

# Albania political issues. Women`s minor role in decision-making. Reality and challenges.

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**Abstract**— Taking into consideration the statistics of the population, compared to the participation of both genders in the political life, it is not new to say that the woman is very little represented and participates just as little. The factors of women absence at the Albanian political level, as well as in all the other countries of the world, are social and historical. History is not part of our influence. In fact it affects us. But factors related to the present, social factors are part of our policy and interest. The Major political movements have arisen whenever political groups have had the courage to articulate the vital need for change. The fulfillment of this need is considered key to the expected improvement and thanks to the spread of the ideas it has taken a wide social extension. Is the woman nowadays facing a situation that requires one or more vital needs for change? You cannot bring or ask changes if the social group is satisfied with its current condition. The undeniable achievements of the last 20 years in Albania should not make us complacent. In fact, the development of Western society regarding gender culture, representation of women in civil and political society, the participation in execution and decision-making, as well as the new demands facing the Albanian society today, make us face up big and challenging questions. Does Albanian society need more women to represent and participate in the government execution and decision-making? Regarding this point of view we can see that the local politics, which in fact, at the beginning of this new century, is only a piece of the worldwide global policy. Ideas are born and designed in development policies as a result of the need for change. But you cannot generate the development policy if you do not recognize the need. These needs come from the research and investigation in everyday life, of simple people, and society`s normality. The investigation implies a broad and opens discussion on these issues, in order to discover and articulate their needs. Which are the vital needs of women changes today? How can we fulfill these needs? Could they be fulfilled with a neutral representation or self-representation of women? Does Albanian society need women? *Why? What are the social and political spheres where it is missing?*

**Keywords**— gender equality, women needs, politics, society changes

## I. The relevance and the gravity of Albanian politics

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There are two ways of doing politics. People, either live for the politics but and/or live of politics. This contradiction is not at all exceptional. On the contrary as a rule man makes them both at least ideally but most of the time even materially. Who lives for the politics turns it into its own live in the spiritual sense. He enjoys either the possession of his exercising powers, or breeds his inner balance and pride with the sense that through service to a cause he is giving his life a meaning. Seen in this spiritual sense every person who lives for a cause surely lives of the cause too. So the difference refers to a much more fundamental aspect of a phenomenon, the economic one. Whoever tries to make politics a permanent source of incomes lives as a profession from politics. But, how do actors and factors of doing politics in Albania see it? In some cases foreign media write that Albanian politics is characterized by tense fronts, dialog curtailing in political and media forums, fierce clashes between the Democrats and the Socialists, and the parliament boycott by the previous opposition, etc. The inner struggle in Albanian politics makes it possible to use these terms and then the situation is understood as such. Obviously, the democracy cannot be settled in 5 or 20 years. Democracies of many developed countries have a 200-300-year history of wars and tension. However, this does not justify at all the major political crisis, tensions or even the violent masculine sense of Albanian politics. The important thing is that this great movement which started 23 years ago has not failed in its main principles, even though it is delayed. In these 23 years, democracy in Albania has been a political democracy, that is to say recognition of pluralism, recognition of the right for political wars, recognition of the right for opposition, etc. All this has led to politicization of institutional life. Albania does not lack freedom but institutional aspect; it lacks the institutionalization of this freedom in a state of law and rights. In these moments it seems that political parties are the main source of problems in Albanian politics. They are the ones that in some sense decide even for the gender composition of the legislative, executive and other institutions of decision making. In this sense the political composition is characterized by man mania and there is less and less room for the role of women.

## II. The history of women`s status and the international conventions in women`s rights improvement

For the first time in the XVIII century bourgeois societies women`s call for rights became powerful. This had many reasons and the first one was the Declaration of Human Rights

on the basis of natural law in France and in the United States which started the requests for gender equality. Thanks to the development of capitalist productive work, the work place and the residence were increasingly being separated from each other. This led to the redefinition of labor division between the sexes. Man considered the woman as wife and mother whose work enabled the success of the man outside the house. Women were 'liberated' from work which provided economic incomes, women in the family should create a private shelter which replaced in a harmonious way the world outside the profession, and the competition for money and power. Companies of that time did not allow women, or furthermore prevented them from being genuine competitive in different areas. They were excluded from many political decisions, economic and sometimes even private ones. Women had limited education possibilities, no right of administration on their properties; they could not sign any agreements or work without the consent of the husband. At the same time several conditions were created for setting minimum wages for women who worked and for their exploitation. Almost a century later the same picture appeared in the United States of America. Women's and girls' attempts to be active in political life were considered deviant behavior. Since then, mentalities and practices of women's involvement in political activities have changed not only in Europe and America but in other regions of the world. This situation was suitable ground for the first public requirements and for equal rights and opportunities for women. Universal declaration of Human Rights affirms the principle of non-discrimination and proclaims that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and that everyone can enjoy all the rights and that everyone can enjoy all the rights and freedoms proclaimed in the Declaration, without difference especially because of sex. However, the International Covenants on Human Rights, various UN documents and its specialized institutions regarding equality of rights continue to be subject to significant differences. The discrimination exercised against women was considered incompatible with human dignity and the family and society well-being. The importance of the contribution of women in the political, social and cultural life is clear. It is even clearer their role in the family especially in the education of children. It is considered necessary to be legally and factually universally recognized the principle of equality between men and women. The General Assembly of the United Nations on November 7, 1967 solemnly declared that "discrimination against women for the fact that denies or limits the equality of women with men is fundamentally unjust and constitutes a violation of human dignity" (Article 1 of Resolution 2263). It is necessary that the principle of equality of rights between men and women should be applied in all states in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 11, Resolution 2263), the Declaration on the Elimination of Women Discrimination). Women's political rights are also guaranteed by the Convention on the Political Rights of Women (Resolution 640). The Convention guarantees that everyone has the right to participate in the running of public affairs of his country either directly or with the mediation of their freely elected representatives and to participate in equal terms in public functions of the country giving in this way

equal conditions to both men and women in exercising political rights (article 11). Women have the right to be elected in equal terms with men in all publicly elected bodies which are created on the basis of national legislation without discrimination. Considering the content of this provision and the obligation that UN member states have towards every resolution issued by this organization Albania also had the obligation to include these guaranteeing and legal protections for women in the national legislation. Therefore the legislation exists but what are the obstacles of non-representation. Which are the reasons for such a low percentage of women in decision-making? Let us analyze the causes.

### **iii. Being a woman under the tradition cyclone and the Albanian unwritten law**

Albanian society had a patriarchal character as it did not value women very much. The names of our male ancestral could be recognized up to twenty generations, whether the names of the females were forgotten after two or three generations. The words of the unwritten law say: "Men have blood, while women have gender" that is to say men have their origin and women have relatives and "woman is somebody else's daughter" that is she can come from everywhere and she has no origin. Just as in all patriarchal societies the whole property and rights belonged to men. So when a man got married the house belonged only to him and not to his wife. Neither religion nor law obliged the husband to divide with her the material goods. Further the unwritten law states that "woman is a bag to carry things" namely her role is to raise children. Given that the unwritten law forbade her to hold relations with the outside world until she grew old it was the husband who did everything. The unwritten law again states that husband is wife's head so he could punish her for disobedience or bad behavior. Customary law stated that every married woman had the right to go and meet her family at least once a year. Women lost their identity and their name. If a woman got married she was no longer called with her name. Her husband was reluctant to call her with her name and the others distinguished her as the new of this or that and later as his "wife" or "old lady". So as her name was not used it was lost. This thing leads to the isolation of women from the outside world. Since even the heritage did not take into account the property's transfer to females their names were not appreciated and remembered.

### **iv. The impact of the Islamic Conversion process**

While in some regions the society regulated its relations through unwritten rules, the rest of the country was affected by the process of Islamic Conversion (under the influence of the Ottoman occupation). Under the influence of the Muslim constitution called Sheriah, women were "covered" and in this way isolated from the outside world and non-participating in

any state administrative jobs. This period lasted for a long time and it returned in a tradition. Women's figure was underestimated and it suffered the impact of the men's power, especially within the family. During the King Zog I governance and under the influence of the Italian state many areas of life felt a kind of impact. This thing happened in architecture, economics, legislation, culture and society emancipation as well. Of course for the sake of tradition, economic conditions and other factors of real life social status did not improve. During Communism veil holding was stopped through a special law which said that women should be "discovered". The impact of the law created two different systems of thinking. At the first one woman should affect social life and at the second she should induce traditions-woman in family service. Despite the vague efforts the women's status remained stub. It was true that women worked and enjoyed certain rights in labor relations, but if we would view her own mentality and society's mentality in general she remained under the influence and power of man. Women were considered free under a "captive" and this understandable because the whole Albanian society remained isolated. The impact of the feminist movement for gender equality in the Europe of those years did not affect the Albanian mentality or only affected it a little due to the isolation, lack of information and state intercultural exchanges. The real hope for the growth of women's self-esteem, and also from the whole society took off after the 90's because women represent half of the world and has the right to exercise all political rights. The opening of the Albanian society and the Albanian's dream that Albania would be the same as Europe brought real opportunities for women's to be active part of the society, in the political aspect of decision-making.

## v. Reality and challenges

The main reasons why we have always emphasized the participation of women in politics and above all in parliament are numerous. First the equal opportunity of participating is the right of everyone. In additions studies show that countries that have less than 30% of the seats in parliament occupied by women are less democratic and more discriminating countries. Second, women and men have different perceptions on priority policies of a country. The evidences suggest that women are included in laws from which women, children, and families benefit. Consequently, equality in representation provides better protection to women and their issues. The third element, and the most important, is that the evidences speak for improvement and reduction in corruption cases thanks to the participation of women. Of course nowadays in this reality of low participation of women in politics the fact that the political struggle in Albania in these 23 years has been and continues to emerge as a men's war, has a considerable impact not in which there is little space for women participation, which by nature is fragile compared to the "fighting" attitude of men. The way politics is conceived, developed and implemented in our society and the lack of its civilizing qualities, its rudeness, the swearing, and insults make a serious obstacle for considering politics and decision-making a "natural environment" even for women. Politics in this context as a content and as a form has its own responsibilities for the low level of women's representation in the highest levels of

politics ranging from the parliament to the lower organs of local government. In a population whose 50% consists of women the participation in decision-making positions of both sexes should be in the same quota. In reality the figures of the whole world talk about societies run by men and where the participation of women is mainly enforced by international organizations. The information in the following chart (Fig. 1) clearly shows women's low participation in the Albanian parliament.

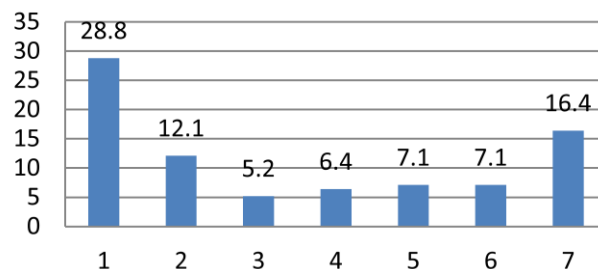


Figure 1. Women % in parliament towards the total number of deputies. Source: INSTAT

Women representation not only in Parliament but also in local level institutions is minimal. The second chart (Fig. 2) clearly shows the low percentage of female councilors (red columns) towards male councilors (blue columns).

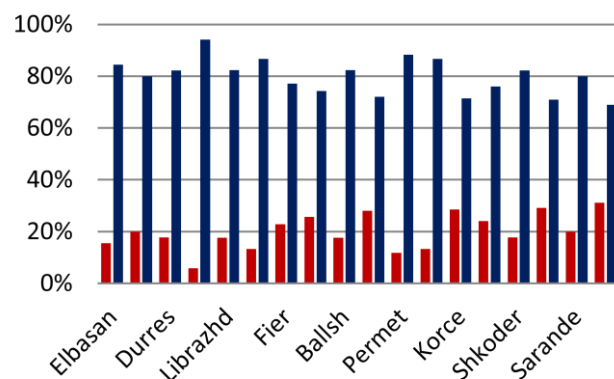


Figure 2. Women councilors' percentage in local councils towards men councilors' percentage. Source: INSTAT

The minimum of women representation in state institutions and decision-making is clearly defined but it is not applied. It is true that it is defined in law and in the Election Code that women should at least represent 30% of the parliament (legal obligation) but such thing has not become reality due to lack of political will. The level of women participation in political life should grow and this is considered a necessity now. Of course there is an increase of this level during the recent years but they should at least reach the figure of 30% required by law. The solution does not lie only at the law as it is only a link and not a process to enable true representation of women in decision-making. We need to have political will for this,

and leaders who should put women candidates at the begging of the lists and not on their end.

## VI. Recommendations

One of the causes of the still low level of women participation in politics and decision-making is their low level of representation and membership in political parties which remains a men's domain. Political parties must at least act in accordance to the legal provisions regarding women placement on candidate lists and voluntarily exceed those provisions to show commitment to gender equality in decision-making. Party leaders should use their selective authority to place women in competitive positions in the candidate's lists and consult with party structures to identify women candidates who can be elected. They should take actions to ensure that women candidates benefit from the support of the entire party structure. Political parties should include in their platform policies regarding women political representation, their economic empowerment, social equality and guarantee security and justice. Better treatment of women in a society is considered significant even for the political direction of the country. Among other things the increase of women participation in politics also requires:

- A good education and professional career exercise.

The fact that women manage the family interests and increasingly get more and more important roles in the society, their professional career will bring a positive impact and reaction regarding the problem solution and the improvement of social parameters. Women based on their biological nature and their familiar roles transmit their knowledge firstly at their children. They guide their children towards broader horizons. Women seem to want to overcome the gap of inequality with galloping pace. This brings the increasing number of women in certain sectors of the administration (health, education). However we can feel the preponderance that women are gaining every day, aiming other areas which until now were taboo for them.

- Interagency cooperation in formulating NPO-s policies

Since recent years in Albania there are state instruments for ensuring equal opportunities in terms of gender. Albanian parliament has ratified most of the international conventions whose aim is gender equality in all areas and has set up a good legislation, but they still remain ineffective and incomplete. It seems that public policies continue to do little or nothing to narrow gender disparity.

- Promoting prominent women. Women for women

The media contribution in promoting awareness on women issues plays an important role. Through it we can transmit the message to the public that women's participation in political life is an essential part of democracy and it is socially necessary. Media by promoting prominent women in various fields of life can create models for the public (society) by guarantying trust. We, women often become double myopic because we see each other with our and our men's scornful glasses. We should throw away these "glasses" and not only in

pompous conferences. We should constantly and every day work to affirm step by step professional, social, personal and each other personality. Media must present as much as possible the women contribution in the development processes, as well as present the public image of women character. This would no doubt encourage women to have more confidence in their forces, to raise awareness on women's participation and to oppose discrimination more forcefully or everything else that affects their interests. Women in politics bring alternatives that men do not tend to find. They know how to seek solutions for problems related to family, society and phenomena and problems whose burden usually falls on women. The methods and the ways that women choose to discuss and debate, improve and mitigate the natural severity of men. Politically activated women should continue to build inter-party relations together with the media, civil society and the private sector. They should then use these spaces to build political agendas that serve the interests of many and various women in Albanian society, as well as build a strong feminine electorate.

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