



Where are women in politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina?¹

Adnan Kadribašić

To this date the discussion on women in politics was focusing on the numbers of women in the legislatures in Bosnia and Herzegovina. When it comes to numbers the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina is not much different from the rest of the world when it comes to participation of women in the legislature. Women make 56,6%² of all registered voters and the voter turnout is almost the same for women (49,17%) and men (50,83%). In 2006 the number of elected women in the Parliamentary Assembly of BaH was 11,9%, and in 2010 19%. The numbers of women in local legislatures (municipal councils and municipal assemblies in BaH) are only available for the last 2 election cycles. In 2008 there were 15% and in 2012 16,5% of women amongst the elected candidates.

Although the study has show that female members of parliaments (MPs) already make a substantive change the general perception is that female MPs are not perceived to be representing interests of women as a group in the legislature³.

But what can be done to improve this situation? A number of variables were analysed to find the remaining obstacles which influence the substantive representation of women. The al-

ready existing data was complimented with an in-depth analysis of the performance of women in the Parliamentary Assembly and these findings were tested as a part of a questionnaire "Position of women in politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina"⁴.

One of the first conclusions was that the Election law of Bosnia and Herzegovina is not a problem and the second is that women in politics need support both to get into politics but also to act for women of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

THE ELECTION LAW OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA IS NOT A PROBLEM

The debate how to get more women into politics was largely influenced with the idea that the Election Law needs improvement. These debates were especially sparked by the Recommendations the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women made to BaH after reviewing the Initial, Second and Third Report B&H has submitted to this body. In its recommendation the Committee urged that the Election Law should be harmonized with the Law on Gender Equality⁵ and the recent agreement of the new coalition partners.

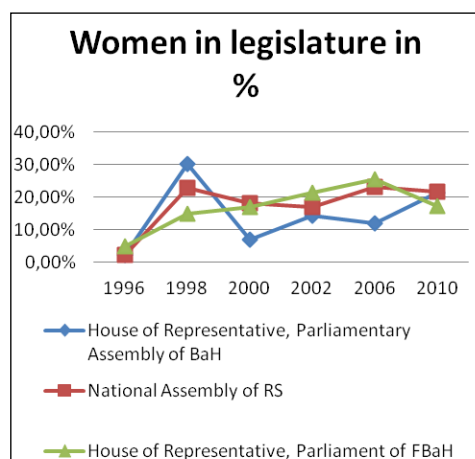
Summary

Despite significant advances in education and political participation, women remain under-represented in decision making positions in politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The debate how to increase the numbers of women in the legislatures has been circling around the amendments of the Election Law. Recently this debate was supported with the new coalition which has declared that it would amend the Law and "close the lists" in order to increase the numbers of women. However, the study has shown that the Election Law and the quotas which already exist are not the problem but a part of the solution. This policy brief supports the idea that we should move away from the debate on the numbers of women in politics but that we should focus on the need to have female MPs acting for the interests of women as a group. Finally, this policy brief gives a list of recommendations for future action..

¹ This policy brief is based on the Policy study "A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE LEVEL OF SUBSTANTIVE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN ACHIEVED WITH QUOTAS" which was conducted as a part of the Policy Development Fellowship Program supported by the Open Society Fund of Bosnia and Herzegovina and offers more data on the parts of this policy brief.

² „Women and Men in Bosnia and Herzegovina“, Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, December 2011

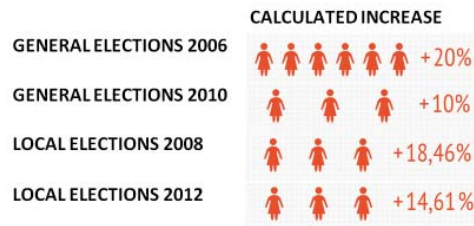
³ Such statements are heard quite frequently but most recent events include „Open Forum: Politics has a female gender“ organized by Sarajevo Open Centre, April 2012, „Worldcafe: The Role of Women in BaH Politics“ organized by Fridrich Ebert Stiftung, February 2012, Conference „How to increase the number of women in politics“, organized by Committee for Gender Equality of the PA BaH and OHCHR, November 2011



⁴ A total of 49 persons responded to this questionnaire out of which 11 are currently serving as members of legislatures and the other 38 are participants in one of the political parties and/or are working for NGOs which are working on the promotion of women in politics or are studying political sciences.

⁵ Recommendations of UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: Bosnia and Herzegovina, No. 30 CEDAW/C/BIH/CQ/3

Chart 1: Calculated increase if list were closed per election cycle



One respondent concluded that “closing of the lists would be an artificial solution which doesn’t guarantee any success”. Some respondents were more categorical saying that closing of the list “would undermine democracy” and would “force the electorate to vote for a man or a woman”.

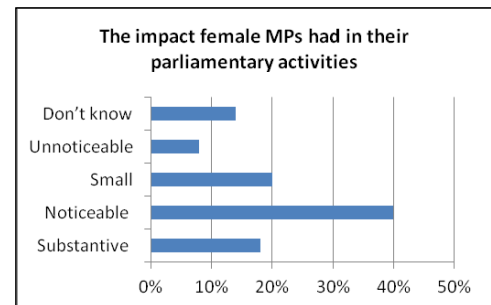
The introduction of closed list system emerged as the only viable a policy option which could increase the numbers of women in politics since any other amendment would not guarantee any increase in numbers. And in-deed if we calculate the number of seat influenced by the electorate under the open-list system the numbers of women would increase.

This increase is noteworthy this policy option would be more favourable for the representation of women only in descriptive and not in substantive terms. There is data from other research that points out that one of the indirect negative outcomes of closed party lists is the fact that MPs alienate themselves from the electorate and do not maintain regular contact with the electorate⁶. It depersonalises the mandate holders and diffuses the mandates to the entire party. The support by the respondents to this policy option is 14% and out of women which are currently serving as MPs at any level only 2 or 18,18 % support this policy option.

This policy would even decrease the cost of the elections and has the necessary political support. However, this policy option doesn’t bring anything to the substantive representation of women as a group in the legislature and it can only jeopardise the possibility and the already established links between female MPs and the electorate.

WHY WE SHOULD DEMAND SUBSTANTIVE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN?

The main aim behind the quotas as policy option and other policy options applied worldwide is not to achieve descriptive representation only but rather to ensure that women in politics “act for women”. Substantive representation exists when elected women are performing acts in favour of women (voting, introducing and supporting bills, speaking for women, broadening the political agenda, formulating women’s interests, gendering debates and policy content, lobbying the state, feminist policy analysis and feedback) that deal with issues of specific importance to women situated in the private and/or public sphere and/or are aiming at gender equality. The results of the questionnaire indicate that the respondents have recognised the change women in parliaments are making with an average score of 58% combined for substantive and noticeable change and 28% for small or unnoticeable change. 14% of respondents were not aware of the change women are making.



One respondent concluded that “Women are trying to work together to influence their male colleagues, which has resulted e.g. in the adoption of the Law on the protection against domestic violence. Women approach problems with more detail and try to find solutions”

Female MPs have already “acted for women” in the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina. There is evidence that besides the absence of critical mass, female MPs have acted as women, spoke for women and formulated women’s interests during the parliamentary debate. Even where some MPs opposed proposed materials focusing on gender equality or the empowerment of women, female MPs were ready to respond and to advocate for the adoption of such proposals.

⁶ Bowler, Shaun, and David Farrell. 1993. “Legislator Shirking and Voter Monitoring: Impacts of European Parliament Electoral Systems upon Legislator-Voter Relationships.” *Journal of Common Market Studies* 3



WHAT CAN BE DONE - TWO FRONTS FOR SUBSTANTIVE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN (SRW)

Bosnia and Herzegovina is among the countries which have recognised the importance to actively work and promote gender equality and the empowerment of women. One of the main priorities in these efforts is to promote equal and effective participation of men and women in political life and decision making by removing all the barriers to women’s active participation. The study found barriers both on the supply side (the number of with aspirations for politics and the women already in politics) but also on the demand side (the current attitudes toward women in politics, gender biased voting and the perception on substantive representation).

2. Women need support to build their capacities to enter politics

Aspirations to enter politics are largely influenced with the current political discourse. Action is needed to mobilise women and to train aspiring women with the skills necessary to be noticed in the political party structures. These activities should be done, where possible, in partnership with political parties in order to impose women as credible candidates for the elections.

3. Political parties should utilize the capacities of organisations of women in political parties

Political parties should be motivated to support the organisations of women in political parties to support women to get engaged and to act for women. This can be achieved through support



Quotas should be preserved	SUPPLY	SRW	DEMAND	Demand substantive representation
Support to women to enter politics				Support to “act for women”
Use of women’s organisations in political parties				Promote the change of SRW

ACTIONS TO INCREASE THE SUPPLY SIDE

1. Quotas need to be preserved

Worldwide quotas remain one of the main policy options to boost the numbers of women in the elections. The numbers and the presence of women in politics should have an influence on the preferences of the electorate since gender biased voting influences the numbers of women to a large extent.

to political parties to adopt guidelines and budgets for the activities for these organisations or with “naming and shaming” of political parties which only use these organisations as tokens.

Political parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina have a relative high number of women members of the party ranging from 33% in SDA to 52% in SBB BIH. In the main decision making bodies in these parties women make from 10% to 40% of the presidencies / executive boards to 66,66% in the supervisory board in SDP BIH.



Adnan Kadribašić, dipl.iur. and MA, is an expert advisor for harmonisation of domestic legislation with the international and European human rights standards at the Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina. He has extensive research experience in the area of anti-discrimination policies and human rights in BaH. He is one of the authors of the Commentary of the Law prohibiting discrimination and he has published research papers, drafted new policies and legislation, conducted training and provided consultancy services on anti-discrimination law.

ACTIONS TO INCREASE THE DEMAND SIDE

1. Substantive representation needs to be demanded from women in politics

The policies which are either gender sensitive or focus on empowerment of women need to be demanded from women already elected. The main aim behind the quotas as policy option and the policy options proposed by this study is not to achieve descriptive representation but rather to ensure that women in politics "act for women".

2. Women in legislatures need support to act for women

Due to the double burden to represent their geographical and party constituency and to "act for women", women in politics often lack information on the priorities relating to women in the society. The existing institutional gender machinery in the executive and the legislature should be the main actors in the definition and the communication of these priorities.

3. The change women are making in politics needs to be promoted

The traditional attitudes toward the role of women in politics have proven to be one of the main obstacles the access of women to decision making positions most obvious in the present gender biased voting. In order to combat these stereotypes the change women are making in politics needs to be promoted. Female MPs are already making a change and the electorate needs to be informed about these developments. Since the achievements in the area of gender equality and empowerment of women are not high up the political agenda and are not usually promoted by media, the institutional gender machinery and NGOs need to step in.

LITERATURE

Celis, K. (2008) "Studying women's substantive representation in legislatures: When representative acts, contexts and women's interests become important. *Journal of Representative Democracy*"

Dahlerup D. (2002), 'Using Quota's to Increase Women's Political Representation', Karam, Azza (eds) *Women in Parliaments: Beyond Numbers*, International IDEA/Stockholm

Grey, S., Manon Tremblay, Dahlerup, D., Childs, S. Krook, M.L. „Do Women Represent Women? Rethinking the "Critical Mass" Debate", in *Politics & Gender*, 2 (2006), 491–530

Inter-Parliamentary Union. (2006a). Parline database <http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/parline-search.asp>

Kadribasic, A.2012, "Election Law and Quota for Women", Political Academy for Women, Helsinki Citizens Assembly, Banja Luka

Krook, M. (2004). Gender quotas as a global phenomenon: Actors and strategies in quota adoption. *European Political Science*

Tripp, Aili Mari and Kang, Alice, "The Global Impact of Quotas: On the Fast Track to Increased Female Legislative Representation" (2008), University of Nebraska - Lincoln *Faculty Publications: Political Science*. Paper 41.



A "Policy Development Fellowship Program" has been launched by the Open Society Fund BiH in early 2004 with the aim to improve BiH policy research and dialogue and to contribute to the development of a sound policy-making culture based on informative and empirically grounded policy options.

The program provides an opportunity for selected fellows to collaborate with the Open Society Fund in conducting policy research and writing a policy study with the support of mentors and trainers during the whole process. Ninety fellowships have been granted in three cycles since the starting of the Program. All policy studies are available at www.osfbih.org.ba