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The Role of Women in Political and Public Life (Comparative Analysis of the Experience of Poland and Ukraine)



The research project is realised within The Ilko Kucheriv Democracy Fellowship programme, which is a project of PASOS (Policy Association for an Open Society), carried out in conjunction with the Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation (DIF), Ukraine. The programme, which seeks to assist the advancement of democratic practices in transitional democracies, and specifically in Ukraine, has been made possible with the financial support of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). This paper was produced with mentoring from the Institute of Public Affairs, Poland.

Executive Summary

The success of the Women's Congress in Poland in promoting legislative change, including quotas for representation of women in Parliament, can be transferred to Ukraine if a similar congress is established with a strategy of direct lobbying, combined with training of women in NGOs and female political candidates. The strategy needs to be underpinned by a broad-ranging awareness-raising and training programme to instil confidence in women to assume roles in political and public life. The similarities in Poland and Ukraine around the traditional perception of women as home-makers and mothers indicates that the chances of impact achieved in Poland can be replicated in Ukraine, and that the process must go hand-in-hand with the overall political transformation of Ukraine in line with its commitments under the Association Agreement with the European Union.

Political transformation goes hand in hand with gender equality

The subject of women's participation in political and public life is an important issue for Ukraine in the current climate. The need for a transformation in gender roles and relations coincides with the general process of reform required to update political, economic and social life in Ukraine in line with the Association Agreement with the EU signed in 2014. The transformation of the country will have to be based on a new quality model, which has significant affects on the gender perception processes. A new configuration of social relations and social institutions leads to new forms of political and social ways of gender self-expression and relationships. The process of adaptation of gender perception in evolving socio-political relations is closely connected with the social and political renewal of society in general.

Today, the active transformation of Ukrainian society is taking place. Women have begun to become involved more often in the political process. An especially promising development has been the engagement of women in voluntary movements working to support the Ukrainian armed forces - the anti-terrorist operation (ATO) in eastern Ukraine. Women account for more than 50% of the participation in the voluntary sector.

The development of Ukraine is impossible in isolation from developments in the rest of the world, not least its neighbours in the European Union (EU), and progress is affected by developments in other countries in gender impact in public life. Recently, there has been a higher number of women involved in politics and public life in Ukraine. This both necessitates and makes possible the implementation of a gender equality policy. Gender equality policy requires changes in the established social order that also affect the relationship between men and women. The equality of male and female partnership is important in building up a democratic society that ensures that various social roles are evenly distributed in the population across the genders. The establishment of an equal partnership is important to decision-making on public issues and to the building of a just society with equal opportunities for all. The current context and challenges that lie ahead in Ukraine mean that it is both important and timely to study the role of women in public and political life.

The integration of the Ukrainian state into the international community requires the protection and promotion of the role and place of women in society and their equal participation in all spheres of life, particularly in politics and nation-state formation.

The status of women in society is an integral indicator for the level of a country's democratic development. It represents the features of the socio-political structure of the state and its economic development, management, legal system, and cultural and social identity development level. Today, more than ever, Ukraine needs rigorous research, unbiased assessment, and a practical action plan to provide equal opportunities and sustain individual rights for personal development, self-realisation, and socially useful activities for men and women.

Modern society requires a system of gender norms that works to eliminate the gap in the position of women and men to overcome all forms of discrimination in respect of gender in all areas of public life.

This research arises from a comparative analysis between Poland and Ukraine of women who are actively involved in political and public life. Ukraine and Poland have many similarities in culture and mentality, making the experience in Poland useful for application in Ukraine

The research draws on interviews with highly regarded women activists from the Women's Congress in Poland, such as: Joanna Piotrowska (Feminoteka Foundation founder, the largest

feminist information service, transformed into a foundation, and a trainer in self-defence and assertiveness for women), Magdalena Środa (Polish philosopher, professor of ethics at the University of Warsaw, and a feminist author), Agata Jankovska (press officer in Women's Congress, responsible for contacts with regions), and Dorota Warakomska (Board president of the Association of Women's Congress, Chairwoman of the Management Board of the Polish Professional Women Network, Member of the Board and co-founder of the new association of journalism "Society Journalism").

Generally, women are contributing to the solution of a range of social problems. While implementing innovations in different fields, women are using the technology of projects to address the problems in a new and unusual way. The essence of the project organisation process is the construction of the desired future state of the target social grouping (organisations, teams of women, communities of people, the country in general).

The main obstacles women usually meet in political and public life include stereotypes, pay gaps, negative PR, criticism, their own fears of being on top, and different attitudes of colleagues towards them because of being female.

Women should have transformational, dynamic and situational characteristics for coping with these impediments.

The figure of the “Polish Mother” as a guarantee of heart and home during the partitions of Poland, its occupation, wars and battles, is a classic stereotype that faces women in Poland.¹

The stereotype of “Woman as Mother” is very common in Ukraine as well. According to the Global Gender Gap report, Ukraine was ranked 56th among 142 world countries. The Global Gender Gap Index presented in the report seeks to measure important aspects of gender equality, namely the relative gaps between women and men across four key areas: health, education, economy, and politics. The ranking of Ukraine has improved compared with recent years (it ranked 64th from 2011-2013). Poland has similar indicators as Ukraine, ranking at 57th place.

The Index of political rights within the Gender Gap Index country scorecard is steadily improving in Poland. The "Women in Parliament" score of the country is 0.32 (56th in the

¹ <http://rownoscplci.pl/uploads/filemanager/invisibleleadersPolandandChile.pdf>

world), while the score of "Women in Ministerial Positions" is 0.20 (66th in the world)².

In contrast, in Ukraine, such indicators as "Women in Parliament" and "Women in Ministerial Positions" show scores close to zero. Out of 142 countries surveyed for the number of women in parliament, Ukraine is ranked at 118th place.³

According to the Article 8.10 of the Law "On Political Parties in Ukraine", a political party's statutes should include stipulation of a quota of at least 30% representation of women and men in the list of candidates for Ukraine national deputies. However, only 10 of the 29 registered political parties that participated in the 2014 parliamentary election included in their lists of candidates for the seats elected by proportional representation the minimum 30% of women (as required by Ukrainian legislation). As a result, women represent 55% of the electorate, but are represented by only 11% of women in the Ukrainian Parliament.⁴

Why does Poland have better results?

One of the reasons is that Poland has a very active movement, the Women's Congress. The main goal of the Congress is the promotion of women's professional and political activities at local, regional, and national levels, and provision of support to their activities in different fields. Through their lobbying, quotas were introduced in parliament and the Congress supports women, who want to be active in local government and in non-governmental organisations.

Interested women are supported in preparation for political activities through trainings on developing public-speaking capabilities. The Women's Congress also helps to change the mentality of women, to instil a feeling of importance in women, and to support women in local elections. The mechanism for changing mentality is solidarity.

The introduction of quotas in parliament was achieved by teamwork among the participants of the Women's Congress. They talked to members of the different political parties about quotas using direct lobbying tactics.. As the result, in Poland there are now Legislated Candidate Quotas.

² <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2014>

³ <http://povaha.org.ua/schorichnyj-rejtynh-hendernoji-rivnosti-v-ukrajini-zhinky-osvichenishi-zacholovikiv-ale-v-polityku-jim-zas/>

⁴ <http://oporaua.org/news/6409-oblychchja-kandydata-u-narodni-deputaty-2014-osvita-vik-stat-partijnist-infografika>

What steps should Ukrainian activists and the Ukrainian government take?

First of all, involved women need to unite socially and politically in a big civic movement in Ukraine. In short, it is necessary to create a Ukrainian Women's Congress, and to create connections between women who are active at different levels in public and political life. One of the most important findings of the research was that the Women's Congress in Poland united social activists, academics and powerful businesswomen. The main problem in Ukraine is mirrored in Poland, namely the stereotype about role of women in society, Therefore, a similar strategy backed up by lobbying and advocacy for women's interests would be an effective approach in Ukraine as well.

It is important to note that in order for changes to begin to occur, women should be aware of their problems and their position. This awareness is necessary, as the initiative for change should come from the side of women in Ukraine – not from other sources – to ensure that it brings positive, sustainable results..

It is crucial that women would realise both the existing problems and the potential for change. One useful approach is to gather women and discuss important questions at the level of local communities. First of all, women should formulate the problems that really concern them. Secondly, they need to understand the basis of those problems and find ways to change the system.

Recommendations

Moreover, to achieve gender balance in political institutions, *the best mechanism is gender quotas*. The government should set up sanctions according to different types of quotas (reserved seats, legal candidate quotas or political party quotas), which should be written into the law.⁵ For example, if a party list does not include at least 30% of candidates of an underrepresented gender, it cannot be registered.

Furthermore, *new strategies for the state gender policy in Ukraine should be developed*. A survey of experts and focus groups should be conducted, aimed at creating an information cross-

⁵ <http://www.quotaproject.org/aboutquotas.cfm>

section in the population of Ukraine concerning the role of women in political and public life in the country.

Finally, *a series of trainings should be developed for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) about gender policy*, because the majority of members of particular organisations contribute to the social development of the country. The purpose of training should be the development of a strategy to create the conditions under which women would have more opportunities to engage in social development planning and policy of gender changes in society; and to develop a strategy for conducting outreach among women to raise awareness of the legal challenges and potential for change, so that there is an inclusive process in mobilising women in support of lobbying for change.