

### O sister where art thou?: women's under-representation in Romanian politics

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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Ghebrea, G., & Tătărâm, M. E. (2005). O sister where art thou?: women's under-representation in Romanian politics. *Studia Politica: Romanian Political Science Review*, 5(1), 49-88. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-56258-3>

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# O Sister Where Art Thou?

## Women's Under-Representation in Romanian Politics

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This paper draws partially from a research project entitled "Enlargement, Gender and Governance: the Civic and Political Participation and Representation of Women in EU Candidate Countries" (EGG). The three year (12/03-11/05), 12 country study is funded by the EU 5<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme (HPSE-CT-2002-00115)<sup>1</sup>. The research project analyses women's contribution to governance in the CEECs<sup>2</sup>, during the European integration of these countries.

The main hypothesis of the research project is that women are under-represented in the political and administrative organisations. The field research intends to find out what the main causes of this situation are and to demonstrate the need for policies designed to stimulate women's participation.

To analyse, in a broader theoretical framework, the Romanian women's representation in politics, we build on several models and approaches. Firstly, resource mobilisation theory implies that those who control the resources also hold power. Social movements (including women's movements) need access to resources – time, people, skills, money and organisation – in order to achieve their goals and operate changes in the political hierarchy<sup>3</sup>. Women do lack classical participation resources, such as money, public communication skills, and free time after attending to their domestic tasks, and Romanian women are no exception<sup>4</sup>. Secondly, we rely on the cultural stereotype theory, considering that cultural stereotypes are simplified and/or false images on different social groups, which contribute to the enforcement and reproduction of the establishment<sup>5</sup>. One common line of argument maintains that women are perceived and self-perceived as gentle, kind, non-violent, sensitive etc. They are hence considered incompatible with politics – and hence sometimes avoid it voluntarily – because politics is dirty, competitive, tough, violent... Thirdly, we ground our study on the gendered organisation theory: as March and Olsen point out, "Institutions... define the framework within which politics takes place"<sup>6</sup>. For instance, political organisations function on masculine norms, values and practices, and "this will have the effect of creating a democratic deficit and excluding women and women's needs, interests and

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<sup>1</sup> Website: [www.qub.ac.uk/egg](http://www.qub.ac.uk/egg).

<sup>2</sup> Central and Eastern European Countries.

<sup>3</sup> Allan G. JOHNSON, *Human Arrangements*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Washington, D.C., 1989, pp. 586-588.

<sup>4</sup> Georgeta GHEBREA, *Romania: The Socio-Economic Context and Women's Status*, EGG Discussion Paper (WP1), 2003, pp. 1-10.

<sup>5</sup> Richard T. SCHAEFER, Robert P. LAMM, *Sociology*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1995, pp. 307-311.

<sup>6</sup> James G. MARCH, Johan P. OLSEN, *Rediscovering Institutions. The Organisational Basis of Politics*, Free Press, New York, 1989, p. 18.

perspectives from governance"<sup>1</sup>. Gendered institutions produce and reproduce a gendered social order<sup>2</sup>. "Moreover, since those who occupy power positions come to share a common world view, the ideas they produce tend to reflect the values of the ruling elite."<sup>3</sup>

Concerning the latter theory, we intend to find arguments for it in the political reality of the Romanian transition. Transition means continuity and change at the same time, where change includes the risk of perpetuation of inequality but also the hope to change values, norms, institutions and practices. The most significant political organisations for the production and the reproduction of the gendered political order are – in our view – the political parties. They ascribe political statuses and roles, including women's statuses and roles in politics. Thus, in the very rare circumstances when women occupy political positions in Romania, these positions are – most of the time – within certain "feminine" ministries and parliamentary committees, such as: health, education, family, social protection, human rights. There is a gendered division of labour in the Romanian politics. These positions consolidate women's "caretaker" image.

The organisational culture of most political parties plays a key role. It structures and maintains the male-oriented distribution of power not only in these specific organisations, but also in politics as a whole. Therefore, transition itself becomes gendered, being marked by gender inequality of representation and participation in decision-making. In order to be successful in male-dominated organisations, women adopt the masculine culture, abandoning women's interests and concerns, "... they declare themselves anti-feminist and share the gender-blind strategy"<sup>4</sup>.

The gendered character of the Romanian political parties is reflected in their leadership, where women are very few. This character is also reflected in the candidate lists, where women are present in a small number and they are, usually, at the bottom of the lists, in non-eligible positions. The outcome is women's under-representation in Romanian politics.

The main data sources were the Internet, visits to the relevant institutions, archives, data bases, libraries and in-depth interviews, while the methods used for the secondary analysis of the collected data included statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, breaking down figures by gender), and content analysis.

The in-depth interview (used in this paper especially for researching women's campaign for "change") is a semi-structured research instrument, based on an interview guideline. The guideline is used as a checklist of topics to be covered, although the order in which they are discussed is not pre-ordained. The questions asked vary depending on the particular expertise of the respondent. The answers are not quantified. There needs to be a willingness to redefine the objectives and the scope of the project in terms of the material obtained from the interviews.

<sup>1</sup> Yvonne GALLIGAN (coord.), *Enlargement, Gender and Governance: State of the Art Literature Review, Analysis of the Transition to Democracy, and Conceptual Framework for the EGG study*, Discussion Paper, Queen's University Belfast, 2003, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> This theory is influenced by the organisational sciences and by a neo-Marxist perspective, reflected in Pierre BOURDIEU, Jean-Claude PASSERON, *La reproduction*, Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1970.

<sup>3</sup> Margaret L. ANDERSEN, *Thinking about Women. Sociological Perspectives on Sex and Gender*, Macmillan Publishing Company, New York, 1988, p. 35.

<sup>4</sup> Mihaela MIROIU, "Feminismul ca politică a modernizării", in Alina MUNGIU-PIPPIDI (ed.), *Doctrine politice – concepte universale și realități românești*, Polirom, Iași, 1998, p. 262.

However, within the interview, a delicate balance has to be maintained between, on the one hand, covering the ground the researcher thinks is important and, on the other hand, allowing the respondent to open up new areas without going off on irrelevant tangents<sup>1</sup>. Probing played an important role in interviewing, using continuation probes, clarification probes and completion probes.

The sample included the following categories: feminists/NGOs/women's rights: respondents F1 and F2; leading women of the PAST in democratisation movements: respondents F3 and F4; individuals responsible in the PRESENT for gender equality (e.g., equality commission, trade unions, officials and ministers in government departments responsible for equality and enlargement): respondents F5 and F6; others (media, actresses, academia/intellectuals, third sector/informal groups): respondents F7 and F8.

## REVIEW OF ROMANIAN LITERATURE ON GENDER ISSUES

There is an extremely well documented constructivist interest in the beginnings of "emancipation" for Romanian women in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These works research the changing gender relations, the impact of the legislation of the day, or the image that is created for women's roles in contemporary dailies and magazines (medical, hygiene, cooking, and fashion), usually by comparison with similar developments in France. The comparison usually shows a mimicking of attitudes in the French image, contemporary with the development of "print capitalism", as France was the place to go for the local elite to study abroad, and its habits were taught as the ultimate archetype in terms of modernity; generally, France was considered the epitome of "Europe", although all other Europeans – except for the Italians – were indiscriminately called "Germans" in normal conversations<sup>2</sup>.

In this key, Ionela Băluță writes about the patriotic role and duty of women around 1848, above all mothers. The intelligentsia and more prominent publicists of the day, one of whom founded the first magazine that chose to address both male and female audiences explicitly (1836 – *Curierul de ambele sexe*), see them and write to enhance their image as moral agents, as agents of civilisation and as first aegis for education, without whom no social or political revolution and entry to modernity can ever be achieved. Nevertheless, Ionela Băluță mentions that,

"The idea of citizenship, so dear to the revolutionary groups, remains purely masculine in its original meaning [...] We can say that citizenship is for women a social duty, never defined at the political level: in fact this issue is never mentioned in the three discourses we analysed"<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>Wynn GRANT, *Elite Interviewing: A Practical Guide*, IGS Discussion Papers Series no. 11 / 2000, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>On Europe's image in Romania, see Alexandru DUȚU, "Europe's Image with Romanian Representatives of the Enlightenment", in Pompiliu TEODOR (ed.), *Enlightenment and the Romanian Society*, Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 1980; Adrian MARINO, "Les Lumières roumaines découvrent l'Europe", in *La culture roumaine à l'époque des Lumières*, Univers, București, 1982.

<sup>3</sup>Ionela BĂLUȚĂ, "Femeia cetățeană: între datoria socială și absența politică la mijlocul secolului al XIX-lea românesc", in *Studia Politica. Romanian Political Science Review*, vol. II, no. 3, 2002, p. 681 (our translation).

Further, she writes,

“Elles ne sont pas citoyens et n’ont pas des droits politiques. Leur participation à la vie politique (le domaine le plus important de la sphère de l’État) est donc impossible. Elles sont reconnues soit seulement en tant qu’individu, et ne peuvent entretenir que des relations interindividuelles, au niveau privé, ou sont admises dans certaines brèches de la sphère publique”<sup>1</sup>.

Studies on the more recent political participation of women include the distressing statistics by Alina Mungiu-Pippidi in 1997 in an introductory book on political doctrines<sup>2</sup>. To contextualise, Mihaela Miroiu, the author of the chapter on feminism, speaks of the consequences of “command emancipation” under the communist regime, associated with the absence of social protection and development assistance, and provides several important statistics for 1996. For instance, at the level of activity initiated by the civil society, she notices that many points on the agenda of feminist movements have been obtained without any recourse to such agency: the right to vote (1947 – by the communists), abortion rights (1991), parental leave (1997).

Most of the works published by Polirom under the pennant of the “Gender and Society” collection aim to socialise the public opinion into the discovery that the effects of transition are more pernicious for women than for men. For instance, in 1997, Laura Grünberg and Mihaela Miroiu – with the support of the “Gender Capacity Building” project financed by the UNDP-Women’s Participation to Development – co-ordinated a manifesto book that gave the later name of the collection. They brought together several perspicacious analyses that ranged from the discriminatory traps of language – where the Romanian lexicons have diminutive forms for the “typically male professions” (like *driver*, *postman*, *welder*, *medical doctor*) assumed by women (respectively, *șoferiță*, *poștăriță*, *sudoriță*, *doctoriță*)<sup>3</sup> – to those of primary school textbooks that socialise students into specific conventional professions for each gender by the power of illustrations and model sentences.

The same book includes the two editors’ theoretical guidelines, one related to sociological studies and concepts (Laura Grünberg’s speciality, later expanded in a separate work<sup>4</sup>), and another to the historical and contemporary philosophical directions in feminist and gender studies (Mihaela Miroiu’s area of expertise, also further exploited in her works<sup>5</sup>).

Another trend is the one treating the myths of communism and its approach to women as comrades and equals. The demolition of these myths by Daniel Barbu, Lucian Boia, Ovidiu Bozgan, Mariana Celac, Adrian Cioroianu, Ovidiu

<sup>1</sup> Ionela BĂLUȚĂ, “Le rapport des genres dans la deuxième moitié du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle roumain”, in *Studia Politica. Romanian Political Science Review*, vol. II, no. 2, 2002, p. 421.

<sup>2</sup> Alina MUNGIU-PIPIDI (ed.), *Doctrine politice...* cit.

<sup>3</sup> Cristina CĂRTĂRESCU, “Despre diminutive și diminuate”, in Laura GRÜNBERG and Mihaela MIROIU (eds), *Gen și societate. Ghid de inițiere*, Alternative, București, 1997, pp. 29-33. The author notices that all diminutives vanish in the case of positions of authority, be it economic or simply power-related: business woman = *femeie de afaceri*, judge = *judecătoare*, etc.

<sup>4</sup> Laura GRÜNBERG, *(R)evoluții în sociologia feministă. Repere teoretice, contexte românești*, Polirom, Iași, 2002.

<sup>5</sup> Mihaela MIROIU, *Convenio: Despre natură, femei și morală*, Polirom, Iași, 1996, 2000, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.

Cristea, Adrian Drăgușanu, Petre Guran, Lucian Năstasă, Eugen Negrici, Zoe Petre, Cristina Petrescu, Dragoș Petrescu, Mihai Sorin Rădulescu, Sorin Șerban, and Al. Zub, separately and under the co-ordination of Lucian Boia, is quite effulgent in this respect. For instance, the communists are the ones who – quite admirably – established the universal vote (that is, including women), in Romania, in 1947. (Universal male suffrage had already been instituted by the Constitution of 1923. The 1938 dictatorial Constitution of King Charles II permitted women to vote and present their candidacies for the Senate but not for the Chamber of Representatives.) In fact, voting soon became void of any meaning, with forced participation and massive electoral fraud. From a social-economic point of view, the communists subsequently installed a deeper double burden. Also – via initial quotas of female representation in the leadership of any firm and institution, often despite crass incompetence for the selected position – they caused a backlash of contempt and derision for ambitious, dedicated, and voluntary women in power positions. Consequently, even today, these are compared (by women and men alike) to Ana Pauker (a communist fanatic and spy) and Elena Ceaușescu (the dictator's wife, who "was far worse than him in every way": a uninstructed parvenue, who had the pretensions to be declared a Prof. Dr. engineer in chemistry, a rank nobody else was allowed to hold, and who upturned the entire field of education and research in her own image<sup>1</sup>).

Zoe Petre also summarises the effects of the 1965 Decree (770/1965) that forbade all abortions and contraceptive measures, such that surgeons performing suspicious interventions had to do so in the presence of a witness from the prosecutor's office, and women were obliged to undergo a monthly obstetric control at the workplace, the regime thus detecting and forcing them to accept any pregnancy, as part of the new Chinese-model demographic policies of Ceaușescu. The elaboration of her thesis – stating in essence that women's bodies had been nationalised just like all the (other – *sic*) commodities, from birth to bearing children and onwards to death itself – stems from an extremely painful discovery: the earliest date for declaring a newborn had been pushed ahead by one month, in a desperate bureaucratic attempt to reduce the staggering figures of infant mortality<sup>2</sup>. Hence the author's ultimately humanitarian concern and her parallel engagement on a scientific enterprise that made an excellent case in point for the perversity of the communist system.

The most in-depth and best-documented analysis of the ban imposed on abortions and its consequences can be found in Gail Kligman's book, *Politics and Duplicity. Controlling Reproduction in Ceaușescu's Romania*. An apt "ethnographer of the state and its politics of reproduction", Gail Kligman vests the homogenisation of race, gender and ethnicity, as well as the extreme political intervention first into the public and then quickly, quasi-simultaneously, into the most intimate aspects of everyday life – with archival data (statistics, court cases), but also with qualitative interviews with women-"patients" and gynaecologists. She then draws similarly

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<sup>1</sup> Other negative examples include Lina Ciobanu, Alexandrina Găinușe, and Aneta Spornic. Historian Zoe Petre maintains that such images were and still are perceived as tokens of "the world turned upside down and come out of joints" (Zoe PETRE, "Promovarea femeii sau despre destructurarea genului feminin", in Lucian BOIA (ed.), *Miturile comunismului românesc*, Nemira, București, 1998, pp. 255-271).

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Professor Zoe Petre, November 3, 2003.

terrifying conclusions about the social and human consequences of the reproductive policies, and the intricate web for the "institutionalisation of duplicity and complicity as social practices that contributed to the state's perpetuation and ultimate demise". The author's agenda is then obvious, but scientifically justified through her detailed case study:

"When reproductive legislation and policies are formulated according to abstract principles rather than in consideration of actual socio-economic factors that influence the quality of human life, then the lived consequences are too often tragic, particularly for women and children. Ceaușescu's Romania offers a glaring case study of the consequences of banning abortion and limiting the availability of and access to the resources that make everyday life liveable. The Romanian case must be borne in mind by those who would ban abortion in the United States (or elsewhere)"<sup>1</sup>.

Mădălina Nicolaescu takes up – with the support of the GETTY programme offered by the New Europe College in Bucharest – a rather different approach from all of the above. In her (de)construction of Romanian women the post-socialist transition<sup>2</sup>, the argument carries her via a constructivist perspective to the discovery that:

"The 'horror script' of globalisation... should be rewritten by highlighting the way in which women (East European, Romanian women in our case) feel empowered by the new changes. The new opportunities that the market economy, global media and consumption culture offer to some women should not be written away as forms of delusion or cooption to the dominant ideology".

He author goes into some detail about the relevant international programmes, subdividing them between: (a) attempts at salvaging the health and economic sustenance of women at risk after the torrent of cuts in the welfare system, deteriorating living conditions, increasing unemployment, which the author blames in part on the austere measures stipulated by the Structural Adjustment Programmes of the IMF and World Bank; and (b) attempts at changing the self-construction of gender identity, which she exemplifies with a joint CEDPA-USAid policy programme on reproductive health "Women Choose Health" between 1998 and 1999. There are also programmes against sexual and domestic violence, for promoting equal opportunity, one entitled "Women in Politics" that targets the emerging economic and political élites, to shape women in leadership positions<sup>3</sup>. These are all important policies and programmes for raising the awareness of wide audiences, programmes aimed at a meaningful change in mentalities (and Mădălina Nicolaescu's approach to them is quite stimulating in itself).

The European context is explicitly present in a study published in 1995 under the coordination of sociologists Elena and Cătălin Zamfir<sup>4</sup>. Their plan was to

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<sup>1</sup> Gail KLIGMAN, *The Politics of Duplicity. Controlling Reproduction in Ceaușescu's Romania*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1998, pp. 250-251.

<sup>2</sup> Mădălina NICOLAESCU, *Fashioning Global Identities. Romanian Women in the Post-Socialist Transition*, Editura Universității din București, București, 2001, pp. 19-20.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 129.

<sup>4</sup> Elena ZAMFIR and Cătălin ZAMFIR (eds.), *Politici sociale. România în context european*, Alternative, București, 1995.

X-ray the social policies of the Romanian transition. The book is structured in three main sections. Contributors to the first part analyse the production of welfare in societies and regimes, which rely on market economy and pluralist democracy; theirs is an attempt at structuring a rather vast collection of theories on poverty, welfare, and the role of social policies. The second part is a more empirical analysis of particular social policies: social insurance (Ion Mărgineanu), social assistance (Elena Zamfir), social assistance by testing the financial etc. means of the target (Luana Pop), policies for the non-profit sector (Mihaela Vlăsceanu), social policies aimed at the general population and especially at families (Ion Mihăilescu), child protection (Elena Zamfir), health (Dan Enăchescu and Cristian Vlădescu), education (Lazăr Vlăsceanu), education for the ethnic minorities (Liviu Maior; then Alexandru Farcaș and Liviu Maior), gender equality (Laura Grünberg), and study on the policies for the disabled (by Liviu Manea). Ion Mihăilescu<sup>1</sup> lists general policies with regard to family planning, voluntary sterilisation, abortion and divorce laws, the recognition of non-married couples, tax incentives and impositions, homosexuality, prostitution, child allowance, support for the young families, women's status, and specialised private, public, and volunteer services to assist the population with caring for the sick, young, elderly, or disabled. He also talks about the major costs and obstacles to such measures, while drawing a comparison between the Romanian circumstances and world-wide experience in each of these cases. Laura Grünberg<sup>2</sup>, for instance, provides the usual statistics for the date of her study, including unemployment, and feminine distribution in the education system:

"In February 1994, unemployment for women was rated at 13.5% as compared to 9.1% for men. The young women who were unemployed in 1994, while able to boast of a high-school diploma, ran 3:1 as compared to men in the same situation. Graduate women who were unemployed in 1994 numbered 95 000 as compared to 85 000 men, rating especially high among electronics engineers (1615:1068), instructors in all levels of education (91:31), physicians (59:16), and computer programmers (102:39)".

While there is no gap (no legal one anyway) between men and women at the level of academic preparation, Laura Grünberg insists that the academic and board hierarchies of universities do not reflect this situation, vesting discriminating policies, and that this is a world-wide phenomenon<sup>3</sup>.

In this context, and for policy relevance, the author refers to the Swedish, the Canadian, and the British model, respectively: flexible family roles and parental leave, quantifying poverty in terms relevant to women, and implementation of the so-called "friendly" social policies. Her recommendation is not to dissociate social policies by segments, but to look at the entire social structure and tackle its problems in a coherent and comprehensive way.

A pertinent (NGO) report is the output of the Program on *Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in the European Accession Process*, a joint initiative of the Open Society Foundation Romania and the Women's Program of the Open Society

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<sup>1</sup> Ion MIHĂILESCU. "Politici sociale în domeniul populației și familiei", in Elena ZAMFIR and Cătălin ZAMFIR (eds.), *Politici sociale...cit.*, pp. 98-119.

<sup>2</sup> Laura GRÜNBERG, "Politica socială și egalitatea sexelor", in Elena ZAMFIR and Cătălin ZAMFIR (eds.), *Politici sociale...cit.*, p. 187.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 187-188.



Institute. It is a program monitoring these countries' compliance with the Copenhagen criteria and observance of the *acquis communautaire* in the field of equal opportunities for women and men, and contains data up to July 15, 2002. A legalistic text, the report contains a number of important data, such as:

"In Romania the principle of equal pay for equal work has been a part of the Labour Code since 1972 [...] The acts in Lithuania and Romania both confirm the principle of equal pay for equal work and constitute a model for establishing mechanisms for the implementation of the principle of equal treatment [...] Attempts to regulate pay in the private sector in countries such as Romania and the Czech Republic are relatively new, and were first observed in the Collective Work Agreements for the private sector in Romania and in the special unified job classification adopted by the Czech Republic in 2001 [...] In addition to the specialised Ombudsperson in Lithuania, the development of the general institution of the ombudsman in countries such as Hungary, Romania, and the Czech Republic can offer additional guarantees for the effective implementation of the principle of equal pay"<sup>1</sup>.

Not all is pink in this characterisation. Sexual harassment in the workplace is regulated by the new Law on Equal Opportunities, but, as the report concludes, "one could hardly observe any improvements in daily practice"<sup>2</sup>.

Moreover,

"There are no effective mechanisms for monitoring gender equality in social security though, although a Law on Equal Opportunities was adopted and despite the existence of a new independent institution, the National Agency for Equal Opportunities. One positive element is the fact that, related to the risks established by the public system of pensions and other social security rights, Law no. 19 of 2000 regulates the social security jurisdiction, namely specialised departments or panels of the court. There are no professional social security schemes in Romania, and collective employment agreements only provide little compensation that employers are obliged to pay to employees, mainly in cash, at the time of old age retirement, in case of dismissal or death"<sup>3</sup>.

Our brief Romanian literature review converges on conclusions that are common with many comparative studies, thus providing the framework for further quantitative research and its qualitative refinements. Pour citer Bérengère Marques Pereira,

"Toutes les femmes ne partagent pas les mêmes intérêts; ceux-ci sont multiples, conflictuels, voire contradictoires. [...] Cela étant, il s'agit de s'interroger sur le fait de savoir si certaines expériences communes aux femmes dans les différents registres de la citoyenneté permettent ou non la construction, non pas d'intérêts, mais de perspectives spécifiques. [...] Le nombre

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<sup>1</sup> EOWM, *Monitoring the EU Accession Process. Equal Opportunity for Women and Men: Overview*, Open Society Institute, 2002, [http://www.eonet.ro/main\\_right.htm](http://www.eonet.ro/main_right.htm), accessed on December 8, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 33.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 44-45.

fournit-il la recette pour transgresser, contourner, résister ou s'opposer aux norms fortement prescrites de la féminité? À ce titre, la féminisation des élites possède toute son importance"<sup>1</sup>.

### WOMEN IN POLITICS, IN THE CEECS, POST-1989: BETWEEN THE "COMMUNIST LEGACY" AND THE EUROPEAN UNION *ACQUIS*

Women's political representation was one of the main ideas of the communist ideology. In fact, the communist regimes did not succeed to achieve equal opportunities for women in any social field. Women's representation in central and local governance was assured through quotas. Still, very few women were co-opted in the superior leadership. The role of women in the communist governance was rather symbolic. Generally, women did not consider politics as a way to fulfil their life, most of their personal goals being focused on the family sphere<sup>2</sup>.

Women representatives were more often the targets of jokes rather than of respect. In Romania, scientists studied the "Elena Ceaușescu syndrome" which created the image of women's incompetence and evilness in politics<sup>3</sup>.

Following transition-related phenomena, one of the most dangerous tendencies seems to be the de-valorisation of the economic and social status of women. In Romania, transition has unravelled rather as a crisis than as the opening of possibilities for self-assertion. Most women were not prepared for this crisis, all the more so since the greatest burden of the social costs of transition affected them directly and massively (unemployment, poverty, the crisis of the social services). In many fields, women are steadily pushed towards an archaic status, as for instance in the case of agriculture and the rural environment in general. The reduction of women's employment indices generates situations where more and more women are left without any personal revenue, which might ensure their economic independence.

Despite these negative evolutions, one need not underestimate the primed possibility that transition recoil as a real resource for change. Women can and do learn to take advantage of a more fluid social situation, such as transition is (ill-) reputed to be, to assert themselves more easily and more efficiently, within the general opening of the Romanian society. Next to opportunities for individual promotion, professional mobility and private initiative, transition is shyly welling up a new representation of femininity and masculinity, of the functioning of couples and the family, of civil liberties and rights.

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<sup>1</sup> Bérengère MARQUES-PEREIRA, "Regards croisés entre l'Europe et l'Amérique latine", in *Cahiers du GELA.IS* ("Enjeux politiques et théoriques actuels de la démocratie en Amérique Latine"), nouvelle série, no. 1, 2001, pp. 123-124.

<sup>2</sup> Georgeta GHEBRE, *Regim social-politic și viață privată*, Editura Universității din București, București, 2000, p. 53.

<sup>3</sup> Mary Ellen FISCHER, Doina PASCA HARSANYI, "From Tradition and Ideology to Elections and Competition. The Changing Status of Women in Romanian Politics", in Marilyn RUESCHEMEYER (ed.), *Women in the Politics of Post-communist Eastern Europe*, M.E. Sharpe, New York, 1994, p. 207.

Still, after 1989, there was a dramatic decline in the political representation of women (Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Women in Parliament 1990-2003 (percentage of total)*

Year/Country	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04
Bulgaria	8.5	13.8			12.9			10.4				26.7			
Czech Republic	11.0		9.5		9.5		13.5		15.0				17.0		18.0
Estonia	5.7		13.7			12.9				17.8				18.8	
Hungary	7.3				11.1				8.3				9.8		
Latvia	5.5			15.0		9.0			17.0				21.0		
Lithuania	8.1		7.1				18.2				10.6				20.6
Poland		9.5		13.0				13.0				20.7			
Romania			4.0				7.0				10.0				10.6
Slovakia	8.7		18.1						14.0				19.3		
Slovenia		11.2	13.3				7.8					13.3	5.0		12.2

Source: Yvonne GALLIGAN (coord.), *Enlargement, Gender and Governance: The Civic and Political Participation and Representation of Women in the EU Candidate Countries (EGG – WP2 Comparative Report)*, Discussion Paper, Queen's University Belfast, 2003, p. 8. In the case of Romania, the figures for 2004 are computed according to the election results published by the Central Electoral Bureau, [www.bec2004.ro/rezultate.htm](http://www.bec2004.ro/rezultate.htm), and corroborated with the data published by the Romanian Parliament, [www.cdep.ro](http://www.cdep.ro) and [www.senat.ro](http://www.senat.ro), accessed on January 11, 2004. The figures for the Czech Republic, after the senatorial elections, follow the Schuman Foundation reports, respectively <http://www.robert-schuman.org/oe/tchequie/senatoriales/resultats.htm>, while those for Lithuania and for Slovenia refer to the "Women in National Parliaments" table, published by the Inter-Parliamentary Union at <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>, and accessed on January 14, 2005.

We find several explanations for this phenomenon. Firstly, the collective memory has retained the propagandistic image of the "communist woman"; thus, women and general population were reluctant regarding the women's political participation; in Romania the situation was worse, from this point of view, because of the image of the dictator's wife, Elena Ceaușescu, who was seen as "far worse in every way". Secondly, some influential cultural models and mechanisms that inhibit women's civic and political participation persist. Thirdly, the resources that are nevertheless necessary for women's participation are insufficient (women can generally dispose of less resources than men, with spare time at the top of the list). Fourthly, the quotas imposed by the Communist Parties were forsaken. A fifth cause is that the new political institutions (particularly political parties) became more masculine than the former ones. A sixth factor is the fact that the public agenda in the first transition years did not contain gender issues, considering there were other priorities. Finally, the Governments neglected the family and gender policies (lack of interest and lack of resources, as well as due to the higher influence of other pressure groups); in Romania, for instance, the widespread relief for

legalising abortion (chronologically the first measure taken by the authorities after the Revolution of 1989<sup>1</sup>) apparently convinced the new governance that they had solved all the Romanian women's issues.

Nevertheless, some progress was made ever since, especially after the year 2000, when the prospect of EU accession appeared more tangible. For instance, in Romania the number of women in Parliament more than tripled as compared to the 1992 elections (from 3% to 10.6 %), and the number of women-ministers grew from 3.5% in 1992 to 18% in 2000<sup>2</sup>, only to relapse at 12% in 2004<sup>3</sup>.

Some countries have women's political parties: Lithuania (The New Democracy Party); Bulgaria (The Party of Bulgarian Women); the Czech Republic (Political Party of Czechoslovakian Women and Mothers); Latvia (The Social Democratic Women's Party of Latvia)<sup>4</sup>; and Slovenia (Women's Voice – GZZ)<sup>5</sup>. Most political parties everywhere have established women's groups in order to get support from the feminine electorate and to offer a framework for the women's political career.

Some political parties use quotas<sup>6</sup>, in order to improve women's representation: the Social Democratic Party in the Czech Republic; the Hungarian Socialist Party; the UP/Labour Union, the SLD/Social-Democratic Alliance and the UW/Union of Freedom in Poland; the Liberal Democracy Party, the ZLSD/United List of Social Democrats and the Greens in Slovenia. Generally, left-wing parties are more open to women's political representation, compared to the right-wing parties.

Essential as it is, the fight against discrimination did not particularly mobilise the women's movement; indeed, it is a part of the government's agenda especially due to the EU. Sometimes, the equality *acquis* interferes with the national framework<sup>7</sup> and becomes a "form without content". Forms without content signify that, while many relevant laws have been passed, these are not implemented, that there are institutions, but they do not function, and that there are rights, but they are not generally known.

Equal treatment, employment and social policies are a part of the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter in the negotiations with the EU. The *acquis* comprises articles from the treaties, directives, resolutions, recommendations, but also the European system of jurisprudence, specifically the decisions of the European Court of Justice, which make for the interpretation and reinforcement of the ten directives concerning equal treatment. Following the 4<sup>th</sup> UN World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, the

<sup>1</sup> Decree no. 1 of December 26, 1989 – emitted by the Council of the National Salvation Front – abolished several laws, decisions and decrees (including at the top of the list, in chronological order, the infamous Decree no. 770/1966 regulating the termination of pregnancy); published in *Monitorul Oficial* no. 7 / December 27, 1989. See [http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis\\_pck.frame](http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis_pck.frame), accessed on January 14, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Georgeta GHEBREA, Marina TĂTĂRĂM, Ioana CREȚOIU, *Enlargement, Gender and Governance: Analysing Female Visibility in Romania*, Editura Meridiane, București, 2004, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.guv.ro/guvernul/cabinet.php>, accessed on January 10, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Yvonne GALLIGAN (coord.), *Enlargement, Gender and Governance: The Civic and Political Participation...cit.*, p. 44.

<sup>5</sup> Corinne DELOY (coord.), "L'opposition de centre-droit s'impose d'une courte tête aux élections législatives", Fondation Schuman – Observatoire des élections européennes, <http://www.robert-schuman.org/oe/slovenie/legislatives/resultats.htm>, p. 1, accessed on January 12, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 80-81.

<sup>7</sup> Georgeta GHEBREA, Marina Elena TĂTĂRĂM, Ioana CREȚOIU, *Mapping Women Campaign for Change*, EGG Discussion Paper, 2004, p. 35.

EU Presidency decided to pay more attention to gender issues. The "Council Recommendation of 2 December 1996 on the balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process" (OJ L319, 10.12.96) recommended the "promotion of a gender balance at all levels of government bodies and committees".

Concerning women's presence in local government in the CEECs, during the first decade after the collapse of communism, there was a reduction in the percentage of women elected to local government. In the second decade, there is a slightly upward trend (see Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Women's Representation in Local Government in the CEECs (%)*

Country	Before 1989	First Decade after 1989	Second Decade after 1989
Bulgaria	27 (1988)	23.50 (1999)	NA
Czech Republic	NA	NA	9.00 (2000)
Estonia	NA	23.90 (1993)	28.40 (2002)
Hungary	NA	15.60 (1990)	27.50 (2002)
Latvia	49 (1982)	35.80 (1990)	41.20 (2001)
Lithuania	50 (1982)	19.40 (1995)	18.00 (2000)
Poland	24 (1988)	10.87 (1990)	17.76 (2002)
Romania	28 (1987)	6.10 (1996)	NA
Slovakia	20 (1981)	NA	NA
Slovenia	27 (1982)	11.00 (1994)	13.00 (2002)

Source: Yvonne GALLIGAN (coord.), *Enlargement, Gender and Governance: The Civic and Political Participation...cit.*, p. 27. The figures between parentheses represent the election year; NA stands for no available data.

Generally, women are better represented in local governments than at the national level. This situation is consistent with the idea that men occupy the most powerful and influential positions; hence, the less influential positions – in a system that remains largely centralised – become available to women. This hypothesis is confirmed by the women's representation considering the size of locality: regarding the positions of councillor and mayor, in the CEECs, women are more successful in smaller towns and villages<sup>1</sup>.

Women have performed well in mayoral elections post-89 (about 20%, on average), though the results for the Czech Republic, Poland, Romania and Slovenia remain in single figures<sup>2</sup>. In Romania women represented 6% of elected mayors in 1996<sup>3</sup>. Women ranked highest for the position of mayor in small towns: 95% of the women mayors elected in Romania's 2000 local elections were in villages<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>Yvonne GALLIGAN (coord.), *Enlargement, Gender and Governance: The Civic and Political Participation...cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 28.

<sup>3</sup>Georgeta GHEBREA, Marina TĂȚĂRĂM, Ioana CREȚOIU, *Enlargement, Gender and Governance: Analysing Female Visibility...cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibidem*.

Women perform best in local elections where the voters opt for an individual or independent candidate rather than choose on a party basis. The higher presence of Romanian women leaders in rural areas can be partially attributed to the casting of votes for individual candidates rather than for the party. In some local elections (e.g., Estonia, Hungary, Slovakia), many candidates run as independents because: "Although patriarchal attitudes are strong, networks and individual relations play a more important part in the public sphere than on the level of national politics, giving women a better chance to succeed than in the strictly hierarchical parties"<sup>1</sup>.

### THE UNDER-REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN AT THE POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE LEVEL IN ROMANIA

The Romanian society in general, and even the Romanian women in particular, do not regard the political realm to be an arena where women should bring an extensive contribution. Capitalizing on such remarks, the cultural perspective seeks a causal link among the values, mentalities, and cultural stereotypes that exist in the Romanian society with regards to women. Accordingly, the Romanian society now faces a confrontation between the traditionalist view and the liberal standpoint. In the traditionalist perspective, women are predominantly seen as wives and mothers; their professional activity is supposed to aim only at contributing a share of the family income, and can never be a goal by itself. From the liberal vantage point, women are considered persons with equal rights, liberties and duties, with abilities and propensities equal to those of men. They have the right to assert themselves in all realms of activity, to become leaders or specialists just as efficient as the men, to lead equally independent lives from all points of view.

Yet the firm belief in the inferiority of women is inculcated from the earliest stages of life. This educational trend begins in the family, where girls are differently socialized than boys. For instance, girls enjoy a more limited autonomy, are subject to stricter control, are forced into conformism, and are permitted to exercise their imagination and creativity to a lesser extent. The games, towards which their parents and relatives guide them, simulate their future social roles, avoiding games of competition and higher degrees of aggressiveness. School consolidates these cultural matrices, most textbooks accrediting the idea of limited social roles that women can and are meant to play. The mass-media also have an important contribution, as they generally promote stereotypical, negative, unbalanced, and even degrading images of women, where they are presented as objects, as housewives, as superficial beings who brood and fuss over easy entertainment (numerous media monitoring reports attest this state of facts).

Therefore, it is no surprise that, once they reach the beginning of a professional career, in order to assert themselves, women have to face all the stereotypes in everyone else's minds, but above all their own bias. This explains why many women who obtained excellent results during their academic training only attain mediocre fruition on the professional level. The women's political under-representation is also one of the outcomes of this situation.

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<sup>1</sup> Yvonne GALLIGAN (coord.), *Enlargement, Gender and Governance: The Civic and Political Participation...cit.*, p. 28.

The communist regime tried to improve the women's political representation, struggling to abide by its own ideology. The 1973 Plenary Assembly of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party decided to enhance the role of women in the economic, political, and social life of the country. A quota system was established to introduce proportional representation (30%) for all levels of political, administrative, and economic power. Despite the political statement and corresponding compulsion, this principle was never actually achieved (see Table 3). Numbers grew merely for the typically decorative and propagandistic job descriptions. During the communist regime, women members of the Great National Assembly and women in other political and administrative positions did not exercise power effectively. Rather, they were inserted there only to demonstrate the party politics of promoting the "equality of the sexes".

**Table 3**

*Women in the Romanian Assemblies*

Year	National	Regional (County Councils)	Local (municipal, town, village local councils)
1975	36 (15.10%)	NA	NA
1987	82 (34.40%)	512 (29%)	11 358 (28%)
1992	16 ( 3.30%)	NA	NA
1996	27 ( 5.70%)	94 ( 5.47%)	2 434 ( 6.11%)
2000	49 (10.04%)	NA	NA
2004	48 (10.66%)	NA	NA

Source: Georgeta GHEBREA, Marina TĂTĂRĂM, Ioana CREȚOIU, *Enlargement, Gender and Governance: Analysing Female Visibility...cit.*, p. 7. The figures for 2004 are computed according to the election results published by the Central Electoral Bureau, [www.bec2004.ro](http://www.bec2004.ro), and corroborated with the data published by the Romanian Parliament, [www.cdep.ro](http://www.cdep.ro) and [www.senat.ro](http://www.senat.ro), accessed on January 11, 2004.

In fact, the comparison of parliamentary participation of women in Romania before and after 1989 is deceiving, because the Great National Assembly was not an actual Parliament, since both the election mechanisms for this institution and its principles of functioning were anything but parliamentary. Also, during *real-socialism*, there was no clear distinction between the state structures and those of the hegemonic party. There was only a mixed structure, wherein all the structures and organisations of the state were doubled by organisms within the Romanian Communist Party or simply replaced by the latter.

This façade inclusion is further corroborated by the staggering decrease in women's political participation post-89. Nevertheless, after the 2000 general elections, a significant growth in the percentage of women members of the Romanian Parliament has been verified, and the tendency can be considered positive. It appears that slowly but surely women in Romania begin to make their physical and numerical presence felt in the fundamental legislative institution of the country. A series of women MPs, some representing the parties in power and others the opposition parties, have promoted legislative initiatives with a large public echo,

intensely advertised by the media. This change in perceptions is also a response to the changing attitudes of women in politics. There is an important difference between women MPs counting on the experience of previous mandates and the newcomers. The latter lack the information about the equal opportunities movements, and as such are not particularly sensitive to the theme. The women with a longer parliamentary experience have generally taken part in trainings and conferences<sup>1</sup>, and in time have developed an understanding of the significant concern for equal opportunities at the European level.

Many women MPs take up the behavioural traits and fit inside the legislative directions set by the majoritarian male parliamentarians. The case of Mrs. Mona Muscă disturbs this pattern, as she initially exhibited a rather gender-neutral disposition, but in time has become a key activist the fight against discrimination, domestic violence, etc. The reverse also applies: Mrs. Norica Nicolai, a former state secretary in the Department for the Promotion and Protection of Women's Rights, established within the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MMPS), now appears to have completely forsaken the issue.

The data presented below for the gender distribution in the Romanian Parliament prescribe the following main conclusions. Firstly, as institutions go, the Romanian Senate is visibly more reticent than the lower chamber of the Romanian Parliament (the Chamber of Deputies) in what concerns promoting women's political participation, although the gap appears to have reduced in 2004. Secondly, the percentage of women holding leadership positions in the Romanian Parliament is even more preoccupying than the rate of their membership in the same institution.

**Table 4**

*The Composition of the Chamber of Deputies and Senate following Elections*

Year	Deputies				Senators			
	Total		%		Total		%	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
1992	13	326	4.00	96.00	3	140	2.00	98.00
1996	25	315	7.00	93.00	2	141	1.40	98.60
2000	38	307	11.00	89.00	11	132	8.30	91.70
2004	35	278	11.18	88.82	13	124	9.48	80.52

Source: Georgeta GHEBREA, Marina TĂȚĂRĂM, Ioana CREȚOIU, *Enlargement, Gender and Governance: Analysing Female Visibility...cit.*, p. 9. The figures for 2004 are computed according to the election results published by the Central Electoral Bureau, [www.bec2004.ro](http://www.bec2004.ro), and corroborated with the data published by the Romanian Parliament, [www.cdep.ro](http://www.cdep.ro) and [www.senat.ro](http://www.senat.ro), accessed on January 11, 2004.

<sup>1</sup> One such project, entitled "Improving Women's Representation in Politics", was recently completed by British Council Romania (December 2001 – April 2004), specifically tackling the awareness of women in the political parties, with the declared aim of improving their numbers and status, and moving for the intensification of debates on gender issues in such a setting (see <http://www.britishcouncil.org/ro/romania-support-human-rights-and-equal-opportunities-women-in-politics.htm>, last accessed on January 11, 2005). Despite these efforts, mid-project (summer 2003), our own interviews revealed that nearly all the political parties concerned had not even compiled, let alone published, gendered statistics of the membership in their leadership structures.



**Table 5**  
*Leadership Positions in the Romanian Parliament following  
 the Most Recent General Elections*

The Permanent Bureau	Total members	Women members after the elections of 2000	Women members after the elections of 2004
The Chamber of Deputies	13	–	6
The Senate	11	–	1

Source for 2000: Georgeta GHEBREA, Marina TĂȚĂRĂM, Ioana CREȚOIU, *Enlargement, Gender and Governance: Analysing Female Visibility...cit.*, p. 9; for 2004: the official site of the Chamber of Deputies of the Romanian Parliament, [www.cdep.ro](http://www.cdep.ro) and the official site of the Senate of the Romanian Parliament, [www.senat.ro](http://www.senat.ro), accessed on January 10, 2004.

Concerning the composition of the permanent commissions, there are four permanent commissions in the Chamber of Deputies, which during the previous legislature had an exclusively male membership: the commission for Finance and banking, the commission for Defence, the commission for Public order and national safety, the commission for Inquiry on petitions and allegations of abuse and corruption, and the commission for (Internal) regulations. The same situation occurred in the Senate for three commissions: the commission for Nominations, discipline, immunity and validation, the Economic commission, and the commission for Privatisation. Following the general elections of 2004, women are adequately represented only in the commission for Equal opportunities for women and men, numbering 66.67% in the leadership structures of the commission in the Senate (where the president of the commission is nevertheless a man) and 80% in the leadership structures of the homologous commission at the Chamber of Deputies. Women are also represented (at 33.33%) as leaders of the senatorial and deputy commissions on Budget, finances and banking, in the senatorial but not at all in the deputy commissions on Agriculture, food industry and forestry, Public administration and management of the territory, and Inquiry on abuse, combating corruption and petitions. There are no women members whatsoever in the senatorial commission on Privatization, or in that on Education, science and youth. Following stereotypes, there are no women deputies in the commission on Defence, public order and national security, nor in that on Economic policy, reform and privatization, or in IT and communications and Inquiry on abuse, combating corruption and petitions. But neither are there any women members in the deputies' commission on Health and family, and there is no woman leader in the commission on Human rights, cults and national minority problems, as well as in the commission on Education, youth and sports. Women deputies are nevertheless 40% of the leaders in the commissions on Industry and services, Culture, arts and media, and Foreign policy.

The data presented in Table 6 substantiates the dramatic diminution of the percentage of women in the leadership of governments and ministries for the time-span between 1990 and 2004. In fact, the government that emerged following the 2000 elections held the record as the number of women ministers is concerned: 5 (Minister for European Integration, Minister of Justice, Minister for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises and Co-operation, Minister of Education and Research, Minister of Health and Family), over a total number 26 ministers and authorities<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Public Information, *Romania 2002*, București, 2002, pp. 118-120.

In June 2003, a governmental reshuffling occurred, which reduced the number of women ministers to 3 (Minister for European Integration, Minister of Justice, Minister of Labour, Social Solidarity and the Family), but in a government of only 16 ministries (hence from 19.23% to 18.75%). Today, the Romanian government counts again 3 women ministers (Minister for European Integration, Minister of Justice, Minister for Culture and the Religious Cults), in a government of 25 ministers and minister-delegates, hence amounting to a mere 12%.

**Table 6**  
*Government*

The Romanian Government	1975		1987		1992		1996		2000		2004	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	No.	%	No.	%	No.	No.	%
Ministries	NA	5	NA	11.6	1	NA	5	NA	11.6	1	3	12.00
State secretaries	NA	NA	NA	13.9	NA	NA	NA	NA	13.9	NA	NA	NA
Prefects (county representatives of the central government)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0.47

Source: Georgeta GHEBREA, Marina TĂȚĂRĂM, Ioana CREȚOIU, *Enlargement, Gender and Governance: Analysing Female Visibility...cit.*, p. 11. The figures for 2004 are computed according to the data published by the Romanian government, [www.gov.ro](http://www.gov.ro), accessed on January 31, 2004. The only two women prefects were appointed in Bucharest (Mioara Mantale) and in the county of Vâlcea (Anuța Handolescu), both members of the Democratic Party (PD).

In conclusion, although women represent 51% of the Romanian citizenry, they are under-represented in the political and administrative fields. In fact, women are under-represented in all socially advantaged positions; in 1996, they functioned as only: 28% of the managers and of the administrative staff; 46% of specialists and experts; 41% of wage earners; 23% of the owners<sup>1</sup>.

Nevertheless, certain personalities have begun to assert themselves. They began to play an increasing role, both in the sphere of institutionalised politics and as leaders of the public opinion and various pressure groups.

## WOMEN AND POLITICAL PARTIES IN ROMANIA

The Romanian parties are generally rather misogynous: they tolerate the participation of women in the lower fora of their hierarchies or in somewhat lower key sectors (youth and women's organisations). Men dominate the top structures (see Table 7), both at the central and at the local level, as the percentage of women leaders never exceeds 15%. The patterns of organisation and functioning of the

<sup>1</sup> *National Human Development Report, Romania, 1997*, UNPD-Romania, Expert, București, 1997, p. 116; *National Human Development Report, Romania, 2002-2003*, UNPD-Romania, București, 2003, p. 129.

present political parties seem to extrapolate the (im-) permeability of the political role to women. Due to their "natural" communication abilities, women may play a propagandistic role, but when it comes to the major decisions and advantages of power, these roles accrue decisively to men.

**Table 7**  
*Parties and their Leadership Structures (2000)*

Political Party	Structures	Total	Women	%
PSD (Social Democratic Party) <sup>1</sup>	Central Executive Bureau	107	10	9.34
	The Coordinating Bureau since July 15, 2004	6	1	16.00
	Central Executive Bureau since July 15, 2004	27	2	7.40
PD (Democratic Party)	41 county organisations and Bucharest	42	2 presidents	4.76
PRM (Greater Romania Party)	Directing Committee	21	3	14.30
UDMR (Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania)	Executive Presidium	8	0	0
	Operative Council	11	0	0
PNL (National Liberal Party) – opposition	Executive Bureau	27	1 (vice-president)	6.90
	Permanent Delegation	90	3	3.33
PNȚCD (National Peasant's Christian and Democratic Party)	National Governing Bureau	29	2	6.90

Source: Georgeta GHEBREA, Marina TĂTĂRĂM, Ioana CREȚOIU, *Enlargement, Gender and Governance: Analysing Female Visibility...cit.*, pp. 13-15.

All these parties (except PNL and UDMR who lack them as a formal structure, but have created other protection mechanisms) have planned women's organisations in their configuration. These bodies are internal party structures and have no funds of their own. They function on a fraction of the party's budget, funds approved by the decisional structure of the party, which is predominantly male. None of them are powerful enough to impose their opinions and proposals, regarding gender topics, within the programmatic documents of the party (political programme, electoral offers, etc). In this sense, having obtained the right to vote in the UDMR Congress alongside other interest groups and ideological assemblies, the Hungarian Women's Forum is an important, although novel addition to the Romanian scene.

Indeed, the network of women's political organisations is not very efficient. In this sense, there is no fundamental difference among the post-1989 Romanian parties.

<sup>1</sup> Since July 15, 2003, the PSD has new leadership structures: the Coordinating Bureau and the Central Executive Bureau ([www.psd.ro](http://www.psd.ro)). These changes did not improve the gender structure of the party leadership.

The content analysis of their political programmes indicates merely a formal and superficial stance concerning women's problems<sup>1</sup>. These issues are usually thrust in the same chapter with the elderly, the handicapped, the children, the ailing, and other minority or dependent groups. The only party in Romania that had any initiatives connected with the affirmative policies for women and which promote women programmatically in their leadership structures is the Democratic Party.

Nevertheless, the greatest (although still globally insignificant) gap in terms of participation can be seen between the situation of the Social Democratic Party (PSD, with a manifest leftist and populist orientation, was at the time the party in government) and the National Liberal Party (PNL, with a manifest rightist alignment, was in the opposition). With the above qualifications, we can say that the National Liberal Party (PNL) displays a weaker representation in its party and parliamentary structures, while there was a greater openness towards women's participation on behalf of the PSD. In various degrees, the latter occurs for all the parties that claim social-democratic principles, such as the Democrat Party (PD), the only party that formally lists the goal of achieving equal opportunities in its statute.

Approximately the same situation occurs should one check the gender figures by party for the parliamentarians these send to the fundamental institution of the state (Tables 8 and 9).

In order to find their names on the party lists of candidates, women have to comply with a long track of political apprenticeship or volunteer work before they obtain a real chance in the final selection. This is a conclusive constraint for many women, who confess that, due to family constraints, they have less time at their disposal for such strenuous party work.

**Table 8**  
*Parliamentary Groups in 2000*

Parliamentary Groups	Chamber of Deputies			Senate		
	Total	Women	%	Total	Women	%
PSDR	172	18	10.46	65	7	10.76
PRM	70	10	14.28	60	–	0
PNL	27	0	0	10	1	10
PD	27	2	7.40	9	1	11.11
UDMR	27	2	7.40	12	1	8.33
Minorities	18	2	11.11	–	–	–
Independents	–	–		5	1	20
TOTAL	341	34	10	161	11	6.8

Sources: The official site of the Chamber of Deputies of the Romanian Parliament, [www.cdep.ro](http://www.cdep.ro) and the official site of the Senate of the Romanian Parliament, [www.senat.ro](http://www.senat.ro), accessed on September 10, 2004.

<sup>1</sup> Mihaela MIROIU, "Feminismul ca politică a modernizării", in Alina MUNGIU-PIPPIDI (ed.), *Doctrină politică...* cit., pp. 254-255.

**Table 9**  
*Parliamentary Groups in 2004*

Parliamentary Groups	Chamber of Deputies			Senate		
	Total	Women	%	Total	Women	%
PD (in the "Justice and Truth" Alliance)	48	1 secretary, 7 members (2R)	16.67	21	1 vice-leader, 4 members (2R)	23.81
PNL (in the "Justice and Truth" Alliance)	64	3 members (1R)	4.68	28	1 member	3.57
PSD (in the PSD+PUR Union)	113	15 members (4R)	13.27	46	4 members (1R)	8.70
PUR-SL (in the PSD+PUR Union)	19	1 vice-leader, 4 members (1R)	26.31	11	1 vice-leader, 1 member (1R)	18.18
UDMR	22	–	0	10	–	0
PRM	48	6 (4R)	12.50	21	3 members (3R)	14.29
Minorities						
Independents						
TOTAL	341	34	10	161	11	6.83

*Sources:* The official site of the Chamber of Deputies of the Romanian Parliament, [www.cdep.ro](http://www.cdep.ro) and the official site of the Senate of the Romanian Parliament, [www.senat.ro](http://www.senat.ro), accessed on January 10, 2005, corroborated with the lists published by the Central Electoral Bureau, [www.bec2004.ro](http://www.bec2004.ro). Here R stands for the candidates who became MPs after the redistribution of wasted votes, according to the d'Hondt algorithm that governs the Romanian electoral system<sup>1</sup>.

One solution is that of stipulating vested quotas for women's participation<sup>2</sup>. The statute of the Democrat Party clearly states that the Women's Organisation has the right to propose at least 30% women candidates for any party lists proposed for elected functions or nominations, within or outside the party itself. However, no sanctions are stipulated for the case that these quotas are not met.

Moreover, by their very design, the women's organisations in different political parties do not have enough power to duly support their female candidates, so as to obtain and maintain key positions on the electoral lists. For instance, a comparison of the lists of candidates of the 1992, 1996, 2000 and 2004 elections reveals a steady increase in the number of female candidates, but only for the second part of the panel, on the non-eligible positions.

<sup>1</sup> For comments on this electoral mechanism, see Daniel BARBU, *Republica absentă*, Nemira, București, 1999, pp. 163-180; Filon MORAR, *Systèmes électoraux et systèmes de partis. La production électorale du système roumain de partis*, Editura Universității din București, București, 2000, pp. 201-209; IDEM, *Democrația privilegiilor. Alegerile aleșilor din România*, Editura Paideia, București, 2001, pp. 63-79, 84-106; Cristian PREDA, *România postcomunistă și România interbelică*, Meridiane, București, 2002, pp. 22-29.

<sup>2</sup> For a comparative overview of the perceptions in Central and Eastern Europe on this mechanism, see Amanda SLOAT, "Where are the Women? Female Political Visibility in EU Accession States", in *Transitions*, vol. XLIV, no. 1, pp. 45-58.

In short, the fact that women are not represented in the decision-making structures of their respective parties has negative upshots for the number of women elected in the Parliament and local government, and for the women's political role, in general.

## WOMEN IN LOCAL ELECTIONS IN ROMANIA

The number of women mayors is very low, compared to other CEECs. Table 10 shows the evolution of this number from one electoral year, to another:

**Table 10**

*Local Government (Mayors) in Romania*

	1992		1996		2000		2004	
	No. Women	%	No. Women	%	No. Women	%	No. Women	%
Town and Village Halls	46	1.56	81	2.75	109	3.6	103	3.2
Bucharest City Hall	0		0		0		0	

Source: Georgeta GHEBREA, Marina TĂTĂRĂM, Ioana CREȚOIU, *Enlargement, Gender and Governance: Analysing Female Visibility...cit.*, p. 12. For 2004: the National Institute for Statistics (INSSE) and the Central Electoral Bureau.

The local elections that took place in 2004 did not change the general situation: women remain underrepresented in the Romanian local governments.

Our conjecture concerning the role of political parties (as gendered organisations) in this under-representation is confirmed by the data about the women candidates. Table 11 demonstrates a very low rate of women's participation on candidate lists:

**Table 11**

*Gender Distribution of Candidates for Mayoral Positions, Romania, June 2004*

Party	Total Candidates (%)	No. of Men Candidates	No. of Women Candidates	% Women
United Socialist Party	49 (100%)	30	19	38.7
Party of the New Democracy	179 (100%)	161	18	10.0
PUNR (Party of Romanian National Unity)	758 (100%)	689	69	9.1
PER (Ecologist)	505 (100%)	459	46	9.1
Independent candidates	955(100%)	869	86	9.0

Party	Total Candidates (%)	No. of Men Candidates	No. of Women Candidates	% Women
Popular Action	862 (100%)	787	75	8.7
Democrat Force of Romania	1 027 (100%)	937	90	8.7
PNȚCD	1 530 (100%)	1 401	129	8.4
PUR (Humanist)	2 460 (100%)	2 263	197	8.0
Party of Pensioners and Social Protection	165 (100%)	152	13	7.8
Party of the New Generation	1 287 (100%)	1 190	97	7.5
PRM (Great Romania)	2 739 (100%)	2 550	189	6.9
The Socialist Alliance	218 (100%)	203	15	6.8
PNL (National Liberal)	2 938 (100%)	2 802	136	4.6
UDMR Democrat Union of Hungarians	334 (100%)	320	14	4.1
PSD (Social-Democrat)	3 000 (100%)	2 876	124	4.1
PD (Democrat)	2 845 (100%)	2 777	68	2.3
Other parties	741 (100%)	576	165	2.2
TOTAL	22 592 (100%)	21 042	1 550	6.8

Sources: National Institute for Statistics (INSSE) and Central Electoral Bureau<sup>1</sup>.

The table above confirms certain hypotheses, such as:

1. The women's under-representation in local governments is a consequence of women's under-representation on candidate lists, where women occupy only 6.8%.
2. The lists of smaller parties contain a greater proportion of women candidates than the lists of bigger parties; it could be a strategy for increasing the party visibility.
3. The women's participation rate to the local election as independent candidates – running for mayoral positions – is rather high (9%), compared with party lists.
4. There is a certain connection between the gender balance on candidate lists and the label of "left-wing party", but this connection operates for smaller parties only (see the United Socialist Party in Table 5).
5. The most important conclusion, inspired by the Table 5, is the following: the biggest parties (both in government or in opposition, left-wing or right-wing)

<sup>1</sup> See also the press release of the Institute for Public Policies (IPP), The Open Society Foundation (OSF) and the Center for Juridical Resources (CRJ), June 7, 2004, [www.osf.ro/comunicate/comunicat\\_algeri\\_locale\\_2004.pdf](http://www.osf.ro/comunicate/comunicat_algeri_locale_2004.pdf), accessed on January 14, 2005.

are the most prohibitive to women's representation on candidate lists; women's participation on their lists for mayoral positions did not exceed 5% of the total number of candidates; this confirms our hypothesis regarding women's exclusion from the real political power.

The election outcomes do not differ essentially from the candidate structure, as shown in Table 12:

**Table 12**

*Results of Mayoral Elections by Party and Gender – Romania, June 2004*

Party	Total Elected Mayors (%)	No. Women Mayors	% Women Elected Mayors
The German Democrat Forum	9 (100%)	1	11.0
Independent candidates	82 (100%)	6	7.3
PUNR (Party of Romanian National Unity)	14 (100%)	1	7.0
Party of the New Generation	23 (100%)	1	4.3
PD (Democrat)	380 (100%)	16	4.2
PRM (Great Romania)	81 (100%)	3	3.7
PNL (National Liberal)	443 (100%)	16	3.6
PUR (Humanist)	123 (100%)	4	3.2
PSD (Social-Democrat)	1 700 (100%)	51	3.0
PNȚCD	35 (100%)	1	2.8
UDMR (Democrat Union of Hungarians)	186 (100%)	3	1.6
Other parties	68 (100%)	0	0
TOTAL	3 133 (100%)	103	3.2

Sources: National Institute for Statistics (INSSE) and Central Electoral Bureau

Most of the women mayors were elected in rural area. There are only two very small towns (Budești and Lehliu-Gară) where the mayors are women. 98% of the women mayors elected in Romania's 2004 local elections were in villages. From this point of view the most significant performance belongs to Maria Petre, candidate of the Democrat Party to the mayoral position in Slobozia, which is a county capital. Mrs. Petre went to the second ballot but she lost the elections by a very narrow margin.

The Case of PUR – The Romanian Humanist (Social-Liberal) Party is very relevant to the ascribed role for women in the Romanian politics.

The Romanian Humanist (Social-Liberal) Party – PUR is a rather small party; it did not succeed to pass the electoral threshold in 2000 (according to the pre-electoral polls) but acceded to the Parliament in coalition with the PSD, just



like in 2004, when they joined in a pre-electoral union, after a brief interlude of running independently in the local elections of the same year<sup>1</sup>.

The *Platform-Programme* of the Romanian Humanist (Social-Liberal) Party<sup>2</sup> defends Romanian middle class interests, supporting SME development. Other programmatic topics mentioned are the advancement of youth, family and anti-corruption. PUR does not include a corresponding Humanist Women's Organisation in its structure; it has instead several "professional departments". The *Platform-Programme* does not even mention women's issues; the same situation concerns the *Humanist Doctrine*, a document that is also available on the party's website. Moreover, this document criticises quotas because "quotas limit free competition and value selection"<sup>3</sup>.

Despite these circumstances, PUR approached the local elections by promoting an important number of women candidates for key-positions, such as the Mayor of Bucharest and Bucharest sector (district) mayors, plus women candidates for different county capitals. This move was surprising, and journalists<sup>4</sup> explained it by the influence of Dick Morris, the campaign strategist of PUR. Seeking for more visibility, Mr. Morris used this idea, in order to surprise and get the public opinion's attention. Mona Nicolici, one of the candidates for the Bucharest district (sector) Halls, is a popular TV anchor, and this fact consolidates the idea of a quest for visibility. Moreover, even during the electoral campaign, PUR approached women's issues superficially. We must conclude that the initiative of increasing the number of women candidates running for visible positions in local government did not belong to the women in PUR but to the male leadership of the party. Still, this gesture increased not only the party's visibility but women's visibility in politics, as well.

The Romanian public opinion was reluctant in accepting women in local government. None of the women candidates of PUR were elected as mayors in town halls. Monica Tatoi, candidate for Bucharest City Hall, had – in May 2004 – a constant evolution in opinion polls, i.e., 6% of the vote intentions<sup>5</sup>, which is almost the same figure for PUR as a whole. Eventually, on election day, she obtained only 3.71% of votes.

## OTHER VENUES FOR WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION

### *Trade Unions*

During the communist regime, every employee was by necessity a trade union member, and therefore it was compulsory to be a member of the General Union of Romanian Trade Unions (UGSR). This organisation was the only union formation

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<sup>1</sup> For comments on the remarkable flexibility of Romanian parties following the local elections of 2004, see Cristian PREDA, "Consensualism administrativ și partidocrație", in *Studia Politica. Romanian Political Science Review*, vol. IV, no. 3, 2004, pp. 546-547.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.pur.ro/>, accessed on April 15, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, *The Humanist Doctrine*, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Mediafax, March 19, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Institute for Marketing and Polls (IMAS), *Sondaje legate de alegerile locale 2004*.

that was legally recognised because it was completely subordinated to the Communist Party. Post-communist studies focusing on the nomenclature show that the UGSR was often used as an "elephant cemetery". Ceaușescu would no longer send his potential political adversaries (or simply the people who had fallen into his disgrace) to the gulag, like in the Stalinist age, but transferred them to the place where nothing ever happened, hence to the UGSR.

Indeed, the organisation had no role in protecting the rights of the employees. It limited its activity to the enactment of party decisions, strictly related to the production plans, propaganda, ideology and the like.

Women constituted an important percentage of the UGSR members and, compared to the Communist Party, they were better represented in the governing structures of the organisation. The principle was, as always, that of toleration, which was proportional to the distance from the real locus of power.

The most active and renowned trade union centres in Romania, formed soon after 1908, are: Cartel Alfa, The National Confederation of Trade Unions in Romania – The Brotherhood (CNSRL-Frăția) and the National Trade Union Block (BNS). Generally, these trade unions, like others with similar roles and power, are organised in branches where the state sector prevails – the mining industry, the metallurgical industry, the machine-building industry – where the number and proportion of women employed are not too high.

Two of these trade unions, that is, CNSRL-Frăția and BNS, took part in an international survey whose results are listed in the tables below:

**Table 13**

*Women in Specific Trade Union Blocks*

Organisation	% Women Employed			Members			% Women Members		
	2000	2002	+/-	2000	2002	+/-	2000	2002	+/-
European average							43.6	50.2	+
CNSLR-Frăția				656 709	250 000	-	39.0	35.0	-
BNS	45.8	46.7	+	NA	150 000		35.0	35.0	

Source: ICFTU CEE Women's Network Survey: *Position of Women in Trade Unions in Central and Eastern Europe 2000/2002*, Discussion Paper, pp. 1, 6.

The table above demonstrated the decrease in the number of trade union members even for the very recent time-period spanning from 2000 to 2002, a fact that confirms – at least in the Romanian case – the powerful link between trade unionism and the size of the state sector. Proportionally to the decline in the state sector, following privatisation, the closing of (often bankrupt) enterprises or the reduction of their activities, the rate of membership in trade unions dwindled significantly as well.

On the other hand, one may notice a diminishing proportion of women in trade unions (a little over one third of the trade union members). Romanian trade unions occupy the last seat in the European hierarchy concerning the average of women members.

**Table 14**  
*Representation of Women in Trade Unions*

Organisation	% of Women in the Congress			% of Women in the Highest Decision Body			% of Women in the Executive Decision Body		
	2000	2002	+/-	2000	2002	+/-	2000	2002	+/-
European average	28.0	28.0		23.8	23.1	-	15.5	15.7	+
CNSLR-Frăția	7.8	6.6	-	5.5	6.2	+	0	0	
BNS	12.0	12.0		6.6	5.6	-	0	5.3	+

Source: *ICFTU CEE Women's Network Survey: Position of Women in Trade Unions...cit.*, pp. 5, 6.

The table above corroborates the conjecture of the unassuming role women play in the great trade union blocks in Romania, stated in the beginning of this section. Women can be found in extremely low percentages (under 10%) in the governing structures of trade unions (like congresses, national councils, central bureaux, and other decision organisms). In this sense also, according to the quoted report, the Romanian trade unions linger at the bottom of the European hierarchy.

If women do not hold a significant role in the leadership of trade unions, they are nevertheless employed in executive functions and in the administrative apparatus, to ensure the daily functioning of these organisations. The women's role, their influence upon the social and political life of Romania cannot even be secured at the level of trade union activity.

### *Social Movements*

During the communist period, in Romania there were no self-organised groups or institutions capable of preserving an autonomous public sphere, which could guarantee individual liberty and check abuses of the state, but there were certain individuals and informal groups that had the courage to oppose to the regime. Among the dissidents and the opponents, there were very few but relevant female characters, such as Doina Cornea and Ana Blandiana.

Prior to 1989, there existed only a small number of associations, all placed under the severe control of the state and/or the single party, grouping the communist youth, women, the sightless, the hearing-impaired, the hunters and the fishers, the bird-growers, the writers, the artists.

The communist state ensured the representation of women by means of the National Women's Council. The latter was organised on three levels of hierarchy: central, county-level, and local, while maintaining structures in the rural areas as well (these were entitled "Commissions of the Women from the Agricultural Co-operative Enterprises). The National Women's Council was subordinated to the Romanian Communist Party, as it co-operated with trade unions, popular councils, sanitary / medical divisions, ministries, etc. Its function was purely symbolic: it had to illustrate the importance granted to women by the regime.

After 1989, the Council became dissolute, as a few leaders attempted to found other, more meaningful, women's organisations<sup>1</sup>. Following 1989, the establishment of all associations and foundations must follow Law no. 21/1924 concerning legal persons (in particular associations and foundations). In order to be granted legal status, each association or foundation had to obtain the accord of the pertaining ministry. This law granted ministers the right to control all new organisations. The legal framework for founding associations and foundations changed as late as 2000, by Governmental Ordinance no. 26/2000, whereby the state renounces the involvement of its administration in the process. The Emergency Ordinance no. 37/2003 reinstates the necessity to present the approval of ministries in order to obtain legal personality by the necessary judicial proceedings.

Women's participation and representation fare better in the NGO sector compared to other sectors. Almost 50% of the NGO members are women, and they occupy almost 25% of the top positions for these NGOs. This sector undoubtedly represents a great opportunity for the civic participation of women in Romania (Table 15).

**Table 15**

*The Participation of Women in Leadership Positions within NGOs – Statistics for 1999*

	Women Leaders		Structure in %
	No.	% of total	
Total number of leading positions, of which:	2 266	24.8	100.0
President	1 277	11.8	56.4
Director, vice-president or co-ordinator	989	32.9	43.6

Source: CNSR and UNDP, *Femeile și bărbații în România*, ARI PRESS, București, 2000, pp. 27-28.

The database of AnA centre lists a record of 59 NGOs<sup>2</sup> dealing with women's issues. The real number can be even higher since the inscription in the database is optional. The organisations counted in these documents are quite varied, with a common core that is often complete with a random selection of women's organisations belonging to the various political parties and trade unions, and even with associations of social care.

Although still marginal and unfamiliar to the public opinion, in the recent years (2002-2004), women's organisations seem to have undergone a change of strategy. They attempt to create more efficient networks and work to intensify the mass-media visibility of some themes that are deemed important for the statute of women, such as equal opportunities and combating domestic violence.

<sup>1</sup> We interviewed someone who had an important position in the National Women's Council. We asked her if women had the power to influence the political decisions and measures taken before 1989. She replied that "they were not allowed to say anything, it was a dictatorship, they yielded to the decisions made by men or were eliminated". She quoted the examples of Florica Bagdasar and Olimpia Ștefănescu.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.anasaf.ro>, accessed on June 10, 2003.

Another cause for congratulations lies with the international programmes, which mustered the funding of organisations such as the European Union, the World Bank, the UNDP, the British Know-How Fund, USAID, and UNESCO. These programmes played a major role in supporting the NGO sector in Romania to argue in favour of integrating the EU and UN principles and instruments regarding gender, and to accurately assess the status and role of women in the Romanian society.

### *Lobby and Campaigns*

No formal lobby exists presently on behalf of the Romanian women. Still, there were some moments when Romanian women stood together for different causes:

1. In 1997, the 222 Project aimed at encouraging gender mainstreaming and gender balance in politics, through a newly instituted lobby component. Even if the initiative generated great enthusiasm (over 200 persons signed petitions for support) it failed. The 222 Group declared itself an informal forum, thus detracting its ability to communicate a clear message and to foster dialogue among political parties<sup>1</sup>. Although almost 70 women from different political parties, trade unions, NGOs received training under this project, the participants affiliated to political parties acted influenced more by the interests of the parties they represented, while their concerns for gender mainstreaming came always second. Moreover, in the 2000 elections, counting among the women who participated in the project, all the women who were elected MPs had already held this position in the previous Parliament.

2. Following their first participation in the Karat Coalition Conference (Bratislava, 1998), the Romanian Society for Feminist Analyses AnA decided to join the Karat Network in their effort to produce a *Regional Report regarding the Advancement of Women in the CEECs*, following the Beijing Conference and based on the national reports on the subject.

3. A street protest organised by a women's NGO took place in Bucharest when the *Playboy* magazine issued an article entitled "Cum să-ți bați femeia fără să lași urme" ("How to Hit one's Woman without Leaving a Trace") in April 2000.

4. In March 2002, in the frame of the National Conference for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men the participants produced a "Statement". The terms of the adopted text are very moderate, without mentioning clear priorities of a future plan of action: they merely promise to act for the elimination of all forms of discrimination, they are to be actively involved in the process of modernisation of the society, they unite their efforts to uphold the laws and policies that are aimed at offering equal opportunities for women, etc.

5. In January 2003, the "Partnership for Equality" Centre (part of the Soros Open Network Romania) has launched a media campaign on preventing violence against women. A 40-second TV spot portrays an episode of male violence against his partner, a powerful image meant to shake the indifference and to prompt to action. The video was featured free of charge by four main TV stations in Romania, over a period of approximately 3 months.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*.

6. In February 2003, the same "Partnership for Equality" Centre, with the support of over 60 NGOs nation-wide, has carried out an intensive lobbying campaign against Government Ordinance no. 9/2003, which amends the Law no. 19/2000 concerning the public pension fund and other insurance rights. More protests were aimed against the limitation of the monthly insurance rights for mothers to a fixed amount, regardless of their previous contribution to the insurance fund, against the expansion of the compulsory period of contribution from 6 to 10 months, and against the annulment of the previously existing individual contracts. Responding to the pressure of civil society, political parties, trade unions, citizens, and media, the government postponed the entry into force of the Ordinance. However the problems still remain.

7. In the same period, as a result of the Conference for Preventing and Combating Domestic Violence, 30 NGOs that are active in the field of preventing domestic violence set up the basis for the creation of the National Coalition for Prevention of Domestic Violence. This coalition fully participated in the debates regarding the Law for preventing and combating the family violence, adopted in June 2003.

8. The AnA Society for Feminist Studies joined the protest initiated by the European Women's Lobby (EWL) regarding the current form of the Draft European Constitution. They fight for the amendment of paragraphs 1-2 and 1-4, in the sense of emphasising the statements connected with the equality between women and men<sup>1</sup>.

### *Women's Voting Behaviour*

The Romanian society (especially since 1991, because 1990 was very much marked by street movements, created by various organisations and parties) is the scene for a certain "civic minimalism", both among men and among the women, provoked by the idea that politics is dirty and whatever one does, one cannot change much. On the one hand, many studies conclude as to the low interest of Romanians for politics, as well as to the low rates of civic and political participation<sup>2</sup>.

While we have seen that there are significant differences between women and men with respect to their political participation and representation, the differences that concern their voting behaviour are less obvious, although they do exist.

A first distinction should be noted with respect to a higher rate of absence in the electoral participation. Electoral sociologists uncovered a significant correlation between absenteeism and the social exclusion of certain groups<sup>3</sup>. For instance, at the elections of 27 September 1992, 63% of the citizens who refused to vote were women<sup>4</sup>. Also, only 60% of the women participated in the November 2000 elections, as compared with 71% of the men<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *Voluntar*, no. 288, June 2, 2003, <http://www.fdsc.ro>.

<sup>2</sup> Ioan MĂRGINEAN, "Suportul social pentru democrație", in *Sociologie românească*, no. 2/1999, pp. 3-19.

<sup>3</sup> Jean STOETZEL, Alain GIRARD, *Sondajele de opinie publică*, Romanian translation by I. Pecher, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, București, 1975, p. 181.

<sup>4</sup> Centrul Independent de Sondaje, Post-electoral poll, October 1992.

<sup>5</sup> Mircea KIVU, "Segmentarea electoratului", in Vintilă MIHĂILESCU (ed.), *Sondajele de opinie. Mod de utilizare*, Paideia, București, 2001, p. 39.

Moreover, women are generally an important segment of the undecided. For example, one week before the elections of November 2000, 38% of the women had not picked a candidate or a favourite party yet, as opposed to 25% of the men<sup>1</sup>.

On the other hand, "judging by the percentage of their votes for the rightist parties"<sup>2</sup>, opinion polls indicate more traditionalist and more conservative mentalities among women than among men. Women are less favourable to abrupt and radical changes. This is an explanation for the fact that Romanian women indicate by their voting preference not the parties that identify themselves on the right wing of the political spectrum, but those political forces and candidates that promised a "bearable" rhythm of the reforms (the so-called "gradualists"). One example is the fact that, in the elections of May 20, 1990, women voted for the National Salvation Front in a significantly greater proportion than men: 70% versus 63%. On the contrary, on average, their votes for "rightist" parties were 3 percent lower than men's votes for the same parties<sup>3</sup>.

The same tendency remained manifest in the ensuing elections. In November 2000, women voted as follows<sup>4</sup>: in the presidential elections, in the first round, 38% of the women chose Ion Iliescu, as compared to only 35% of the men. On the contrary, their preferences for Corneliu Vadim Tudor, a reputedly more aggressive candidate, were far lower: 24%, as compared to 32% of the men. In the parliamentary elections, 41% of the women voted PDSR, as opposed to just 39% of the men. Once more, their preference for Corneliu Vadim Tudor's Greater Romania Party, was far lower: 19%, as compared to 25% for the men.

Generally, a social-demographic analysis grounded exclusively of the gender criterion may become misleading, because gender interferes strongly with the other variables, such as the level of education, residence environment, social status and age. Thus, the electoral behaviour of Romanian women has many common traits with the rural and elderly population. We are unable to claim that the explanation resides in the strong degree of feminisation of the rural and elderly population or whether all these social groups suffer from social exclusion and marginalisation and hence tend to have similar electoral behaviour.

## WOMEN'S CAMPAIGN FOR CHANGE: A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

### *Assessment of Women's Role*

Women's status during Ceaușescu's regime was also affected by the family and reproduction policies, which were based on the interdiction of abortions and contraceptive methods, as well as on the valorisation of family stability as the "basic cell of the socialist society". F4 deems this a fundamental trait of the national-communist policies, somehow reinstating the values of the right and

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 42.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony GIDDENS, *Sociologie*, Romanian translation by Radu and Vivia Săndulescu, All, București, 2000, p. 382.

<sup>3</sup> IRSOP/INFAS, Exit poll, May 20, 1990.

<sup>4</sup> Mircea KIVU, "Segmentarea electoratului", in Vintilă MIHĂILESCU (ed.), *Sondajele de opinie...cit.*, pp. 40-41.

extreme-right: family, children and kitchen. It is also a reason why advancement in one's career and in the social-political activity were blocked for unmarried women and even for the widows:

"I had word from my female colleagues, especially in research institutes and in ministries, that they were either called upon gently by a personnel officer – generally a motherly figure, or confronted by a harsher director, to resolve their situation somehow". [F4]

On the other hand, quotas encouraged women in leadership. Our respondents believe that was also a false opinion because those women were usually linked to a line of power, and there were always men to guide them:

"If a woman made it to the top, people thought that was due to some political command, rather than to her competencies, intelligence, and talent". [F8]

However, there was an informal solidarity against the regime. The dissidents were isolated from the rest of the population but – on various occasions – they had some support even from ordinary people. F3 recounts the isolation she had to suffer during the last years of the regime. She was guarded day and night by the Securitate, her phone was cut and she was not allowed to have any visitors. Contacting her had become impossible. She lived through a terse deterioration of interpersonal relations even with her family and with her best friends, who were forced to avoid her and to refuse any contact with her because of the consequences this might have on their own lives. The only people who stood by her were the trash collector and the housekeeper, who behaved admirably.

Women were just as much a part of the 1989 revolution as men: many of them were victims, either killed or hurt in the fighting that went on at the time. Very few women played prominent political roles during the first Parliament, which was set up after 1989. Several had been major figures in the National Salvation Front immediately after December 1989, including Doina Cornea and Ana Blandiana, but both soon resigned and became major figures in, respectively, the National – Christian and Democratic – Peasant Party and the Civic Alliance. Also, the marathon rally in the University Square was marked by massive women's participation [F4]. The protest rally took place in Bucharest, April through June 1990, and called for the profound democratisation and not a simple makeover of the regime.

In the opinion of our respondents, women have made a place for themselves on the Romanian civic and political scene, but less as an organised movement than by means of remarkable feminine personalities. Some of these (Ana Blandiana, Zoe Petre, Mona Muscă) played an essential role in the opposition against the political regime that was installed immediately after 1989, a regime dominated by elements of the former communist party or of the Securitate. These women managed to crystallise the opposition forces (civic and political) and to achieve in 1996 – for the first time in Romanian history – the peaceful alternation in government. These fora were the civic organisations "University Solidarity" and the "Civic Alliance", wherein, according to F4, at least one third of the activists were women:

"At the same time, I do not believe we should minimise the presence of those women that made their way into the public space, the organisational, associative scene. And I believe that participation to the political life is always built onto a continual negotiation. So, I would not say that women played the key role, but I would not go to the other extreme and call them altogether absent". [F7]



The process of democratisation of the Romanian society should absolutely include – at least in the unanimous view of our interviewees – the gender dimension. Democratisation also means equality between men and women, equal treatment, fight against discrimination, the presence of the gender agenda in the public space. Democratisation means, among others:

“Transparency, decentralisation, equal treatment. Unfortunately, gender is a non-issue in the post-communist Romania, unable to find themselves in ‘the major issues’, in the hierarchy of emergencies and priorities”. [F1]

“The basic issue here is mutual respect and the respect of society towards women’s work, equal to the recognition of the social value of women’s work. In my opinion, equality of rights is manifest whenever you benefit from equal treatment, whether you are a man or a woman”. [F5]

### *Obstacles*

The interviewees believe women’s role in the civic and political participation of women in Romania continues to be narrow to this date. In their opinion, firstly, this role can be the consequence of enduring patriarchal mentalities, as well as those gathered in the totalitarian period, which are still deeply ingrained:

“Women have the option to channel their activity either towards their families or towards their careers. Men do not have that option. In our society if you are an exceptional head of your family, but you are not a success career-wise, you are then considered a failure, whereas if you are a good mother and take good care of your family, then you are a special woman!”. [F5]

“What could women have done, when the entire Romanian people rests in this state of complete dependency towards traditions and age-old mentalities, on top of which came the communist heritage?”. [F8]

Secondly, it may be the consequences of the campaign forcing through the advancement of women during Ceaușescu’s regime. During communism, women had no access to their own identity, and their political participation incited the repulsion of the entire society, a sense that persists to this day towards any public engagement of women:

“And besides, women themselves assumed a sense of guilt, unnatural guilt, that they might be perceived exactly like Elena Ceaușescu who was to be blamed for all the hardships and mediocrity, and that she was to be blamed, hence all the women had to be blamed”. [F2]

“The policy of forced advancement created a fear, a sense of repulsion towards women’s involvement in the public sphere. This embarrassment, the mortification is found both with women and with the society as a whole”. [F8]

Thirdly, it may be simply about the women’s choice. The waning women’s participation in political positions after 1990 can be partially due to their personal decision, as for many of the women such participation was associated with Ceaușescu’s coercive and propagandistic policies. These women are now content to live in peace, freed from the obligation to carry out a more or less active role in the public space:

"And then, in 1990, I believe that many of the women felt the fact that they no longer had to attend all kinds of meetings and extra-familial activities as a relaxation; and maybe they simply retired from this public life". [F7]

Fourthly and quite pragmatically, politics cost money. Hence, another cause for the scarce involvement of women in politics is of a material nature: women defer such engagements wilfully, because every political position must be supported financially. Electoral campaigns (advertisements in general) are very costly. Men and businessmen especially are more willing to give up a part of the dividends. Women involved in business consider it more profitable to develop their enterprise and to dedicate the earnings to their families, rather than spend precious money and time on politics, given that at present society does not yet behave equitably towards women:

"Some of the women who are capable to play a role in politics consider that it is not yet worth it to get involved in politics". [F5]

Fifthly, parties dominated by men decide the political leadership, the composition of government and Parliament. Romanian parties have still only few first-rank women leaders:

"Parties at the left of the spectrum are more sensitive to women's problems than the liberal ideology. Nevertheless, women in all these parties perceive themselves primarily as party members, not as feminists". [F1]

Women are clearly under-represented in political parties, both because men dominate these, and because of the mentalities women have been inoculated with for decades:

"I do not know to which extent women enlisted effectively in political parties, I believe that here in general they were under-represented, because they had some sort of inherited shyness to go out in public and because they were not necessarily welcome, met with hurras and with applause when they did take that chance". [F4]

Women ministers did not project outstanding performance (on the contrary), but there are many women – activists that do important work for their political parties. These women, active in political parties for the past 13 years, are employed only as party members, membership fee payers, organisers for party activities and electoral activities where men take the forefront, while the women are effectively brushed aside. Women are used for second level jobs, which are very valued and highly praised during the party meetings, so they are gratified with this valorisation and accept positions with no chance of eligibility on the party lists. Similarly, in the Parliament, women have far more fruitful activities in the committees than in the plenary or in the leading organs of the assembly. In the opinion of our interviewees there are still important barriers that conduce to women's advancement only in the administration and in executive functions (where their work is important but anonymous) rather than in leadership functions with greater visibility:

"There are barriers inside the political parties, we have discussed them before, but at the same time, most of the public servants in Romania are women, an impressive 75%. In this situation they are also bosses. Men hold the lead in the very high public positions, but many women from the administrative level hold the positions of executive decision-makers. There are

barriers at the level of ministries, the number of women-ministers and secretaries of state being very low, since they still depend on the political decision. For instance we have women bank-directors; in the positions where women have the necessary competencies, they succeed. It is true that they do have to work harder". [F5]

### *Women's Political Participation*

Our respondents see this topic as a part of the equal opportunities policy and not as a field for positive discrimination by means of a system of quotas:

"You don't need 30%. You need a general mentality... You need a general political trend, which should encourage rights for women in terms of equality, of equal opportunities, and these can also be enacted by men". [F2]

"The disadvantage is not of a statistical nature, it has to do with the effective role that women are supposed to play". [F3]

"I believe we need the common will to attract and promote persons independently of their gender". [F4]

Some parties, like the National Christian Democratic Peasants' Party – in 1996, "have made a massive effort to bring more women on the lists, but still just a few ladies won" [F4], because they settled for non-eligible positions on the lists. F4, a leader of a political party, explains how the women in her party refused the idea of founding a women's organisation within the party, considering that this is exactly the expression of an inferior position.

The interviewees hope that after Romania's adhesion to the EU, women's participation quota should increase swiftly, due to the necessity to comply with communitarian regulations.

### *Improving Effectiveness*

This appears to worry some women's NGOs, although very many are satisfied with the specialised activity they perform. The interviewees considered the causes of the relative low performance of the women's NGOs in Romania and made several proposals to improve this performance.

In some respondents' opinion, in order to enhance the efficacy of the women's movement, what lacks is the coherence, the joining of efforts, which are presently rather strewn:

"Maybe more concerted actions of these associations, they seem to be too many and I think that very few of them are organised at a national level". [F7]

The political and social conduct should no longer be dissociated – the fight for political rights and representation should be united with the predicaments of our economic situation and of our social services.

The NGOs should create campaigns in order to brief women about their rights; they should facilitate women's access to the courts, when they must prove these rights have been trespassed. The NGOs should imagine concrete strategies to disseminate and communicate, other than their own newsletters. The general

press is very important. Among possible partners, the respondents listed: trade unions, parties, civic movements, human rights movements, cultural associations, etc., in view of breaking the current isolation and marginalisation of the women's movement.

The NGOs should make themselves known, they should learn to communicate, they should launch or co-opt public and political figures to popularise their cause. Newspaper columnists, the mass media in general ought to be won for women's issues [F8], and the public opinion must be also captivated by provoking articles and warning signals.

Visibility can grow also by restructuring education in schools, beginning with the disciplines that are offered and continuing with the manner in which they are taught. The interviewees (especially F1 and F3) believe that the weight of the social sciences in the Romanian curricula is very inadequate. Also, there should be more gender studies modules in the universities.

Studies concerning women's status, the monitoring of this situation and the popularisation of the monitoring reports would also count as a solution for increasing the visibility of the women's movement.

### *Relationship with the Political System: the Lack of an Effective Dialogue*

Most of our respondents believe that the government is not sufficiently open to the women's movement, that it does not offer the necessary funding and that even the legislative framework is not favourable at all. By abrogating Ceaușescu's law that used to ban abortion (among the first measures taken by the new regime, in 1990), the new parties in government considered that they had done their duty towards women:

"They thought that this was the crux for the condition of women and that they had settled it". [F1]

The governmental institutions have an appetite for secrecy, and (with rare exceptions), despite the existing transparency laws, they hesitate or avoid conducting a dialogue with the women's movement:

"Generally there is a bad relationship with the civil society and its representatives. If they do agree to consultations, these are formal ones. There have been numerous cases where the NGOs were asked after the decision had been already taken, these situations are pure propaganda". [F4]

"The governments that succeed themselves, the relevant institutions – are all apathetic and opaque. With one hand they give and with two they take back, like in the case of the compensations for the parental leave that should have been 85% of the mother's wage and then was kept under the minimum wage. Women that earn well are thus effectively dissuaded from having children". [F8]

Other possible explanations for this situation include, firstly, an insufficient quantity and quality of the human resources. Very few persons in the current government are trained in the field of equal opportunities. Some ministries have one or two persons who are appointed as experts in this domain, but they do not know

what to do. They are part of a general inter-ministerial council, but it is not a strong institution as long as it does not benefit enough from gender training:

“What is worst is the lack of culture in this field. People do not know the meaning of equality, equality of treatment, equality between women and men, discrimination, direct and indirect discrimination... The whole queue of concepts that form the science of equal opportunities is a complete mystery for most politicians, as well as for the employees from the local and central administration”. [F5]

A second cause would be general inconsistency. Sometimes there are too many institutions that function separately, so they end up wanting for coherence. Both F4 and F7 believe that there was some progress during the last administration, but it was nevertheless marked by a certain lack of consistency:

“On the other hand it is very clear that there has been some legislative progress under the current government, but I do not believe that it is the fruit of a coherent vision from this point of view”. [F4]

“Everywhere, including about domestic violence, I think there was recently a televised debate that shows very clearly the responsibility between the ministry and the committee, from the committee to God knows who else, and at the same time there are women who die because of the abuse. It is inadmissible”. [F7]

A third explanation is attributed to the policy of forms without content. The government have to pass many exams and equal opportunity policy is one of them. They think that it is an easy task as compared with others, and recount proudly that we have a body in the Ministry of Labour, an inter-ministerial council, some fine equal opportunity laws, and believe that we can pass any review.

“The policies for women are not consistent, as I mentioned before. There is a kind of detached attitude, reflected in the hasty measures they adopt but which are never transferred to women at large, so as to complete the task. The local administration and the local NGOs should be seriously implementing them”. [F2]

Many interviewees believe there is an increasing interest for women’s participation, but this does not come as per the request of the Romanian society, but rather following the constraints for adaptation and compliance with some European standards. This became quite evident from the promulgation of the law concerning parental leave. In the West there were extensive talks, real battles, before women earned this right, and it was duly deemed their victory. Instead, in Romania it passed quite easily, it made a few waves then, but with very few real implications, “implemented in one over a million cases” [F7]. So the government initiates and the Parliament adopts bills reflecting feminist claims, which were simply imported, which had no social impact and which do not constitute a true collaboration with the feminist movement in Romania, nor the contribution of this movement in any way.

A fourth factor is composed of bureaucratisation and inefficiency. F2 is against a National Agency, against a Ministry for Women, against centralised and bureaucratic bodies, even if they exist in other Western countries. Such institutions are not able to solve the existing problems of women. In her opinion, if a law for equal opportunities or for combating domestic violence already exists on

paper, the institutions of interest that are already in place at the local level (hospital, Inspection of Work, Police office, court of law, NGOs) are those that have to concur to its implementation:

“We do not have to wait for an Agency to solve all the existing problems, to consume our scarce resources on salaries, buildings, and utilities. The suitable governmental strategy would consist in financing projects at the local level, involving local actors, targeting to solve punctual issues”. [F2]

The opinion of the majority of our respondents (regarding the nature of the relationship between women’s movement and Government) is contradicted by F5. She believes that governmental policies towards women exist in Romania presently, and they are relatively consistent. They exist due to the regulations of the European Union and due to the international conventions signed by Romania before and after 1989, and, once they were assumed, these conventions had to be respected and transposed in the national legislation. According to F5, the only major obstacle has nothing to do with the government’s attitude, but rather with the lack of funding. The legislation is in place, but we lack the necessary financing to render these policies efficient. Also, we lack the mechanisms to put these into practice.

These differences in opinion between the interviewees with a track record within NGOs and the ones who come from the governmental sphere give credibility to the gap between the goals of the women’s movement and the government’s openness to these aspirations. In conclusion, the relation between the two camps appears rather tense.

### *Alliances between Groups to Further Aims*

The relation of women’s social movements with women that are active in the Parliament, in the government or in the local government is generally weak and mainly informative. Women in the above-mentioned bodies are few, and this brings them notoriety. They do not listen very often to suggestions from the NGOs, being often more interested in their own image and in the electoral gain of the party to which they belong. An exception appears to be the liberal deputy Mona Muscă, whom the interviewees often mention in point of her good relationship with the women’s movement, and who has supported in Parliament several initiatives of the civil society (the Transparency law, the Law against domestic violence). Interestingly enough, this collaboration between the NGOs and the women politicians has taken place at the same time and on the same issues as the collaboration among the NGOs themselves. Therefore it seems that only certain projects truly mobilise women (be they NGO activists or professional politicians), but this mobilisation is short term and its effects are transient. The main projects that have mobilised women and have incited the collaboration between NGOs and women parliamentarians from the opposition were the prevention of domestic violence and defending social security benefits for mothers.

F6 remarks the total absence of women’s issues from the agenda of the local administration:

“We never discussed women’s problems in our conversations with the district mayors”. [F6]

F6 often worked with local and regional NGOs (for instance Caritas) in order to solve several problems of the local administration and to help some disadvantaged groups (heirless elderly women, abused women). An example recounted by F6 supports our conclusion that it is easier and more fruitful to enact the collaboration between the NGOs and the women politicians at the local level than nationally. It is nonetheless true that the fundamental changes for women's condition need a national framework.

F6 also mentions the women's organisations established within most Romanian political parties, but explains that generally even these organisations always give priority to the party's interests over the women's cause.

The collaboration between women's movement and unions seems insignificant in size, as the trade unions are more interested in their relation with the government than in that with the women's NGOs. Just like the party organisations, the trade unions do not place women's interests first (except when forced to do so by the international organisations such as the ILO). For instance, the women's department of the CNSRL-Frăția initiated, in the framework of an ILO/PHARE project, the so-called Threefold Secretariat (representing the government, the trade unions, and the private sector, including the NGOs), which was approved by the Government by Decision no. 349/1993. This project exists on paper only. Nevertheless, the women's movement would like to learn from the trade union tactics:

"We ought to learn from the trade union movement. The street protests are a good strategy: you make your voice heard; it has the widest impact; it proves your power". [F1]

Some women's NGOs have specific collaborations with the Churches (especially the Orthodox and the Catholic Church). Despite their disagreement with the official positions of both churches regarding some sensitive issues for the women's movement (abortion, contraceptive measures), some collaboration has been possible, especially concerning the provision of social services for women in difficulty:

"The Romanian Orthodox Church has a strong attitude against human trafficking and even sustains a programme against domestic violence, having opened two centres in Bucharest and Craiova. After 1989, it became active in the social realm as well". [F5]

The main churches and religious organisations include women's religious corps or groups where women are the main activists (for example, the Caritas network).

### *Influence of the EU on Campaigns for Gender Equality*

With respect to the impact of the EU in consolidating a women's movement in Romania, our sample contains the full range: from passionate supporters and lucid devotees, to cautious, reserved stances, and on to some very callous critics.

According to most of our interviewees, the EU influence is decisive, because the EU offers and compels one to commit to the necessary legal framework:

"Romanian women have begun to benefit from the policies of the European Union. Let us not forget that, in the year 2002, Law no. 202 (concerning equal opportunities for women and men) was promulgated. The bill

synthesised the main directives and allows for the implementation of the EU provisions with respect to the equal opportunities principle". [F5]

In fact, in F4's opinion, this is the only concrete advantage, as the influence of the EU can only be felt in facilitating the transposition of the *acquis* regarding equality between men and women. Without the EU *acquis* concerning equality and non-discrimination, such initiatives would have never surfaced on their own, since the opposition of certain groups and institutions (such as the Orthodox Church) is already too strong:

"No, precisely, I can recount my own experience on the matter, since I talked to all the possible associations of gay and lesbians: if it had not been for the pressures from the EU, nothing could have ever been determined on the issue". [F4]

Harmonisation takes time and sometimes the EU is not very sympathetic in this respect, pressuring the authorities into doing things hurriedly and superficially:

"I perfectly agree that these laws against discrimination need to be adopted but above all implemented properly, that we need a clear and firm package of legislation against sexual harassment, which is a great problem in the Romanian society, but we need more time; at least we should attempt to shorten this period of adjustment in our mentalities, not to wipe it out altogether". [F4]

## CONCLUSIONS

1989 led to the regain of the fundamental rights and liberties. However, women did not hurry to find their place in the forefront of the political and civic life (with a few noteworthy exceptions). The rate of their participation was and still is much below the percentage they represent among the Romanian electorate. Parliaments, governments, local administrations, parties and trade unions – all these organisations and institutions under-represented the percentage and role of women during their activity, thus sadly confirming the hypothesis of our research.

Nevertheless, some progress was made since, and especially after the year 2000, when the prospect of EU accession appeared more tangible. Thus, the number of women in Parliament tripled as opposed to the 1992 elections, and the number of women-ministers grew from 3.5% in 1992 to 18%, regressing at present to 12%. The rate of women's participation in the leadership tiers of the Romanian trade unions grew by 3% between 2000 and 2002. Women who participated in building democracy in Romania, both pre- and post- 1989, were dissidents, civic activists, opponents and columnists.

Women are present in the Romanian public life more as individual characters, less as an organised movement.

The most significant political organisations for the production and the reproduction of the gendered political order are – in Romania – the political parties. This character is also reflected in the candidate lists, where women are present in small numbers (on average, 6.8% of the candidates for positions of mayor – Table 10). The outcome is women's under-representation in Romanian politics; for instance, women are only 3.2% of the elected mayors (Table 11).



The effect of left-right alignment on parties' gender awareness was not reflected in the mayoral elections; according to this effect, the left-wing parties are more sensitive to the women's issues; all bigger parties were equally hesitant in promoting women candidates.

During the electoral campaign, women are promoted mostly as elements of surprise or with a decorative function.

In Romania, men occupy the most powerful and influent political positions; then, the less influential positions become available to women: mayoral positions in the rural area, candidates of the smaller parties.

Women represent a higher proportion among independent mayors, compared to the mayors elected on party lists; it proves that Romanian parties are not yet effective instruments for promoting women.

The Romanian public opinion is still reluctant in accepting women in government, one example remaining the scarcity of women presidential candidates (with the exception of an independent candidate, Anghelina Nuțu, who obtained 0.34% of the votes in 1996, and that of Grațielă-Elena Bârlă, who ranked tenth in a list of thirteen with 0.6% of the ballots cast in 2000, followed by Lia Roberts, an American citizen, President of the Republican Party in Nevada, who retreated from the race before even enlisting officially, in 2004<sup>1</sup>).

Considering the conclusions above, it is difficult to imagine a spontaneous change in the Romanian politics, regarding the gender balance. Thus, the legal and institutional frameworks need to be changed: it is necessary to take legislative measures in order to improve women's participation and encourage political parties to introduce quota systems, because "numbers count" in the process of changing attitudes, norms and behaviours. The candidate lists would be more gender-balanced if parties would open their leadership structures to women.

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://aleg-ro.org/module-pagesetter-viewpub-tid-10-pid-11.phtml>, accessed on January 10, 2004; Marina POPESCU, "The Parliamentary and Presidential Elections in Romania, November 2000", in *Electoral Studies*, vol. 22, no. 2, June 2003, p. 332; and <http://www.romanialibera.ro/editie/index.php?url=articol&tabel=z14012004 &idx=34> accessed on January 10, 2004.