marginalization of women from decision-making as public attitudes reinforced the view that women were not decisive politicians and strong leaders during war and conflict.

The Women's Movement and Women Politicians

Unfortunately, gender equality concerns have come to be somewhat discredited in the region owing to their association with previous regimes. The growth of the women's movement in particular faced difficulties in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of communism due to the perception that feminism was associated with the corporatist socialist women's organization or with the "man-haters" of the West. The women's movement that did eventually emerge in the post-Yugoslav case study countries did so mainly by mobilizing women around an anti-war stance, or peace activism. It was only later that this movement began to focus on other political, social and economic issues as well. The women's movement in Albania has focused on issues of violence against girls and women and has worked hard to gain acceptance in Albanian (especially rural) society, which is very traditional on questions of women's roles. For this reason the movement in Albania is less overtly "feminist" in its overall approach than that for example in Serbia.

Levels of women's presence in elected public office in countries such as Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia are not negligible, but do not come anywhere close to the 30% minimum stipulated in the Beijing Platform for Action, and which is considered the minimum necessary for women to have a tangible impact on public decision-making. During the 1990s the level of women in SEE parliaments remained relatively stable at about 7% in the SEE countries. Available data show that Bosnia and Serbia saw their levels of women elected to office increase only after quota laws were passed through parliament and implemented by electoral commissions. In Montenegro and Albania legislated quotas are still not in existence and this has had an obvious effect on the number of women in public life. In Montenegro, women remain significantly underrepresented in politics. Prior to the 2006 elections, two of the country's 21 mayors were women, and two women were government ministers. No significant efforts were made by state institutions, political parties or civil organisations to increase the participation of women candidates in the 2006 elections. Albania has the lowest participation of women in politics in SEE, with only one woman minister and a figure of 5-7% women elected in past elections (see Table below).

Table 1:
Percentage of Women Elected to National Assemblies in Last Decade of National Elections.¹

Election Year	Albania	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Montenegro	Serbia
1996	12.1% ²	2.4% ³	5.0% ⁴	
1997	5.1%			
1998		30% ⁵		
1999				
2000		7.1%	7.2% ⁶	
2001	5.7%			
2002		14.2%		
2003			7.9% ⁷	
2004				
2005	7.2%			
2006		14.3%	8.6% ⁸	
2007				20.4%
Quota (Footnote on Type)	No ⁹	Yes ¹⁰	No	Yes, since 2004 ¹¹

Quotas were at first shunned in the post-communist countries because they were associated with the communist past. However as women became aware of how marginalized they were becoming, support for such policies grew. As preliminary

¹ All data from PARLIN Database <http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/RecentElections.asp> and IDEA international <http://www.quotaproject.org>

² This government quickly dissolved after the nationwide collapse of "pyramid schemes" led to an armed crisis. The crisis was precipitated by political unrest after allegations by domestic and international observers that the 1996 elections were unfair and fraudulent. The percentage of women elected seems to be an anomaly in Albania's pattern; the previous elections in 1992 had resulted in the standard 5.5% women elected.

³ First post-war elections for the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly, representing both entities.

⁴ Chamber of Citizens of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY)

⁵ For these elections a Provisional Electoral Committee controlled by the international community passed a Temporary Gender Rule stating that 3 out of the first 10 names had to be women and the party lists were to be CLOSED.

⁶ Chamber of Citizens of FRY. Elections were partially boycotted by Montenegrins. Amid allegations of election fraud, a popular uprising led to the overthrow of Milosevic days after the election.

⁷ Parliament of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro.

⁸ First national elections after Montenegrin independence.

⁹ Bill proposed but did not pass in 2001. New proposal to come before Electoral Commission towards end of 2007.

¹⁰ Bosnia had different "Temporary Gender Rules" for the 1998 and 2000 elections. The official Electoral Law of 2001 instituted an official quota system: One candidate of the under-represented sex to be included in the first 2 candidates on lists, 2 amongst the first 5 candidates, 3 amongst the first 8 candidates. At least 1/3 of the under-represented sex should be included on party lists.

¹¹ The Electoral Law of 2004 states that lists of political parties must contain at least 30 percent of each sex. Every fourth place is reserved for the less represented sex. During the National Assembly election in January 2007 an extensive campaign for "30 percent for women" campaign was carried out.

evidence from Bosnia and Serbia seems to show, quotas have had an impact on getting women into parliament however women politicians are still far removed from real positions of decision-making power.

Quotas are not the only issue that affects women when it comes to electoral reform. Whether a system uses closed or open party lists must also be considered as both have been used at different times in the past decade of SEE politics. With closed party lists the party determines the rank ordering of candidates. With open party lists, the voters are able to influence which of the party's candidates are elected via personal/preferential voting: if they want they can strike women from the ballot or promote/demote them. The question then becomes whether it is easier to convince voters to actively vote for women candidates, or easier to convince party leaders to include more women higher up on the party list.

In Serbia¹² the quota system has been used to increase women's representation in political party leadership and on parties' lists of electoral candidates. In 2002 a new Law on Local Elections was passed that called for a 30% quota of the under represented sex on local candidates' lists for municipal elections. The context for this law came from the post-conflict atmosphere in Serbia at the time. It was believed that increasing the number of women would establish a more peaceful and cooperative atmosphere in the problematic municipalities of southern Serbia.¹³ In 2004, the National Assembly of Serbia passed an amendment to the National Election Act that also called for a 30% quota of women on candidates' lists but also specified a placement requirement of a woman as every fourth name on the list. A great deal of opposition existed to the implementation of the quota system, especially from within political parties where male candidates expressed dissatisfaction. However, a comprehensive campaign on the importance of the quota took place prior to the 2007 elections and all parties presented acceptable lists to the electoral commission.

In Bosnia in the years leading up to and during the conflict women withdrew almost entirely to the margins of politics. In the last elections under communism in which women had guaranteed representation they made up 27% of the Bosnian communist assembly. In the first multi-party elections in Bosnia in 1992 this figure fell to 2.7% and did not climb in the first post-war elections in 1996 either. This result led women in Bosnia to begin a campaign in 1998 for the establishment of an electoral quota. The internationally controlled Provisional Electoral Commission instituted a temporary gender rule in 1998 that called for 3 women to be placed in the first 10 names of each CLOSED party list. This resulted in a record high figure of 30% women elected, but there were many complaints to international officials that the women on the lists were wives or mothers of the male politicians and were entirely controlled by them. In the 2000 election the electoral commission instituted another temporary gender rule calling for 30% women, but this time on OPEN party lists. This meant that the women were all moved to the bottom of the lists and the percentage elected fell again to 7%.

In August 2001, the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH adopted the official Election Law of BiH and the general elections that followed in 2002 became the first elections since the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords to be administered and conducted completely by

¹² All figures come from IDEA International's Quota Database <http://www.quotaproject.org>

¹³ See IDEA International's case studies for more details on Serbia and Bosnia quota systems. http://www.quotaproject.org/case_studies.cfm#sm

local authorities. The law called for open lists on which one candidate of the under-represented sex was to be included in the first 2 candidates on lists, 2 amongst the first 5 candidates, 3 amongst the first 8 candidates and overall at least 1/3 of the under-represented sex should be included on party lists. The exact same rule was applied to the assembly elections in the two entities of Bosnia as well. The 2002 elections indicated progress in the quota system and the consciousness of voters as the number of women climbed to just above 14%. In national elections all parties met the quota requirements, however in the municipal elections many parties had difficulty in meeting the levels and were sanctioned either by having lists rejected or having men struck from the list. The results have shown that even when the quota exists in its different forms, women candidates in Bosnia have struggled to be treated as equals either in parliament or outside during the campaign. Political parties in BiH are almost completely controlled by men, only the Social Democratic Party has a policy that 30% of its board members be women and that the 30% women on lists be equally distributed.

Albania does not yet have a quota system in its electoral law. A bill was proposed before parliament in 2001, however it did not pass. Since then women's groups have been fighting for a new proposal and draft law. Grassroots support for the proposal has been building and a movement entitled "Petition Quota30" has been collecting signatures in support of a new proposal. In 2007 a new draft law was written proposing a quota of 30% women candidates on lists and the law is expected to come before the Electoral Commission in 2008.

Montenegro also does not have a quota system in its electoral law. Currently there is a growing initiative among women's groups and the Office for Gender Equality (OGE) to push for such a law. In March 2007 the OGE hosted a conference for women's groups, media and politicians on strategies for increasing women's participation in politics. A quota was one of the strategies discussed and met with positive reception.

The above information shows that while quotas are certainly important for giving women better chances to enter politics, women still face meaningful obstacles in making their contribution substantive and meaningful. Beyond just increasing the number of women in office, there is the issue of supporting them to represent the interests of a gender equality agenda and a gender equality constituency. The focus of future advocacy and lobbying needs to be supporting the meaningful representation of a range of women's interests in the decision-making structures of the countries of SEE.