

CIVIC

## Leading positions are also for women

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***It's good to remember that women in Montenegro only gained the right to vote in 1945. Since then, it's been a full sixty-seven years that they are still fighting for their rights and trying to strike a balance with men – who are considered knowledgeable and powerful just because they're men.***

Constitutive assembly of the Parliament of Montenegro began last week, for the second time in Montenegro's history chaired by a woman – **Jelisaveta Kalezić**, as the oldest member of the parliament and only until the old/new president is (re)elected. The event went largely unnoticed in the public discussions, same as her remark that she “objects to the last two stanzas of the anthem”, although she respects the symbols of the state, because they are not gender-neutral.

There was also little mention on the representation of women during the elections. Although we often campaign for human rights, usually of minorities, it is puzzling that the rights of a majority, in this case 50.6% of the population, have slipped out of focus.

It's good to remember that women in Montenegro only gained the right to vote in 1945. Since then, it's been a full sixty-seven years that they are still fighting for their rights and trying to strike a balance with men – who are considered knowledgeable and powerful just because they're men. It took three years to align the electoral law with the Constitution, but the improvements on the gender front have been incomplete. The law established the principle of affirmative action, which stipulates that electoral lists submitted to the ballots ought to contain one third of women nominees, but it offered no mechanism to translate this into distribution of the parliamentary seats. Such a principle could only be promulgated in a country where politics is still understood to be a male job, while the woman are allotted the roles of mothers, sisters, spouses, lovers, secretaries etc.

Montenegro doesn't have much experience with women as political leaders. In the entire parliamentary history only one woman – **Vesna Perović**, of the Liberal Alliance, was named president of the Parliament. We never had a woman president of the state or the government, someone in a position to exert dominant influence on the political culture. Although in the past years more women than man have been graduating from universities and enrolling in higher level graduate programmes, there is only a handful of female deans, and not one of them can dream of becoming a rector.

Some would say that this is easily balanced out by the number of women in the judiciary branch, where both President of the Supreme Court and the Supreme State Prosecutor are women. But these also call forth multiple objections as to the political motivations behind these appointments, as well as the lack of democratic conscience and awareness, which to some extent resulted in worsening trust in female leadership.

The notion of human rights incorporates full dedication to advancement and protection of all rights for all people, including political rights, including also women... In the contemporary Montenegrin context, that requires development and implementation of specific measures of affirmative action to balance the presence and participation of women in political life, but also a change in attitude, especially of those who wish to lead this country.

Equality between women and men is a fundamental criterion of democracy, which ought to be complemented by equal participation in the political life and decision-making. This mustn't take shape of formal concessions, but should come as expression of real commitment to benefit from all human

resources, for the sake of better governance based upon equal changes and respect for diversity. Political will is therefore the key to the enactment of adequate policies and practices.

There is no tradition of political participation of women in Montenegro. The future will mainly depend on the current political elites, insistence of women's organisations and their initiatives, and of other elements of the civil society advocating the values of a civic community. This is especially important since, instead of aiming for the Scandinavian model, our party leaders think of women's participation in politics as of a necessary evil coming from the West that they need to placate with some formalities. Their position to women in politics is best illustrated by the hypocrisy of "nobody is stopping them from doing politics", without mention of their own contribution to the obstacles women face when they attempt to embark on a career in politics.

The question of balanced participation of women in the decision-making processes isn't only of interest to women. It is a test case for the overall democratization of the society and the development of the culture of human rights. The pace of democratic processes in the Montenegrin society, its openness towards differences and integration, will depend to a large extent on its ability to accept that women are capable and willing to make important decision and occupy high-ranking offices in political parties and the state. Even if it means that the men will have to take up their share of the currently more socially acceptable "female" roles...

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