



## **“The Women’s Movement in Lithuania: Discourses and Lobbying Strategies”**

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### **The Implementation of Quotas: European Experiences**

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#### **Introduction**

Like other countries in Europe, the participation of women in politics in Lithuania has ebbed and flowed. In Soviet times, more than 35 percent of all deputies in the former Supreme Soviet of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) were women. However, this institution had no real power and there were very few women in other administrative structures like the supreme bodies of the Communist Party or the Council of Ministers.

Like many other countries in the former Soviet block, women’s representation dropped in the first post-communist multi-party elections. In Lithuania, quotas were partially lifted in the 1989 parliamentary elections, and consequently, the proportion of women deputies fell from 36 percent (in 1984) to 16 percent in 1990. Since then, women’s representation has continued to climb, with 21 percent female members of parliament in 2004. This case study examines the political participation of women, gender quotas and the women’s movement.

#### **The Electoral System**

The first democratic parliamentary elections, in 1990, employed electoral rules inherited from the Soviet era, that is, the majority/plurality formula, combined with an element of competition achieved through the liberalization of nomination procedures. Political organizations, social movements and community entities had the right to nominate electoral candidates; the number of candidates was unlimited.

The new Seimas Election Law, passed on 9 July 1992, introduced a mixed voting system for parliamentary elections in Lithuania. Seventy-one deputies are elected by direct vote in single-member constituencies based on the number of inhabitants and administrative-territorial divisions, while 70 deputies are elected via party lists (multi-member constituencies).

The Election Law was amended on 16 March and 27 June 1996. The nomination procedures remained virtually unchanged, except that political movements lost the right to put forward candidates for election in the single-member and multi-member electoral districts. More substantial changes were made with regard to seat allocation in multi-member districts. The electoral threshold was divided into two parts: five percent for single parties; and seven percent for party coalitions.

Local and parliamentary elections were held in Lithuania in 2000, in March and October respectively. In the 2000 polls, open lists were introduced for the first time, meaning that people could vote not only for a party, but also for the candidates they most liked and trusted, with the possibility of changing the ranking of candidates on party lists. Prior to the elections, a few attempts were made to alter the significance of the rankings, but they were unsuccessful.

### **Electoral Quotas for Women**

The laws of the Republic of Lithuania do not provide for quotas for women on election lists or in the administration system. At present only one political party, the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party, has introduced a quota, stipulating that no more than two-thirds of persons of any sex can be on its election list and or elected to its internal bodies. The 33 percent quota has been in effect since the mid-1990s.

In accordance with the Lithuanian Women’s Advancement Programme, efforts will continue to be made to achieve a gender balance with respect to the election lists of parties and to ensure that representatives of one sex do not make up more than two-thirds of all commissions and committees formed by the government.

In spring 2004, Lithuanian parliamentarian Birute Vesaitė unsuccessfully attempted to put the matter of quotas for women on to the agenda of the Seimas with the aim of changing the Election Law or even the Constitution. The introduction or question of quotas has not been attempted since the Spring of 2004.

The National Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (2003–2004) is fully oriented towards implementing a gender mainstreaming strategy. It encompasses new guidelines established in European Union (EU) directives, as well as in other international instruments. Government departments are the main implementing agents, and the Commission of Women’s and Men’s Equal Opportunities is the primary coordinator. The programme includes a separate Chapter on Policy and Decision-making. Local- (municipal) and governmental-level measures are discussed. Quotas are not mentioned at all.

### **The Representation of Women in Politics**

Table 1 illustrates the changes in the position of women in politics since 1980. Twenty-five women (18 percent) were elected to the eighth Seimas in 1996 and 29 women (21 percent) in 2004.

**Table 1: Women’s Participation in the Lithuanian Parliament (Seimas)**

<b>Soviet period</b>				<b>Since independence was restored</b>									
<b>1980</b>		<b>1985</b>		<b>1990</b>		<b>1992</b>		<b>1996</b>		<b>2000</b>		<b>2004</b>	
W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M
125	225	125	225	14	126	10	131	25	114	15	126	31	110
36%	64%	36%	64%	10%	90%	7%	93%	18%	82%	11%	89%	22%	78%
N=350		N=350		N=140		N=141		N=139		N=141		N=141	

Sources: Šeduikienė J. (2000), *Women in the Parliament of Lithuania, Woman's World, 2000, No. 3-4. Women and Men in the Baltic Countries (2002). Vilnius: Lithuanian Statistical department, p. 61.*

Women have also played an active part in local municipal elections. In 1995, the lists of nominees for election to municipalities comprised 24.3 percent of women; 19.42 percent were elected. In 1997, the list of nominees for election to municipalities consisted of 30 percent of women; 22 percent was elected. Of the candidates in the local elections that took place on 19 March 2000, 38.5 percent women; 17.6 percent was elected. It is obvious that women's organizations have done a lot to encourage women to seek leadership posts. Until the local elections on 19 March 2000, there were only two women were among 56 Mayors of Lithuanian municipalities.

### *Quotas in practice*

Parties have different attitudes and strategies towards women's representation—there is no direct correlation between a party's success and the number of women candidates on its lists. A common perception is that parties that have a bigger representation of women are 'weaker' at the polls - 'the more women, the weaker party'. In the 2004 election, the only party to have introduced a quota, the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party, was split into two coalitions: the Coalition of Algirdas Brazauskas and Artūras Paulauskas 'Working for Lithuania'; and the Lithuanian Social Democratic Union. The latter (the Lithuanian Social Democratic Union), included the principle of women's quotas (32 percent of party candidates were women), but did not win any seats..

Table 2 illustrates that the strategies of parties, which placed women among the first ten places on electoral lists, are very similar. Usually the lists of these parties comprise two or three women among the top ten candidates.

Lithuanian women were more successful in ensuring representation in the first elections to the European Parliament in June 2004: five women were among the 13 individuals elected to the body (38.5 percent). The names of five candidates were printed on voting bulletins. Only the Labour Party put forward three women candidates. There were a few parties, including the Liberal and Centre Union, that did not include any women among their five candidates.

One can sum up the situation by saying that different parties have used different strategies towards women's representation in different elections (national, municipal and European).

**Table 2: Women on Candidate Lists vs. Women Elected to the Seimas, 2004**

Name of Political Party/Coalition	Total candidates on lists	Women on the lists (%)	No. of women among the first ten candidates	Total Number of mandates (W = mandates won by women)
Labour Party	141	18.4	3	39 (W=8)
Coalition of Algirdas Brazauskas and Artūras Paulauskas 'Working for Lithuania'	140	26.4	3	31 (W=6)
Homeland Union (Conservatives, Political Prisoners and Deportees, Christian Democrats)	96	20.8	3	25 (W=5)
Liberal and Centre Union	141	17.7	2	18 (W=2)
Coalition of Rolandas Paksas 'For the Order and Justice'	139	12.9	2	11 (W=2)

Union of Farmers' Party and New Democracy Party	116	37.1	3	<b>10 (W=3)</b>
Electoral Action of Lithuanian Poles	128	32.8	2	<b>2 (W=1)</b>
Independent candidates				<b>5 (W=2)</b>
Christian Conservative Social Union	39	20.5	2	-
Lithuanian Christian Democrats	73	26.0	2	-
National Centre Party	37	35.1	1	-
Republican Party	28	25.0	2	-
Lithuanian Social Democratic Union	31	32.3	4	-
Lithuanian Freedom Union	29	55.2	4	-
National Party 'Lithuania's Way'	24	41.7	3	-
Lithuanian National Union	31	19.4	2	-
				<b>141 (W=29)</b>

Table 3 shows how many women were elected by the different electoral formulae, either through on the party lists, or directly elected in the single-member districts, since 1992. While more women are typically elected through political party lists, it is apparent that women are able, and have won, seats in single member districts. The introduction of open lists in 2000 has positively affected women in a significant way. While open list voting means that some women candidates were displaced upwards or downwards on the party lists, there were some positive results. For example:

- In June 2004, Ms. Laima-Liucija Andrikiene was elected as one of two representatives of her party to the European Parliament after she moved from fifth position on the list of the Homeland Union to second.
- Ms. N. Steibliene was re-elected to the new Seimas in October 2004 after she moved from forty-eighth to fifteenth on the candidate list of the Coalition of Algirdas Brazauskas and Artūras Paulauskas 'Working for Lithuania'.

**Table 3: Women Elected by Electoral Formulae Type**

Electoral Formula	1992*		1996*		2000*		2004	
	No.	W%	No.	W%	No.	W%	No.	W%
Party lists (Multi-member electoral districts)	5	7.1	14	20	9	12.8	16	22.9
Single-member electoral district	5	7	11	16.2	6	8.4	13	18.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>20.1</b>

W=women

\* **Source:** Krupavičius A. and I. Matonytė. 2001. 'Women's Political Recruitment and Representation in Lithuania'. *Viešosios politikos studijos*. No. 1/1. Kaunas: Public Policy Research Centre. p. 14.

### **Initiatives by Non-Governmental Organizations**

The Lithuanian National Women's Forum (Board) was re-established only at the end of April 2003, serving as the consultative board of the parliament. Today it plays rather an important role in coordinating and initiating various actions involving non-governmental organizations (NGOs), parliament and government.

In February 2004, the 'Vision of Development of Egalitarian Society in Lithuania Until 2014' (prepared by volunteers Ina Dagtė, Esmeralda Kuliešytė, Giedrė Purvaneckienė, Ramunė Trakymienė and Vilija Vasiliauskienė) was adopted. The

same group of volunteers is currently preparing a strategy to encourage cooperation between NGOs and governmental structures.

A Ministry of Equal Opportunities for Women and Men is mentioned at the end of the Vision document. Also mentioned is an Ombudsman for Women and Men, separate from the Ombudsman for Equal Opportunities. 'One of the main spheres of its activities is the improvement of women's status in society and receiving gender statistics from the employers. All employers will account for statistical indicators about women progress in their annual reports'.<sup>1</sup>

The number of women's organizations has increased significantly; they have also become more powerful. As of October 2004, 63 women's organizations are active in Lithuania. Women's organizations played a key part in the drafting of the Law on Equal Opportunities for Men and Women. They can be divided into two groups: women's groups within political parties; and public women's organizations. Five of the biggest political parties in Lithuania have women's groups: Lithuanian Centre Union's Women's Section; Lithuanian Democratic Women's Group (within the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party); Lithuanian Social Democratic Women's Union; Union of Women Conservatives (Homeland Union–Lithuanian Conservatives); and the Women's Section of the Lithuanian Christian Democratic Party.

Many of the NGOs were established as interest groups. According to the *Directory of Women's Organizations of Lithuania*, in 2000, 20 NGOs cited policy and decision-making as their primary area of concern. The size of the membership of Lithuanian women's organizations varies greatly, ranging between nine and 10,000.

Public women's organizations are very diverse. Seventeen are active at the national level, while a number of others operate at the regional or city levels, or within other organizations (such as women's study centres in universities). Some of these organizations have set a very clear goal of equal rights and opportunities; others are focussed on assisting women or uniting women on the basis, for example, of profession, religion and nationality. Cooperation among women's organisations is strong, as exemplified by the relationships among elected women, NGO's and the Department of Lithuanian Statistics. In addition to Lithuanian organizations, ten international women's organizations have stepped up their activities (for instance, Soroptimists and Zonta).

The Women's Issues Information Centre, supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), is among the strongest of the women's organizations in Lithuania. It collaborates closely with the Prime Minister's Office. The centre assists other women's organizations in trying to find solutions to critical problems and coordinates common initiatives. It initiates projects that seek to address women's issues, organizes conferences, seminars, workshops and training courses to raise awareness and to improve understanding of gender equality, and aids educational institutions in circulating information on gender equality matters. The centre's publications are disseminated all over the country and help women to understand their rights and to acquire knowledge on how to implement these rights in the real world. Its monthly magazine, *Woman's World*, is available free of charge and in two languages, Lithuanian and English. The centre also collects gender-related statistical data and classifies the findings of social studies.

Public education and advocacy campaigns before elections seem to have an impact. For instance, 'Women voting for Women', a campaign organized by NGOs (through the internet and printed materials) encourages political party leaders to include more women on candidate lists.

## Barriers to the Implementation of Quotas

The 2004 study, 'Enlargement, Gender and Governance' (EGG), highlighted certain political barriers as instrumental in the resistance to quotas. The study on 'The Civic and Political Participation and Representation of Women in the EU Candidate Countries,'<sup>2</sup> identified the following barriers:

### *At the state level:*

1. Absence of coordinated strategy and common understanding about a quota policy. Although there have been a few attempts by individual parliamentarians and NGOs, the lack of a common concept or a coordinated strategy to debate and establish quotas provides a barrier to their introduction.
2. Frequent government changes, mostly in the first decade of independence, preventing sustained and consistent policy debate.
3. Too short a time between municipal elections (2.5 years) to discuss and to create gender policy.
4. Lack of information.
5. No strategy or policy to involve other social partners.
6. With the introduction of democratic multiparty elections, the number of women in national parliaments has been drastically reduced across the former socialist countries.<sup>3</sup> One reason for this decrease lies in the abolition of the unwritten quotas for elections to the Supreme Council during Soviet times. There is very strong resistance towards quotas system. One of the arguments of the critics is that we had this system in the Soviet times, and it neither worked nor changed the status of women.

### *At the government level:*

1. Strong forms of stereotyping and the highly patriarchal attitudes of responsible people in authority.
2. No clear financial support strategy.
3. Very few officials involved in gender policy formation and implementation.

### *At the civil society level:*

1. Lack of solidarity among women.
2. NGOs remain isolated as a result of limited cooperation and sector-wide initiatives, and do not receive the official support and public attention that they deserve.
3. Financing is one of the main challenges facing Lithuanian NGOs.
4. Fundamental to success is effective management of an NGO, as well as attracting good personnel.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> 'Vision of Development of Egalitarian Society in Lithuania Until 2014', <http://www.lygus.lt>.

<sup>2</sup> Enlargement Gender and Governance project co-ordinated by Queen's University at Belfast, available online at <http://www.qub.ac.uk/egg>.

<sup>3</sup> Women in Transition (1999), The Monee Project, CEE/CIS/Baltics, Regional Monitoring Report – No.6.- UNICEF.