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European Elections 2019: Time for Women's Politicians Empowerment

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Key points

The European Parliament is characterized as the core of the European democracy, as it remains the only directly elected European body. Yet, more than 30 years on, there remains an under-representation of women in European politics, even inside the European Parliament. After the decrease of voter turnout (42.62%) in the latest European elections and the fact that a latest Eurobarometer survey indicates that 20% of European citizens tend to be more eager to vote if there are more women candidates in the next elections, the advancement of women in politics remains an issue of high importance.

This policy brief outlines the parameters of all international and European judiciary background in decision-making gender equality. Moreover, it analyses the possible causes of this under-representation, by taking Greece as a case study. Also, taking into account the latest results of the European Elections 2014 and the latest surveys on the situation of elected or aspiring women politicians and on voters' needs it suggests the following possible measures:

- Calling upon intensified lobbying meetings with the European Commission
- Supporting regional NGOs' public awareness campaigning under a holistic European NGOs cooperation
- Promotion of other European countries' good practices (Slovenia), such as gender quotas
- Creating a platform directly related with "EIGE's Gender-Sensitive Parliaments" tool, in order to provide data and raise public awareness
- Encouraging the insertion of gender equality in European Parliament's Initiative "This Time I am voting" campaign
- Asking for respect of the amendment in Regulation 1141/2014, according to which every political party is obliged to inform the voters about the quotas of the representation of women in last elections (Article 18, 3a).
- Introducing elected politicians to be ambassadors of women's empowerment into European politics

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Introduction

Following the decrease in voter turnout in the last European elections in 2014 (only 42.62% of the European citizens) and the fact that according to the Eurobarometer, 79% of Greek people believe that their voice is not heard, it is alarming that European people have lost their faith in the European construction. Equally important, the lack of women in European politics and more specifically their low presentation as members of the European Parliament has a lot to say about gender equality and how it is secured by the Union and its citizens.

As a result, the predominance of male members of the European Parliament reflects a rather defamatory image for a prosperous continent, which respects and has fought for human rights. It can also push away future women candidates or even European citizens to vote. Furthermore, according to feminist critical theory, men may introduce stricter European policies. Finally, it seems that voters and political parties have not respected the international and European women's rights legislative acquisition.

There is no denying the fact that this issue affects women themselves but at the same time plagues families, civil society and voters, as they feel the lack of political conscientiousness and of meritocracy.

On the one hand, the European Union legally respects the equality of men and women, by incorporating into specific legislative initiatives the empowerment of women in politics.

On the other hand, the numbers say that the European legislation is not respected even in the European Parliament, with the percentage of female members of the European parliament still remaining lower, in comparison to men. Also, in some Member States such as Greece, there isn't any national and constitutional legislation which addresses the empowerment of women in politics directly.

Under these circumstances, the European Elections 2019 are a huge opportunity to reassure and promote women's participation into European politics. The European Parliament along with national and international NGOs and political parties have to play a major role.

The European Union's Legislative Framework

In the first place, equality in work and salary has been assured in the European Union since 1967. Today specific articles of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) enhance the Union to act in favor of equal employment and women's empowerment (articles 153,157). The adoption of anti-discriminatory legislations is reassured on article 19 of the treaty. Generally speaking, on the Treaty of the European

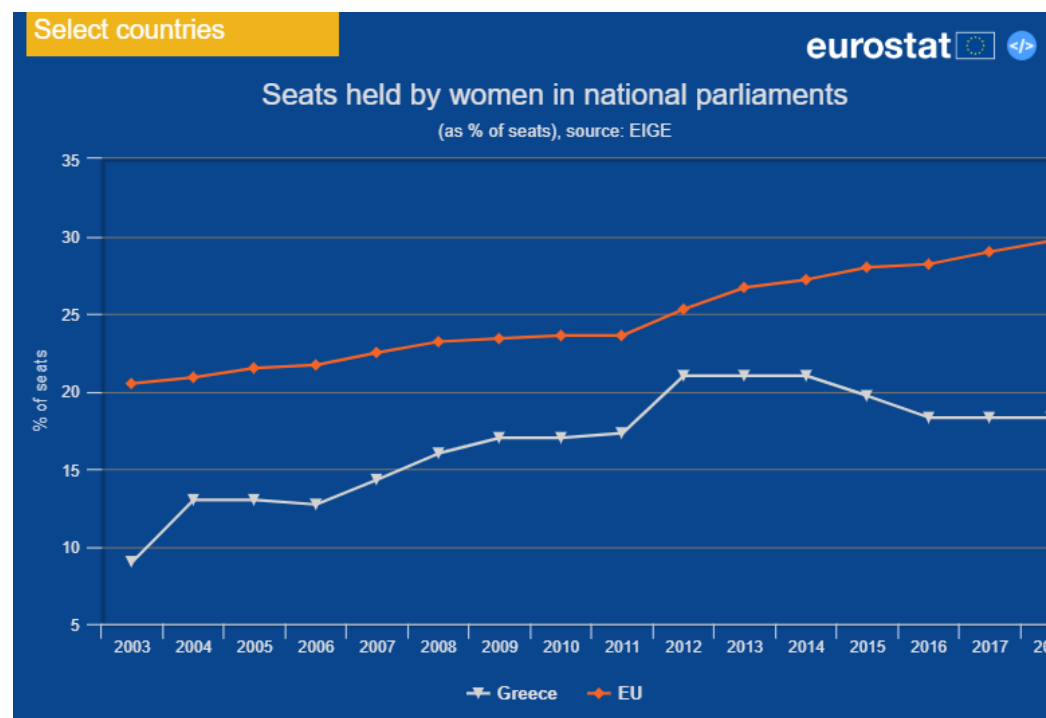


Union (Articles 2 and 3 (3)) and on the Charter of Fundamental Rights (article 8) gender equality is also established.

The Strategic Engagement for gender equality 2016-2019 is considered as the latest of the European Union's measures, in which the promotion of equality between women and men in decision-making is prioritized. The European Commission was the first in setting this agenda and collecting data from national Parliaments.

In addition, the Union remains a top partner of the United Nations-UN Women and their cooperation has been reaffirmed in 2016 with their cooperation in UN's Step it Up Campaign by the adoption of a new Gender Action Plan 2016-2020. Previously, in 2015 the United Nations General Assembly has adopted the agenda entitled: "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". The agenda includes 17 sustainable development goals, and 167 targets. The fifth sustainable development goal legitimizes gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. More specifically, target number 5.5 ensures women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision- making in political, economic and public life.

This chart shows the implementation of sustainable development goal 5 by the European Union and Greece.



[Source: eurostat.europa.eu]

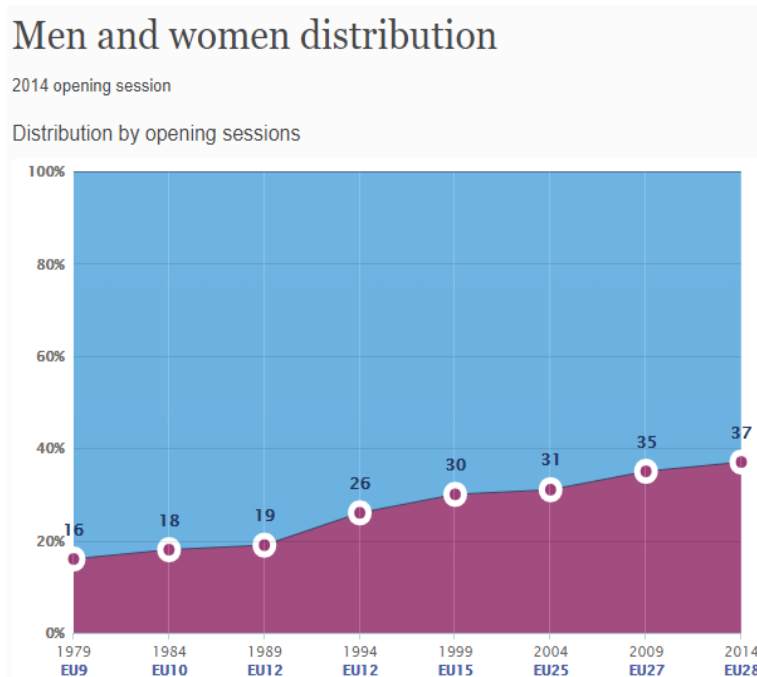


At an institutional level, the European Institute of Gender and Equality promotes gender equality and analyses data for the European Union's bodies and national policies. As for the role of the European Parliament, through its committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM), it reports and supports gender equality. Thanks to High Level Group on Gender Equality and Diversity (chaired by Dimitrios Papadimoulis) and to FEMM Committee, which has created a specific network inside the Parliament, gender mainstreaming in the work of other committees of the European Parliament is introduced.

Aiming to boost future European elections' voter turnout, European bodies and, more specifically, the European Parliament has launched a non-politically-oriented campaign, the aforementioned "This Time I am voting". At the same time, The European Commission proposed new rules on European elections and political parties in order to enhance transparency in taxpayer European money and to inform voters. Yet it seems that combating gender disparities between members of the European Parliament is not inserted in those actions.

Elected Representatives and the situation in the European Parliament

Apart from that entire European and international legislative framework, after the 2014 elections, women members of the European Parliament currently account for only 37%. It is true that the situation is improved over the years, while the allocation of seats in the European Parliament is more stabilized in comparison to national parliaments.

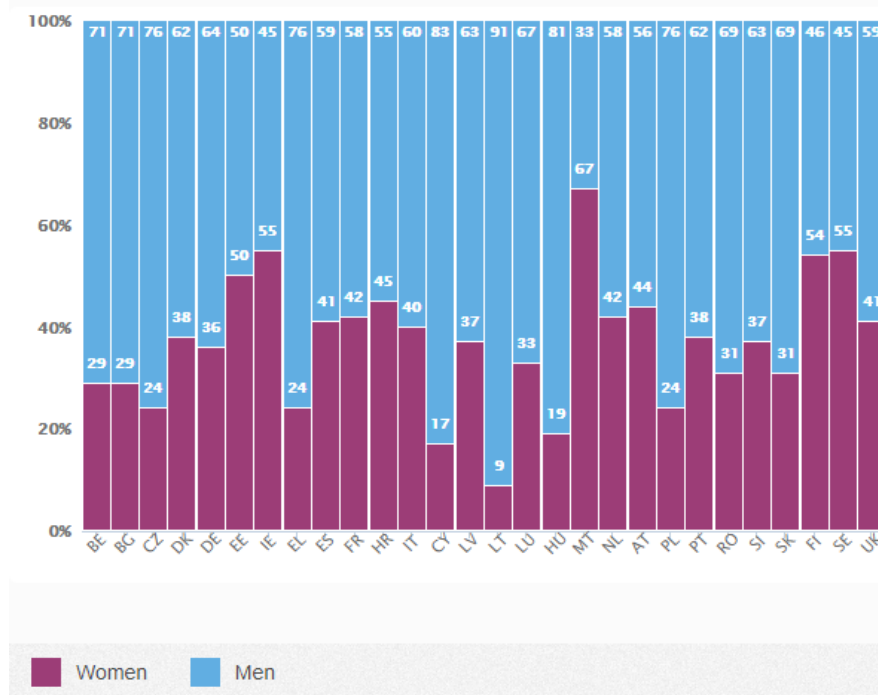


[Source: europarl.europa.eu.]



However, there is a notable variation between member states. Member states such as Malta, Sweden and Ireland are represented in a slightly higher percent by women, while some other member states (Italy, Spain) include at least 40% of each gender. Less than 25% of seats in the European Parliament occupy Greek, Cypriots, Lithuanians, Hungarians and Czechs women politicians. More specifically Greek percentage of male members of the European parliament is 76% and women 24%.

Distribution by country



[Source: europarl.europa.eu]

time	2016-Q3	2016-Q4	2017-Q1	2017-Q2	2017-Q3	2017-Q4	2018-Q1	2018-Q2	2018-Q3	2018-Q4
IE	54.5	54.5	54.5	54.5	54.5	54.5	54.5	54.5	54.5	54.5
EL	23.8	23.8	23.8	23.8	23.8	23.8	23.8	23.8	23.8	23.8

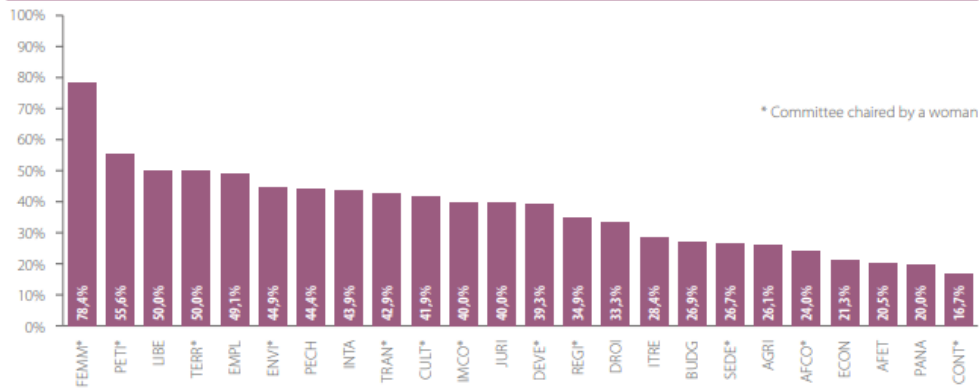
[Source: EIGE Gender Statistics Database]

Another factor that should be taken into consideration is the portfolio allocation in the Parliament's committees, in which gender segregation is clearly noticeable. While most



of male members of the European Parliament are assigned to foreign affairs, economy and justice, women are more likely to be given socio-cultural portfolios.

Women in parliamentary committees



[Source: europarl.europa.eu]

Another key thing to remember is that European elections are infrequent, so there aren't so many opportunities to change the women's position. Similarly, it is stressed that political parties' practices, national electoral systems (closed-list, preferential voting, transferable vote) have a negative impact on the presentation of women. As for funding, women candidates may have access to less resources from their parties and personal financial resources.

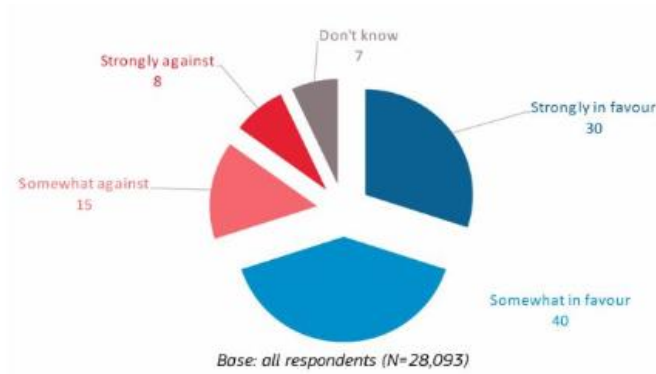
Taking into consideration Greek political party practices in 2014, there was no equality in allocation and candidates were selected by all parties according to reputation and money and not by establishing any competition. But now, following the new Parliament's and Council's amendment in Regulation 1141/2014 a new measure has been added, namely that each political party is obliged to inform about the quotas of the representation of women in the latest elections (Article 18, 3a). Thus, it is pretty obvious that political parties are urged to be fully alarmed of women's advancement into European politics.

Supporting actions in favor of women politicians

Despite the under-representation of women in politics a recent Eurobarometer Survey on Gender Equality shows that 70% of Europeans is in favor of legislations that help women run for office, while 86% think that they can be represented by women. But stereotypes still hold, with 35% of Europeans believing that men are more ambitious than women.

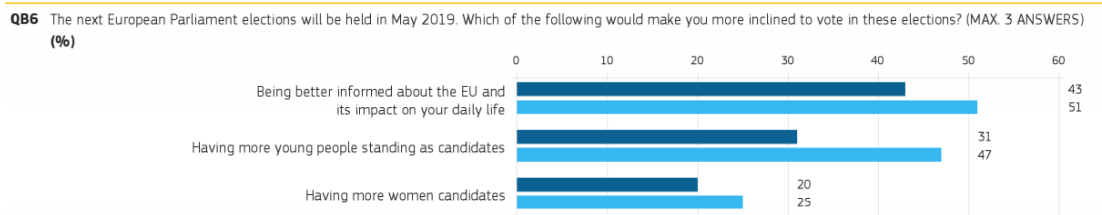


Figure 3:



[Source: europa.eu]

It is highly important to refer to Greeks, who consider that they are more likely to vote in the European Elections of 2019, if there are more women candidates (25% out of 20% generally in the Union).

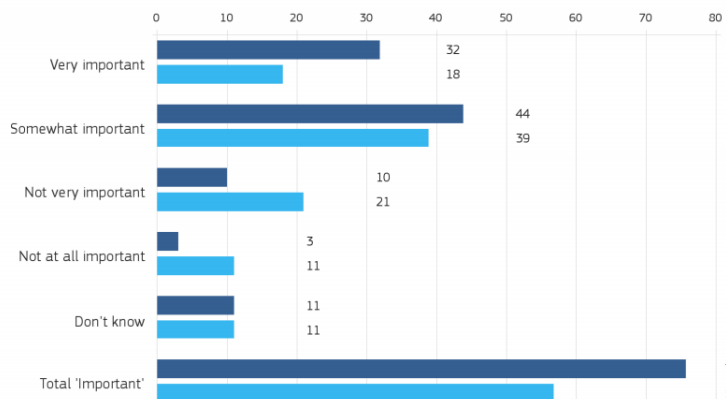


[Source: eurobarometer.europa.eu]

Furthermore, the vital role of NGOs is indicated in this survey, as Greek citizens along with all other European underline their importance in promoting democratic practices and values.



QB16 How important is the role of civil society (associations, NGOs) in promoting and protecting democracy and common values, including in terms of fostering a well-informed and pluralistic democratic debate? (%)



[Source: eurobarometer.europa.eu]

Recommendations

All these facts, figures and statistics show that the advancement of women in politics is a social and political necessity and will attract voters in the next European Elections. The European Union will be highly committed to gender equality. Therefore, pressure for the implementation of the amendment in Regulation 1141/2014, is urgent. Moreover, the promotion of other European countries' good practices is essential. For instance, Slovenia has imposed gender quotas for national elections, both local and European. Also, an Irish platform called "Women for election" encourages young women to enter politics. Furthermore, the creation of such a platform in the official site, directly-related with "EIGE's Gender-Sensitive Parliaments" tool is proposed. Similarly, the insertion of gender equality in politics in European Parliament's "This Time I am voting" campaign is strongly encouraged, as this campaign is available for free in social media and appeals more to young voters. Also, intensifying European Women's Elections 2019 events across Europe within NGOs cooperation and lobbying procedures is necessary. Finally, the achievement of public awareness campaigns will be reinforced by elected women members of the European Parliament, which have to be invited to share their challenging personal path, in order to achieve that goal.

Conclusion

To conclude, European Elections 2019 will be an opportunity for all actors in the Union to elect or appoint women politicians by demonstrating their commitment to UN Sustainable Goal 5, and to all legislative European background in favor of gender equality. After all, as Simone Weil reminds us: "I can, therefore I am".



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