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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Fink-Hafner, D., Deželan, T., & Topolinjak, S. (2009). Party-centrism and gender equality: a study of European elections in Slovenia. *Politics in Central Europe*, 5(2), 32-54. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-66094>

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Party-centrism and gender equality: a study of European elections in Slovenia

Danica Fink-Hafner, Tomaž Deželan, and Simona Topolinjak

Abstract: *In 2004 female candidates won a relatively large proportion of Slovenian MEP seats due to effective institutional engineering and despite the: a) persistent dominating political culture (unfavourable to women in politics); b) predominant party-centric electoral system and election campaign; and c) further marginalisation of female candidates compared to male candidates in the printed media during the party-centric election campaign. Research findings support the thesis found in political party literature asserting political parties adapt to new electoral rules without radically changing how they function and without them struggling to change the dominant political culture and media reporting that is unfriendly to gender equality.*

Keywords: *gender representation, institutional engineering, political parties, election campaign, mass media, political culture, European elections, Slovenia*

Introduction

According to academic research (e.g. Sainsbury 1993; Lovenduski and Norris 1993; Leijenaar et al. 1996; Norris, 1997; Saxonberg 2000; Farrell 2001; Fink-Hafner and Krašovec 2004; Fink-Hafner 2004), several aspects are relevant to female candidates' electoral success: institutional factors, the level of public welfare and the character of political culture. Many years of European experience show that combining 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' pressures is the most effective way of introducing gender-balanced representation in politics (Lovenduski 1999, 47). This article focuses on the success of just one type of such pressure, namely top-down pressure from the EU. It was external pressure that led parliamentary political parties to adopt national institutional engineering, which is and is declared to be in favour of the success of female candidates at elections. At the same time, the dominant political culture and the mass media's role during electoral campaigns have not been the subject of any particular gender equality policy instruments.

The article's main purpose is to test the limits of the success of a change in national institutional rules brought about externally (by European Union actors) in an environment with a discriminatory political culture. The article focuses on the interweaving effects of a discriminatory political milieu and gender equality institutional engineering. The search for policy alternatives and evaluating them is

beyond the scope of this particular research. However, the findings may underpin: a) the development of a more complex research model that takes a full range of factors supporting gender equality in politics into account; and b) the crafting of a set of policy tools going beyond oversimplified international (including EU) pressure in favour of gender quotas.

The article's main thesis relates to the success of an EU-induced change in national electoral rules. We contend that political parties primarily focus on their electoral success and only adopt a more gender-balanced focus to the extent and in the time-span they are externally forced to. Party-centric institutional rules feed the party-centrism of media coverage. In circumstances where political culture is biased against gender equality, the treatment of women in political and media processes will negatively impact on their electoral success. This relationship can only be limited by specific candidate-centric institutional factors to some extent.

The thesis is tested on the first Slovenian elections to the European Parliament (EP) in 2004. The 2004 European elections offer a good case study for the following reasons. These elections were held for the first time in Slovenia so the country's political parties were facing new electoral rules. It was at these elections that the Slovenian political elite introduced important institutional innovations in support of gender equality. This reflected the external pressure of various European-Union-level political actors but not a changing political culture. In these circumstances, some temporary and limited effects of institutional rules supporting gender equality became apparent.

So far the literature on electoral engineering has shown it is important to distinguish between short-term and long-term impacts of changes in electoral rules (see e.g. Shugart 1992). The main difference lies in the range of political parties' possible responses. While electoral rules can have relatively important immediate effects, in due time after a national institutional innovation political parties may learn how to adapt their functioning by skirting around the new rules without radically changing their behaviour. In this article we only analyse the immediate effects of national institutional innovations introduced for the holding of European elections. Two main theses from the literature stand out. First, an alteration of the norms/rules of the game is not immediately reflected in the core values and principles of the political system, or in the formal and informal patterns of authority structures (Easton 1965). Second, political parties tend to pragmatically adapt how they function to the new rules rather than radically change themselves (Shugart 1992).

Here we first analyse the electoral system for electing deputies to the European Parliament (EP) in terms of previous research findings concerning factors that shape the electoral success of female candidates. The next section re-examines the political party-candidate link and identifies the most significant factors defining

this relationship in the context of European elections. The third section considers the electoral system's impact on presentations of candidates of both genders in relevant¹ articles appearing in printed media (newspapers) during the electoral campaign for the EP in 2004. In the concluding remarks the research results are summarised.

The *political party-candidate* relationship in the context of the electoral system for electing deputies to the EP

Electoral institutions for electing Slovenia's deputies to the EP are complex and internally heterogeneous. They may be arbitrarily classified in two clusters of electoral rules, each with distinct features according to the *political party-candidate* relationship. The party-centric cluster is composed of electoral rules that strengthen a political party's position in the abovementioned relationship, while the candidate-centric cluster comprises rules that promote a candidate's position. From a gender-equality perspective, it is clear that party-centric electoral rules make it harder to overcome presented deficiencies and achieve true gender equality in politics. As previous studies in the field have already indicated (Krašovec and Lajh 2004; Fink-Hafner and Krašovec 2004; Lovenduski 1999), political parties pragmatically adapt their operations to the predominant political culture in order to maximise their votes. By monopolising certain key points in the electoral process (e.g. candidacy procedures), political party elites maintain a *modus operandi* based on a masculine political culture. On the contrary, candidate-centric procedures can lead to more egalitarian processes. That is because in some aspects of the electoral process they put an individual candidate on a more equal footing *vis-à-vis* a political party.

a) Party-centric electoral rules in Slovenia

A key feature of the electoral system for electing deputies to the EP in the context of the *political party-candidate* power relationship is the existence of 'party' candidate lists. These lists of candidates are a strong element of the party-centric character of the institutional system (Deželan 2004) due to political parties' control over how these lists are composed. Further confirmation of this is provided by the very nature of the candidate-selection process

¹ The relevant articles were determined by two criteria that reflect the topic of elections of MEPs and simultaneously acknowledge the number of readers (the distribution of copies of a periodical among readers) of a particular newspaper. Criteria were therefore the coverage of an individual printed media and the relevance for political science research. The latter restricted the selection of printed media to those dealing with international/internal politics on a daily basis or devoting an entire section to these topics. The criterion of coverage is, on the other hand, based on the Slovenian '*National reading report*' research (Cati d.o.o. 2003).

within Slovenian political parties, which is chiefly in the hands of political parties' central organs, namely the party elites.

The second key party-centric electoral institution for electing deputies to the EP is the provision concerning the order of candidates on the list and its importance. The formulation '*... the remaining deputy posts are distributed according to the order of precedence on the candidate list*' (ZVPEP 2002) determines the way deputy posts are distributed if a candidate does not receive more than 1/14th of votes for the list (on a list of seven candidates). This provision, as shown on election day, generates a vast amount of power for political parties vis-à-vis the candidates also due to the political parties' policy of nominating the 'principal' candidate who collects the vast majority of votes in first place on the list.²

In addition to these institutional system characteristics, the number of deputy posts for the Slovenian delegation in the EP is relevant. The modest number of seven deputies generates considerable additional authority for the political parties since this small number of candidates is selected from a vast pool of an individual party's nominees at the national level. The somewhat twofold provision that makes Slovenia a single electoral unit regarding the *political party-candidate* relationship diverts the already limited influence of local party organisations to central party organs and consequently empowers party elites. As a result, the candidate-selection methods of an individual party are centralised³, also because of the modest legislation on determining the method in party statutes. According to Krašovec and Lajh (2004), this practice is evident in virtually all Slovenian parliamentary political parties. Hence, party elites retain full power over the candidate-selection process that would otherwise be more evenly distributed (decentralised) amongst the party membership. As a consequence, this situation reduces the autonomy of potential candidates and their activities.

However, the most influential novelties of the institutional system for EP elections are the provisions that promote gender equality in politics. The two most obvious gender-equality provisions are quotas and the 'zipper' system. The former is set to a 40 percent minimum per gender, which effectively translates into at least three out of seven candidates on a party list. The latter is an unconventional form of the system of zipping candidates of a different gender together.

² The mentioned policy was evident with most major political parties. The clearest exception was the United List of Social Democrats which put the most far-reaching candidate in the last, seventh place due to unforeseen circumstances.

³ The method of selecting candidates lies entirely within the competence of the individual political party, thus central party organs in the form of the party council, presidency, executive committee and not the party congress or local branches, organisational units.

The Slovenian version establishes that at least one candidate of each gender should be placed in the upper half of the candidate list. In effect, the most common practice has been to place the less-represented gender, usually female, in the second, fourth and sixth positions on the list of candidates. As a result, both provisions operate in a party-centric manner since the ‘mandatory differentiation’ of the gender profiles of candidates gives extra power to political parties.

b) Candidate-centric electoral rules in Slovenia

The other aspect of electoral rules for electing deputies to the EP involves those candidate-centric provisions that empower individual candidates in their relationship with their political party. The arrangement of Slovenia as a single electoral unit which, in addition to what was mentioned before, enables publicly known candidates (as a rule, they are male) to take advantage of their reputation and partly neutralise the exclusive power of political parties. Thus, particularly once they are confirmed as candidates they can counterbalance the imposed party hierarchy on the candidate list due to their nationwide publicity and the institution of the preference vote. The latter enables the electorate to prioritise individual candidates and disregard the imposed party preference.⁴ Thus, the preference vote somewhat devalues the party-centric character of the electoral institutions. However, it must be stressed that the abovementioned provision presents an opportunity for political parties to evade the progressive gender-equality electoral provisions. For example, there have been cases of circumventing the gender equality rules by: a) not choosing female candidates who are well known; and b) at the same time nominating two prominent and well-known male candidates on either the top or end of the list. In these circumstances male candidates have won regardless of their position on the list.⁵ Taking these empirical experiences into account, the zipper system may well be, and in some cases has been, just an empty shell of gender equality.

c) Party-centric vs. candidate-centric provisions in Slovenia

All in all, the electoral rules for electing deputies to the EP tend to have more party-centric attributes and therefore lean on the side of political parties. The

⁴ Preferential voting is taken into consideration if the number of votes for an individual candidate exceeds the quotient, which is the number of votes for the candidate list divided by two times the number of candidates on the same list.

⁵ This might be the case when taking the Slovenian political context into consideration, where a political party places a publicly well-known candidate(s), usually a male, at the bottom of the candidate list and at the same time in first place on the list. This was the case of the United List of Social Democrats which delivered its MEP from seventh place on the list.

mentioned structures of interest intermediation are still the most influential feature of the Slovenian political space and are further empowered by certain newly introduced institutional provisions of the electoral system. These provisions are, in addition to the effect of introducing greater equality between genders, prone to favouring political parties *vis-à-vis* individual candidates. The clearest example of such a side-effect is the system of gender quotas since female politicians, who struggle to assert themselves even at the level of individual political parties, are chosen by the party elite.

Table 1: The party-/candidate-centric character of electoral rules for electing deputies to the EP in Slovenia

Features of the electoral system	Party/candidate-centric impact
'party' candidate lists	P
definition of the order of precedence on the candidate list	P
preference vote	C
number of electoral units (publicity)	C
number of deputy posts	P
mode of candidate selection	P
gender quotas and the 'zipper' system	P

Source: Deželan (2004)

The presented features of the electoral system and institutional framework indicate that election reporting in the mass media might be similarly balanced in favour of political parties and not individual candidates, despite certain distinct features of these elections and the EP itself. The investigation of the printed mass media's reporting in the next section examines whether such presumptions are correct.

The party-centric character of media reporting on elections of deputies to the EP and discrimination against female candidates in Slovenia

Given the described features of the system for electing EP deputies we attempted to establish parallels between the institutional rules and the mass media's coverage of the electoral campaign with a special focus on gender issues. The subject of our inquiry was not the various factors that influence media reporting and determine the nature of public discourse in the sphere of politics, but only the patterns of

media coverage. The insight into the printed mass media's reporting is based on data collected as part of an international comparative analysis named 'Mapping an Engendered Media',⁶ which collected and analysed published newspaper articles⁷ during the 2004 EP election campaign. The data collection referred to was designed as some kind of 'barometer' of equal opportunities policy due to its attention to measuring (in)equality in gender presentations in the media.

To start with, the distribution of individual articles/units of analysis according to topic is likely to reveal some key features of media reporting. In order to examine reflections of the institutional system in the mass media space, the newspaper articles were classified by their topic in party-centric and candidate-centric categories.⁸ The following topics were placed in the party-centric group: a) an individual party's manifesto pledges and policy discussion; b) one party's criticism of another/others; c) 'horse-race' comparisons between political parties; and d) a presentation of candidate lists. In the candidate-centric group there are articles involving profiles of interviews with an individual male or female MEP, EP candidate or politician.

The distribution of the primary (main) topic⁹ of the articles produces results similar to expectations made on the basis of the institutional system. The party-centric group of articles proved to be more numerous than the candidate-centric one, although not to the expected extent. The share of party-centric articles within all selected articles was 25.6%, while the candidate-centric share of articles was 21.5%. Similar proportions were evident when we examined in detail the pre-election period (13 June 2004) when the shares were 24.1% for the party-centric and 22.5% for the candidate-centric group. In addition, the division of articles in daily and weekly newspapers gave similar results. Thus, in the case of the distribution of articles according to their primary story topic the media space replicates the features of the institutional system only to some extent. However, we must note the importance of the country as a single electoral unit as a very significant party-centric feature.

⁶ The analysed printed media were selected according to the criteria of coverage and relevancy for political science research, with the timeframe of a 30-day electoral campaign and the post-electoral reflection of results. The method applied was a content analysis of the articles/units on the basis of a previously designed and internationally harmonised codebook.

⁷ The selected printed media (periodicals) were: a) three dailies: *Delo*, *Dnevnik* and *Večer*; b) three political weeklies: *Demokracija*, *Mag* and *Mladina*; and c) two weekend editions: the Saturday edition of *Delo* and the Saturday edition of *Večer*.

⁸ The party-centric and candidate-centric groups are composed of categories from the previously designed codebook which refer to either of the two broader sets. As 31% of articles only dealt with the process of the European elections in general, they cannot be ranked in these two categories. That is why they were not included in our analysis.

⁹ The primary story topic denotes the main topic that prevails in individual articles.

Table 2: Shares of party-/candidate-centric primary topics within selected articles

Primary topic group (in %)	total	before 13.6.2004	dailies	weeklies
party-centric	25.6	24.1	25.2	29.6
candidate-centric	21.5	22.5	19.3	28.5

The assumption that the institutional provisions of the electoral system are reflected in media reporting in favour of political parties is further tested by looking at the distribution of articles into party-/candidate-centric groups according to secondary ¹⁰ topics. A share of 41.9% of all selected articles according to their secondary topic was classified in the party-centric group, while just 6.9% went into the candidate-centric group. Limiting the examined period to only the pre-election period further confirms the vast dissimilarity acknowledged in the case of secondary article topics. Further, the dividing up of newspapers into daily and weekly ones substantiates the observed discrepancy between the shares of articles in the party-centric and candidate-centric groups. The slight deviation between the shares of the candidate-centric group for dailies and weeklies can be ascribed to the tendency of weekly newspapers to deal with the profiles of individual candidates for deputy posts.

Table 3: Shares of party-/candidate-centric secondary topics within selected articles

Secondary topic group (in %)	total	before 13.6.2004	dailies	weeklies
party-centric	41.9	44	44	42.7
candidate-centric	6.9	7	4.6	13.8

The figures presented above indicate a structure/pattern of media reporting in the relevant newspapers as presumed following the analysis of the institutional system. In-depth research into the prevailing topics of the selected articles further established the dominance of political parties, even when reporting on the electoral campaigns of individual candidates. Hence, most articles with a primary focus on candidates and their profiles also described the policy decisions, power, day-to-day politics and chances of their political party, but not *vice versa*. Therefore, media reporting reflected the main features of the institutional system which is clearly, despite some progressive provisions, unfavourable to women, especially female politicians. To reconfirm such statements, we examined the female gender's representation in newspapers with a focus on female politicians.

¹⁰ The secondary story topic denotes the latent topic of the article which is reported in the background.

According to the newly installed progressive electoral institutions on gender-balanced representation, a ‘balanced’ state of media reporting should be the ratio of approximately 2:3 of media attention for the more favoured gender based on the gender quota and ‘zipper’ provisions with a reasonable level of tolerance either way due to the prevailing number of male candidates in the first place of an individual candidate list. The actual ratio between shares of articles focussing on female/male persons¹¹ was around 1:3 in favour of the male gender to a discriminatory degree that cannot be justified by the abovementioned factors. The ratio demonstrates the wide-ranging and far-reaching limitations of the new, progressive gender-balanced legislative attempts and is corroborated by the observation that the female-focused articles were given less desirable places on newspaper pages (bottom-left and bottom-right corners vs. top-left corners, centre of the page or whole page). It was only in three cases (out of 13 candidate lists) where female candidates headed the list. In terms of personality (*persona*) rather than content-oriented media reporting, the above remark gains additional weight. Beside the quantitative differences in covering candidates of different genders, a substantively biased coverage was obvious. While, on one hand, there were neutral interviews in dailies with two female leaders, on the other hand, the media were openly convinced they would not win seats in the European Parliament. They even made politically incorrect remarks about them. For example, the daily newspaper *Delo* stated that Alenka Paulin had chosen to be a candidate because she wanted to have media attention once more and that Alja Brglez was too ambitious and sublime. Except for two interviews with other female candidates in right-wing weeklies, the media gave more attention to extreme foreign female candidates such as the ‘strong attributes’ of Czech porn star Dolly Buster and Estonian super model Carmen Kass.

Table 4: Share of articles focussing on male/female candidates

Article gender focus (in %)	total	before 13.6.2004	dailies	weeklies
female	5.3	4.8	4.4	7.1
male	16.2	17.7	15	21.4

Additional information comes from photos included in articles. In fact, non-verbal cues can be much more important than verbal ones (Argyle et al. 1971) in addition to the observation that having fewer images in written media increases the importance of any single image (Lang et al. 1996). Further, earlier research (Barret and Barrington 2006) offers strong evidence of a biased photograph-selection process.

¹¹ The two groups’ ‘articles that focus on female/male persons’ were generated by compiling the codebook categories profiles and interviews with politicians of male/female gender.

Disregarding the fact that a particular photo may include certain latent information, we only examined photos in a quantitative sense to generate certain descriptive statistics on gender representation within the photos. Overall, the share of photos focusing on the male gender was much bigger than the female share, which is partly ascribed to the already greater share of male-focused articles. Besides that, it was impossible to overlook examples of politically incorrect pictures such as a photo of the female leader of a candidate list (Alenka Paulin) in a friendly hug with her ex-party colleague with the following caption below the photo: ‘That’s my bunny’ (political weekly *Mladina*).

Table 5: Share of photos focussing on females/males

Photo gender focus (in %)	total	dailies	weeklies
female	17.5	14.8	25
male	58.2	58	55.4

This short examination only shows the ‘selective mirroring’ and not the full ‘transposition’ of the electoral rules into media reporting. Obviously, the mainly party-centric and male-favouring features of the electoral system overrode the influence of the progressive provisions in the mass media’s coverage.

The electoral system’s influence on the electoral success of female candidates in Slovenia

a) Positive and negative elements of the electoral system from the gender-balanced representation perspective

Previous research on elections at the national and local levels (i.e. Fink-Hafner and Krašovec 2004) shows that most institutional innovations of the adopted EP Elections Act¹² are unable to fulfil the high expectations and declared goals of the equal representation of genders in the stages of candidate nomination and electoral success due to the political culture being disinclined to women’s participation in politics. From the gender equality point of view, the problem is that parties pragmatically subordinate their functioning to the predominant political culture when pursuing the goal to maximise votes.

The 2004 European election rules can be divided into two separate groups according to their effect on the equality of representing genders in politics. The

¹² The Elections of Deputies of the Republic of Slovenia to the European Parliament Act (ZVPEP) was adopted in October 2002 by the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia. The Act Amending the Elections of Deputies of the Republic of Slovenia to the European Parliament Act (ZVPEP-A) entered into force on 11 March 2004.

first is composed of provisions expected to induce the equal representation of both genders in Slovenian politics. The main feature of the second set of provisions is preservation of the *status quo*. They predominantly include political mechanisms, which had – as a rule – discriminated against women in Slovenian politics already before 2004.

Mechanisms that should help women's electoral success according to expectations based on pre-2004 research in Slovenia include the: proportional representation principle; definition of Slovenia as a single electoral unit; presence of lists of candidates; minimal 40% gender quota per individual list of candidates; provision on the representation of both genders in the upper half of a list of candidates (positions 1, 2 and 3 on a list of 7 candidates);¹³ and the provision on the annulment of any candidate lists that disregard the requirements promoting the equal representation of genders in politics.

By preserving the under-representation of women in politics and the patterns of the predominantly male discriminatory political culture of political (party) elites, the electoral institutions for electing EP deputies that might have the reverse effect include: the candidacy for the position of deputy is proposed by political parties and voters; political parties nominate their candidates according to their internal provisions; the ability of a political party to propose a candidate list if it has gathered the support of at least four deputies of the National Assembly (the minimal threshold for political parties to enter the chamber)¹⁴ or at least 1,000 voters; the ability of two political parties to propose a candidate list if they have gathered the support of at least six deputies of the National Assembly or at least 1,500 voters; the ability of at least 3,000 voters to propose a candidate list; and the institute of the preference vote.

To summarise, the most important institutional provisions of the system for electing deputies to the EP expected to positively affect the level of equality of gender representation in politics in Slovenia are therefore *national candidate lists, the definition of Slovenia as a single electoral unit and the various provisions that promote and define the equality of gender representation on individual lists of candidates*. As experience shows, the most important factors that can discriminate against women in the institutional system despite

¹³ The number of candidates on an individual list is determined by the number of MEP posts per electoral unit – Slovenia. Thus, the current number of seven Slovenian MEPs determines that candidate lists have a maximum of seven candidates. According to the practice of political parties at the first EP elections in 2004 in Slovenia, the lists are predominantly composed of seven candidates.

¹⁴ The National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia is composed of 90 deputies, two of whom are representatives of the Hungarian and Italian national minorities. Deputies can express their support for one list of candidates, which is normally the list of the parliamentary party they belong to.

provisions promoting gender-balanced representation in politics¹⁵ are the continuation of the political party monopoly over candidacy procedures and the absence of any formal provisions regarding intra-party nomination and candidate-selection procedures at the national level. In an environment of a political culture discriminating against the female gender, the above observations might be interpreted as an indicator of the unwillingness of Slovenian political parties to reform themselves (Lovenduski, 1999: 48)¹⁶ in spite of the few, already mentioned, individual attempts to experiment made by certain more progressive political parties.¹⁷

Despite the effects of the newly introduced institutional mechanisms that promote the gender-balanced representation of Slovenian deputies in the EP, Slovenia's political environment maintains a predominantly masculine, discriminatory political culture. The prevailing (self)discriminatory political culture of the male and female electorate is therefore a wider, more complex and long-term social problem that cannot be removed or neutralised by simple institutional engineering. Notwithstanding the clear effects of European institutions'¹⁸ external pressures on the Slovenian political elite – the adopted gender-balanced provisions of institutional engineering have proven to be efficient – such effects seem to be without any impetus when we observe the political culture of political/party elites and the electorate in the domestic environment.

b) Data on the 2004 European elections in Slovenia The Slovenian political elite was prepared to experiment with electoral institutions due to the relative insignificance of European elections for (re)distributing political power among the relevant national parties and because the EP was viewed as a second-order arena.¹⁹ In addition, the Slovenian political elite was somewhat

¹⁵ Various political parties (the Liberal Democracy of Slovenia and mainly the United List of Social Democrats) have introduced certain measures of gender-balanced representation in the past on their own initiative. Such a gender-balanced policy backfired with a dreadful result for the most progressive party in the field (the United List of Social Democrats), which eventually 'loosened' its gender-balanced provisions.

¹⁶ According to Lovenduski (1999), political reforms that abolish barriers to the equal representation of genders in politics can only be efficient if such processes of wider political reforms are in harmony with the reform of political parties.

¹⁷ For more on this, see Antič and Gortnar (2004).

¹⁸ As an obvious example of the stated pressures we note the explicit criticism of gender-unbalanced representation in Slovenian political institutions made by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, which at the beginning of 2004 announced that national delegations composed of representatives of just one gender would no longer be acceptable.

¹⁹ Voters-citizens of the EU tend to pay less attention to the EP elections (EOS Gallup Europe 2005), frequently also presented as '*second-order national elections*' (Reif and Schmitt 1980), since there is 'less at stake' in elections to the second-order (EP) arena.

obliged to introduce the innovations due to external (European) pressures to stimulate greater equality in opportunities for both genders.²⁰ In practice, most political parties have respected the new rules only formally.

Main features of lists of candidates

Thirteen candidate lists²¹ competed at the elections of deputies to the EP in 2004 in Slovenia (Table 6). The candidate lists encompassed 91 candidates, of whom 41 (45%) were female. Most candidate lists included three female and four male candidates (42.9%), with the exception of the progressive ecological movement party SEG and the pro-women party GŽS, which are small extra-parliamentary parties. The latter (GŽS – Voice of Women of Slovenia) tried to put a list of seven female candidates together but was forced by the gender-balanced representation provisions to include three male candidates.

²⁰ The Slovenian political elite lacked the impetus to adopt innovations of the Slovenian electoral system which had been on the public agenda for an extended period of time. Gender-sensitive institutional rules were first adopted for the 2004 European elections. External pressures on Slovenian party elites to do so included the specific criticism of the gender structure of Slovenia's formal political institutions (made by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in early 2004), which clearly stated that in the future single-gender national delegations (such as Slovenia's) would no longer be acceptable. Soon after this criticism, one member left the Slovenian delegation to make room for a female colleague. Besides that, Slovenia as a new member state is obliged to implement the common EU policies, including policies ensuring gender equality.

²¹ The full names of the candidate lists of political parties are: LDS+DeSUS (Liberalna demokracija Slovenije in Demokratična stranka upokojencev Slovenije; *Liberal Democracy of Slovenia and Democratic Party of Retired Persons of Slovenia*), N.Si (Nova Slovenija – Krščansko ljudska stranka; *New Slovenia – Christian People's Party*), SEG (Stranka ekoloških gibanj; *Party of Ecological Movements of Slovenia*), SMS+ZS (Stranka mladih Slovenije in Zeleni Slovenije; *Youth Party of Slovenia and Greens United*), SDS (Slovenska demokratska stranka; *Slovenian Democratic Party*), NSD (Nacionalna stranka dela; *National Party of Labour*), SSN (Stranka slovenskega naroda; *Party of the Slovenian Nation*), SJN (Slovenija je naša; *Slovenia is Ours*), DS (Demokratska stranka Slovenije, Demokrati Slovenije; *Democratic Party of Slovenia, Democrats of Slovenia*), GŽS (Glas Žensk Slovenije; *Voice of Women of Slovenia*), SNS (Slovenska nacionalna stranka; *Slovenian National Party*), ZLSD (Združena lista socialnih demokratov; *United List of Social Democrats*), SLS (Slovenska ljudska stranka; *Slovenian People's Party*).

Table 6: Number of female candidates and their position on the list of candidates

List of candidates	Female candidates		
	number	positions 1-4	1 st position
Liberal Democracy of Slovenia and the Democratic Party of Retired Persons of Slovenia (LDS+DeSUS)	3	1	-
New Slovenia – Christian People’s Party (N.Si)	3	2	-
Party of Ecological Movements of Slovenia (SEG)	4	3	-
Youth Party of Slovenia and Greens United (SMS+ZS)	3	2	+
Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS)	3	2	-
National Party of Labour (NSD)	3	2	-
Party of the Slovenian Nation (SSN)	3	1	-
Slovenia is Ours (SJN)	3	2	+
Democratic Party of Slovenia, Democrats of Slovenia (DS)	3	2	-
Voice of Women of Slovenia (GŽS)	4	2	+
Slovenian National Party (SNS)	3	1	-
United List of Social Democrats (ZLSD)	3	2	-
Slovenian People’s Party (SLS)	3	1	-
Total	41	23	3

Source: http://www.rvk.si/volitve200401/vlozene_liste.html, 21. 8. 2004

Three candidate lists (SMS+ZS, SJN and GŽS) introduced a female candidate in first place on the list. The first party mentioned is also the only, albeit the smallest parliamentary party to have nominated a female candidate as the ‘leader’ of its list due to her strong public image and party relations with the progressive European greens. Other parties placed their first female candidate in second place on the list, with the exception of the SLS and SNS, which are both parliamentary parties. The first has been a continuous member of various government coalitions, while the second is an extreme-right party.

Election results

The inaugural elections of deputies to the EP in Slovenia, held on Sunday 13 June 2004, saw by far the lowest electoral turnout since Slovenia declared its independence in 1991. Such a crushing turnout (28.35% – 461,879 of 1,628,918 voters)

hardly reached the levels of referendum decisions, which are some of the least attended forms of electoral participation in Slovenia. The seats in the EP were distributed to four candidate lists (five parliamentary political parties), two to the N.Si, LDS+DeSUS (joint list) and the SDS, while the ZLSD gathered enough votes for one deputy post. Three female candidates are among the seven elected deputies. All of them occupied 2nd position on the candidate list which was effectively the key to their electoral success. Other female ‘frontrunners’ experienced a total electoral defeat.

Table 7: 2004 elections of deputies to the EP – results

List of candidates	votes		MEPs
	number	share (in %)	
New Slovenia – Christian People’s Party (N.Si)	102,753	23.57	2
Liberal Democracy of Slovenia and the Democratic Party of Retired Persons of Slovenia (LDS+DeSUS)	95,489	21.91	2
Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS)	76,945	17.65	2
United List of Social Democrats (ZLSD)	61,672	14.15	1
Slovenian People’s Party (SLS)	36,662	8.41	-
Slovenian National Party (SNS)	21,883	5.02	-
Slovenia is Ours (SJN)	17,930	4.11	-
Youth Party of Slovenia and Greens United (SMS+ZS)	10,027	2.30	-
Voice of Women of Slovenia (GŽS)	5,249	1.20	-
Party of Ecological Movements of Slovenia (SEG)	2,588	0.59	-
National Party of Labour (NSD)	2,022	0.46	-
Party of the Slovenian Nation (SSN)	1,386	0.32	-
Democratic Party of Slovenia, Democrats of Slovenia (DS)	1,263	0.29	-

Source: <http://www.volitive.gov.si/ep2004/index.html>, 21. 8. 2004

According to the Elections of Deputies to the EP Act, voters can decide to give priority to an individual candidate on a candidate list by conferring their vote of preference. The Slovenian case is a shining example of the victories of ‘list leaders’ who gathered large majorities of votes for the list, with the exception of the said case of the ZLSD. Hence, four male candidates exceeded the preferential quotient of an individual candidate list and were elected by application of the preference

vote provision. On the other hand, none of the three elected female candidates exceeded the limit set preferential quotient of an individual candidate list. Table 8 presents the results of the preference vote for each elected candidate. None of the three elected female MEPs exceeded the limit set by the preferential quotient, with Ljudmila Novak (N.Si) only achieving a devastating 1/7th (0.99% of votes for the list) of the calculated preferential quotient for the N.Si candidate. Yet from 7th place on the candidate list the least successful elected male MEP collected three times more votes than the elected female MEPs put together. Hence, this experience demonstrates the fragile character of the new gender-balanced provisions in the absence of any wider reforms since parties can manipulate the electoral success of female candidates simply by introducing two prosperous male candidates to the candidate list.

Table 8: Number of preference votes collected per elected candidate

Candidate list	total votes per list	preferential quotient	elected candidate	votes per candidate	
				number	Share in the List (in %)
N.Si	102,753	7,339	Lojze Peterle	79,472	77.34
			Ljudmila Novak	1,017	0.99
LDS+DeSUS	95,489	6,820	Jelko Kacin	55,798	58.43
			Mojca Drčar Murko	5,696	5.97
SDS	76,945	5,496	Mihael Brejc	45,992	59.77
			Romana Jordan Cizelj	2,135	2.77
ZLSD	61,672	4,405	Borut Pahor	27,385	44.40

Source: http://www.volitive.gov.si/ep2004/rez_kan.html, 21. 8. 2004

The electoral results therefore reflect two layers. The first, most manifest layer is (but only at first sight) the astonishing success of female candidates and incredible level of gender-balanced representation unfamiliar to all previous electoral races or appointed delegations. Yet, the second is more latent and identifiable after an in-depth analysis of collected votes by gender, which proved to be in favour of male politicians at an alarming level despite a similar number of candidates per gender. Therefore, from the perspective of the final result of the elections and composition of delegations the provisions leading towards the equality of women in politics were only partly effective. The road to having more women in politics appears to be very slippery particularly if parties do not reform themselves and their

predominantly male elites decide to ‘evade’ the progressive provisions imposed by international organisations.

Concluding remarks

The presented results of the 2004 European elections in Slovenia primarily demonstrate the relatively isolated and limited efficiency of the elite-defined institutional innovations created under external (EU) pressure. Still, it is possible to detect a range of impacts of individual institutional solutions.

A positive institutional factor was the provision on the position of female candidates on candidate lists (with the ‘leading’ female candidate usually appearing in second place), but only in the case of the big success of a particular party (at least gaining more than one seat). On the contrary, the preference vote was confirmed as being a particularly unfavourable electoral institution for women – something already noted by other research on the prevailing (self)discriminatory political culture of voters in Slovenia. In fact, the preference vote served as a tool for discriminating in favour of well-established (male) politicians for the electorate as well as the enduring and accumulating media exposure of individual (male) candidates. In practice, many aspects of the ‘engendered’ institutional rules operated as tools in the hands of opportunistic party elites primarily interested in winning votes by counting on already profiled male candidates and being less oriented to the positive profiling of female candidates.

In addition to the media ‘heritage’ of individual candidates (as a rule, male candidates had advantages here as they were exposed as politicians to the public longer even before the European elections), the mass media’s biased character when reporting and commenting on the electoral campaign was obvious. Further, female candidates were additionally damaged by unfriendly biased verbal or non-verbal cues.

To conclude, Slovenia remains trapped halfway towards gender equality in politics since the EU-forced engendering of electoral rules is still accompanied by a persisting political culture that (self)discriminates against women in politics, by the party-centrism of the political environment and the party-centrism of the media. The political parties’ opportunistic adaptations to the formally gender-friendly electoral rules without radically changing how they function and without them struggling to change the prevailing political culture and media reporting at the second European elections in 2009 comes as no surprise.

The task of developing a more thorough and valid model of the factors guaranteeing the success of engendered institutional engineering remains with social scientists, while day-to-day practical pressures on party elites to enculturate gender equality in their internal and external politics remains with intraparty and extra-party activists.

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