



“Quotas: The Case of Macedonia”

Daniela Dimitrievska
Macedonian Women's Lobby

A paper presented at the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)/CEE Network for Gender Issues Conference

The Implementation of Quotas: European Experiences

Budapest, Hungary, 22–23 October 2004

At the start of the 1990s, women confronted a new set of challenges as a result of the introduction of a multiparty system as part of the democracy-building process in the Republic of Macedonia. They faced up to them with a great deal of energy, hoping to construct a society that would continue to advance equality. This case study focuses on the political participation of women in Macedonia, and the implementation of the law on quotas.

Political Background

In the first post-transition general election of 1990, five women (four percent) were elected to parliament (out of 120 representatives). For many this was not unusual; few were surprised by the fact that 95 percent of the candidates were men and, therefore, that only five percent were women.

These were the years when everyone was learning about the new society, about democracy. In these circumstances, no one was asking questions about the representation of women or minority groups. If someone did pose such a question, the standard response was: 'The time when everybody needs to be officially represented as happened in Socialist times is over, equality and individualism are now the main symbols of democracy'.

In the second democratic parliamentary elections, in 1994, four women were elected to parliament (out of 120 representatives). With three percent female representation in parliament, Macedonia was placed at the bottom of the list of European countries in terms of women's participation in politics. Women stressed that they wanted to be treated the same as men – without special measures – and started to think more seriously about what they could do to change the situation.

Electoral Quotas for Women

The more progressive women in politics realized that the presence of women in the political arena was going to continue to decline, no matter how capable and qualified they are or how loyal to the party they are. Thus they emphasized the need to address hidden forms of discrimination and other domination techniques—which are very difficult to tackle if you do not have the necessary skills and capacities.

Women from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) initiated a debate on the lack of women in politics, especially in decision-making forums. There was much discussion about the obstacles and about ways of improving the situation. Among the solutions, the quota was highlighted as an instrument that could produce tangible and immediate results. Women's NGOs realized that one of the ways to improve the status of women was by ensuring that women were represented in decision-making bodies. Consequently they proposed:

- to develop relationships with women from political parties;
- to raise awareness of the need for quotas; and
- to lobby for quotas.

A very important point made by women's NGOs was that there is not sufficient time to wait for equality to evolve naturally—this could take hundreds of years.

Public awareness strategies highlighted to the general public the importance of having women in power, of what representation means and of what quotas stand for. It was very important that the public recognize that parliament is dominated by men, that government is dominated by men and that party leaderships are dominated by men, and to ask why, and what is the solution. To have more than 90 percent of men in parliament does not make for balanced decision-making posts, and is based on discrimination.

A number of campaigns were launched to eradicate stereotypes and prejudices, involving, for example, the distribution of leaflets and posters. Women used every opportunity to stress that: 'It is hard to imagine a world with 97% of Romeos and 3% of Juliets'. When members of the public acknowledged the problem of the representation of women in politics, women from political parties and women's NGOs told them that a possible solution was to implement quotas.

Political parties and quotas

Evidence from other countries in Europe, and indeed globally, show that the implementation of voluntary party quotas can be an extremely effective policy to increase the representation of women. These types of quota are adopted voluntarily by political parties, and are most common in centre-left leaning parties. Prior to the adoption of legislated quotas in FYROM, some political parties had adopted voluntary quotas.

However, opposition to quotas is pronounced. Some political party members consider quotas to be a 'gift', in the sense that women are afforded a place as a candidate simply because they are women. This reflects the male/female power dynamic within political parties. Some women believe that by winning a seat on a quota ticket they will be viewed as lacking capacities and qualifications. Others believe that woman who have relevant qualities and capacities will be able to develop their political careers.

But the reality was different. Women who were capable, educated, loyal and hard working found many challenges to getting involved in decision-making. Women organised forums and groups within political parties to press for the introduction of quotas. As a result, party quotas have focussed on the participation of women in party decision-making bodies and the representation of women on lists of candidates. Some accepted the quota in order to be part of an international alliance based on party affiliation. Parties, which have voluntarily adopted the quotas, include the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia, the Liberal Democratic Party, and the Liberal Party.

For the parties that adopted the quota, it meant recognizing the under-representation of women; building women's capacities within the party; and considering the needs of women in society. The quota brought women's issues to the surface in political parties and helped to strengthen organized women's bodies within political parties. The quota also increased the number of women in politics.

It is important to reiterate, though, that this quota applied only to women who belonged to political parties that accepted it. In reality, one of the problems with party quotas is that they are voluntary and implementation is not always obligatory. Not all political parties accepted the quota—some argued that this was due to party ideology. For the rest it was necessary to establish quotas in electoral law.

Legislated quotas in General Elections

The commission in charge of drafting the electoral law included two members of the women's lobby, university professors and experts in law and elections. They analyzed the issue of quotas and electoral law, concentrating, in particular, on whether the introduction of quotas in electoral law would breach constitutional law.

Article 9, of the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, states that all citizens of Macedonia have equal rights and freedoms regardless of their sex, race, skin colour, national and social background, political and religious beliefs and social status. If women were singled out, the quota would be rejected by the Constitutional Court on the grounds that quotas are discriminatory based on sex. The solution was to introduce a quota, into the election law, that applies to the 'under-represented sex'. The final wording was as follows: a '[m]inimum 30% obligatory presence of the under-represented sex on the candidate lists'. However, there is no placement mandate specifying that women should be placed in winnable positions.

A vigorous campaign to support quotas in the election law focused on political party leaders and was strengthened by the participation of women within political parties. The efforts of the campaign bore fruit when the election law was passed by parliament with very little opposition. The law was approved by the Parliament, governed by a conservative majority, on 25 June, 2002.

The law is very clear: those political parties that do not meet the 30 percent criterion will not be registered for elections. The penalty, therefore, is that the party will not have an opportunity to win any seats in parliament.

The candidate lists for the 2002 general election show that all of Macedonia's political parties respected the law. However, the extent of their commitment to women's participation in politics is illustrated by the fact there were only 32.2 percent women on the candidate lists of all of the political parties. Macedonia employed a

proportional closed-list system in the 2002 general election. Hence it was very important that women were placed in a position in which they could win (that is, towards the top of the list). However, the female candidates were distributed as follows:

- positions one to five (4.53 percent);
- positions six to ten (7.81 percent); and
- positions 11 to 20 (19.84 percent).

As a result, 18.3 percent of women were elected to parliament in 2002. By contrast, in 1990, 1994 and 1998, 4.1 percent, 3.3 percent and 6.6 percent of women, respectively, were elected. The increase can be attributed to use of the PR electoral system, the introduction of the law on quotas and the enormous amount of work done by the women's movement.

Legislated Quotas in local elections

Given the experience that we gained and the lessons that we learned with respect to the introduction of quotas in the electoral law (general elections), and the new political situation—decentralization of power and more responsibility for local government—we found that the issue of women's under-representation at the local level was very important to tackle. The solution was to introduce quotas in law for local elections. The opportunity presented itself with the restructuring - decentralization and new division of local districts – and the amendments to the law for local elections. A proportional closed-list system is employed for local elections (city councillors) in Macedonia.

The quota that was adopted was the same as the one outlined above for general elections, but with one important difference: it fixes positions for women on the lists. There was much debate on the content of the amendment, and a great deal of information was compiled on the situation in other countries and regions. The amendment was proposed on 26 June, 2004, and for the first time parliament was divided by the issue and not by political affiliation. After a great deal of discussion, the amendment was approved with 41 votes (the minimum necessary).

The amendment stipulates that a: 'Minimum of 30% of [the] under-represented sex [is] to be on the first half of the list for the local elections and 30% of [the] under-represented sex [is] to be on the second half of the list'.

Conclusion

The lessons learned from Macedonia are the following:

- Quotas are extremely important in kick-starting the process that can lead to parity.
- Quotas need to be obligatory and enforceable to generate tangible results.
- Quotas have allowed Macedonian women to become 'visible' in the political sphere.
- Quotas have made history: the first ethnic Albanian woman has been elected to the Macedonian parliament.
- Quotas have resulted in political parties paying more attention to their women members. Even women from rural areas are being listed as candidates.

All of this would not have been possible, though, if women from political parties, from NGOs, from trade unions, from the media and elsewhere had not worked together to exert pressure to adopt quotas to ensure women's rightful place in decision-making.