



Party Law in Modern Europe

The Legal Regulation of Political Parties in Post-War Europe

When Less Means More: Influential Women of the *Right* – the Case of Bulgaria

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When Less Means More: Influential Women of the *Right* – the Case of Bulgaria

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Abstract

This paper investigates the commonly accepted belief that women's presence in political life and more specifically in parliament furthers the substantive representation of women. The hypothesis is examined within the context of Bulgaria. The conventional wisdom is challenged by the historical legacy of the Communist Party which included a sizeable number of women among its ranks, yet women with no particular voice. On the contrary, after the fall of the regime, parties of the *Right* while not staging women symbolically have born out several influential female politicians. In the absence of true conservatism and a real emphasis on gender issues yet, in comparison to Western democracies, this paper looks at the kernels of female political influence in Post-communist societies, where the symbolic representation of women within the former Communist Party has been complemented or even replaced by the rise of strong female leaders, in Bulgaria's case, within the political parties of the *Right*.

-- WORKING DRAFT --

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Introduction

The presence of women in politics is of fundamental importance, not only to assure the passage of women-friendly policy changes, which understandably have been the concern of many Western scholars, but, on a more basic level, to ensure the realization of one of the core democratic principles to which all, but especially new democracies are still quite sensitive to – that of representation. Despite the fact that proportionally women constitute 49.89 percent of the world's population and 51.89 percent of the population in East European countries (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2011), women remain a minority in national assemblies worldwide, with the current world average for the lower house of parliament being at 20.0 percent (IPU, 2011). The

low number of women in politics in relation to the about equal demographic divide of female and male persons in the world, has spurred high interest among gender, electoral, and most recently democratic transition scholars, who try to explain the political underrepresentation of women.

A large part of the literature and the one that is 'more mature' (Wangnerud 2009, 52) thus focuses on the descriptive representation of women, or in explaining variations in the number of women elected in national parliaments. Explanations of the low percentage of women legislators are linked to the institutional context of the competitive space – the electoral system, the party system, the legislative competition – and to the party context, specifically party ideology or party organization (Norris 1993). Gender quotas, determining the minimum levels of representation for each sex on party lists or national legislatures, have been identified in the literature as the most effective legislative tool addressing women's underrepresentation in national parliaments. In addition to research trying to explain different paths in adoption of gender quotas (Caul 2001; Krook 2006), quotas are increasingly used as explanatory factors for the success of female candidates in municipal elections (Schmidt and Saunders 2004) or women's political engagement (Zetterberg 2009). However, Jones (2009) has argued that gender quotas work only when they are well-designed and that the adoption of quotas alone does not automatically enhance women's representation in parliament. In a comparative study of the election of women in Latin America, he shows that gender quotas work better in closed vs. open-list PR systems, that *Left* parties (for Europe in Caul Kittilson 2006) increase the chance of women getting elected, and that despite conventional expectations, public attitudes toward the election of women, do not have a significant impact on the election of women.

That the percentage of women representatives is of fundamental importance is indisputable. There is a longstanding agreement in the literature that female legislators are more likely to represent women's interests and support

legislation beneficial to women (Jones 1998, Phillips 1995). Thus, the 'politics of presence' (Phillips 1995) is often taken to mean that women's presence in the legislature would have positive policy consequences. However, Childs and Krook (2006) maintain that as the number of works studying the link between women's representation (descriptive representation) and the passage of legislation beneficial to the same group (substantive representation) grows, it is increasingly obvious that the trend is neither linear, nor universal as studies show different results. The debate linking female descriptive and substantive representation, with 'critical mass theory' (Kanter 1977; Dahlerup 1988) at its core, examines the argument that women's impact on legislative outcomes depends on the proportion of women in parliament and in key positions in other political institutions. While gender and politics scholars are becoming increasingly skeptical of the use of the 'critical mass' idea in explaining changing trends in women's substantive representation (see Celis 2006; Crowley 2004), the concept has gained a lot of mileage among non-academics and has become a popular argument for activists, the media, and international organizations for justifying the adoption of measures (most often various types of quotas) that will bring more women in political life (Krook 2005). Despite the popularization of the critical mass thematic and its, albeit unintentional, structuring of a large portion of the gender and politics discourse, in a recent article, Childs and Krook (2008) warn against misinterpretations of 'the magic of the numbers' and emphasize that 'critical mass theory' as developed by Dahlerup (1988) and used in most subsequent research, focuses entirely on the ability of women to form alliances. The latter implies more alliances as more women are elected to office, but overlooks the important detail that as the number of women grows, so does the diversity among them, therefore the ability to form alliances becomes nothing more than an easily disproven assumption.

The diversity that Childs and Krook are talking about is ever more important when we consider the variation of women representation among parties

– while there may be more women in one parliament versus another, women may be part of several, often, non-collaborating parties. Wangnerud (2009) claims that variations in the proportion of women to men are even greater across parties than across nations and one of the earliest findings, namely that *Left* party ideology is a strong predictor of the election of women, is becoming weaker as studies show an increase of women representation in traditionally non-women-friendly party families across the board. What matters then is not so much how many women there are but what they do when in parliament. Challenging the traditional view of feminism as interpreted as being on the left political spectrum, Celis and Childs (2011) attempt to ‘push the boundaries’ of the conventional study of women and politics by encouraging scholars not to limit their scope with what may be classified as “good” women’s substantive representation, but to acknowledge the presence of conservative female politicians and their claims to act for women. With this paper, we intend to contribute to this debate by examining the case of Bulgaria. While there is no true conservatism and the discourse on gender equality is still limited at best, we add to the discussion on the link between descriptive and substantive representation, offering a case in which one traces a trend of decreasing representation, and yet, a representation which contrary to that during the Communist past, has a say in important political decisions. Even though there is growing research on women and post-communist politics, works exploring the link between descriptive and substantive representation in East European democracies are scarce. As such, to our knowledge, this is the first study of post-communist women representation focusing on studying the careers of female legislators, and furthermore, of women of the *Right*. It thus provides new insights for the women and politics literature and offers fresh evidence that it is not the critical mass, but rather the ‘critical actors’ (Childs and Krook, 2009), who should be central to studies interested in women’s substantive political representation.

The principal argument of the paper is that although women representatives have decreased in number since the abolition of the Communist gender quotas, the post-communist presence of women in parliament has been more significant than women's almost nominal inclusion before 1989. During Communism, while there were a large number of women within the legislature (reaching above 25 *percent*)¹, hardly any of them were allowed in the governing body of the Communist Party. On the contrary, female political actors after the change of the regime have held highly influential posts, including chairman of prominent political parties, chairman of the National Assembly, ministers of key ministries (including areas traditionally reserved for male politicians such as foreign affairs), and vice president. To develop this argument the article is divided in three sections. We first look at the representation of women during the Communist-era and discuss the socialist emancipation project (and its legacy), which intends to expose the meaninglessness of gender quotas in authoritarian political regimes. We then briefly discuss the legal framework within which political parties exist and compete since the fall of the previous regime. Here, we review the main obstacles and regulations which political parties are subject to by the state, and discuss intra-party gender policies where such exist. The last part of our study examines the political careers of two of the most prominent female politicians in Bulgaria since 1989. We study their political evolution and their influence on Bulgarian politics and the politics of women, drawing on evidence from parliamentary archives and personal interviews with the two. By focusing on *Right* female politicians, we aim to examine the rising view that *Left* ideology is not the main predictor of female political representation. Our paper ends with a few conclusive remarks on the lessons learned about the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation, and with some specific advice toward future similar scholarship on other East European states.

¹ Forest, Maxime, "From State-Socialism to EU accession: Contrasting the Gendering of (Executive) Political Power in Central Europe," 2nd ECPR Conference, Budapest, January 12-15, 2011, p. 4.

Women and the Communist Past

With the establishing of communist regimes across Eastern Europe following World War II, women's status and role in society in these countries was to be irreversibly changed. Marxist ideology demanded eradication of class differences and social inequalities, including those of gender. For Marxist theoreticians, women's equality was part of the broader social conflict that could not be solved within the framework of capitalism (Stoichkova 2009). Communist societies, by contrast, allotted a new and much more important role for women who were to be key and equal actors in the modernization and rapid industrialization process and the building of the "socialist way of life" and the "new socialist man"². Women's emancipation became an official goal of state policy, centering on the political and economic imperative of integrating the female population into paid work and into positions of state socialist authority (Fodor 2004: 783).

The socialist emancipation project produced mixed results, as proclaimed goals differed from realities, though there were some undeniable improvements in women's social status. Female participation in the labor force steadily increased, even surpassing figures in Western countries. By the early 1980s, for example, 73 *percent* of Hungarian women were engaged in paid work, while the figure for Austria was only 48 *percent* (Fodor 2004: 789). The nature of female labor also changed with more women occupying jobs in industry and state administration. In Poland, of every 100 married women, 13 worked in nonagricultural jobs in 1950, 42 in 1960, 68 in 1970, and about 74 in 1989 (Siemenska 1998: 127). Women were also making headway in managerial positions, occupying 32 *percent* of such positions by 1990 in Bulgaria (Kostova 1998: 207). Positive change was also seen in women's educational levels. By the 1970s, half of all college students in Hungary were women (Fodor 2004: 790), while the number of women with university education in Bulgaria increased 15 times between 1946 and 1991 (Kostova 1998: 206).

² In Slavic languages "man" here is meant as "person" – "человек" in Russian or "човек" in Bulgarian.

These figures, however, are misleading when assessing the success of the socialist emancipation project. Although women reached equal status as proportion of the labor force, they occupied less prestigious, lower-level and lower-paid jobs. Women were most welcome in professions that required less education and more commitment, leading to the feminization of entire sectors. It is in these feminized professions that women enjoyed greater access to managerial positions. Furthermore, Kostova argues, women's share in managerial jobs did not correspond to their employment levels or to their level of educational and professional training (Kostova 1998: 208). Ultimately, women in Eastern Europe came to detest the state-sponsored emancipation which, in the eyes of many, was driven by ulterior motives of achieving economic and demographic targets (Harvey 2002: 30). The mandatory employment imposed by communist regimes further made it difficult to define work as a right or a privilege. "The emancipation of women was reduced to the necessity to have a job," argues Czech women activist Jirina Siklova.³ Mandatory employment was further resented as women were still expected to carry out most household chores.

Communist regimes showed great commitment to opening channels for women's political participation. Women were granted voting rights and access to political positions (if those were not gained in the interwar period), women's mass organizations were formed to mobilize the female population, gender quotas for state legislatures were introduced, and more efforts were made to recruit women to the Communist party. Gender quotas with a target of 30 *percent* steadily increased the proportion of women in parliaments to above 25 *percent* by the 1980s. Not surprisingly, Kenworth and Malami report a strong correlation between Marxist-Leninist one party governments and women's representation in state legislatures (Kenworth and Malami 1999). For the first time women entered executive positions. As Forest reports, between 1945 and 1950, 15 women were appointed to government offices (11 with the rank of ministers) in Bulgaria,

³ Quoted in Harvey 2002, p. 30.

Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Romania, in the Slovenian and Croatian provinces of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Republic of Estonia. For comparison, no women had achieved similar positions before 1945 (Forest 2011: 3).

Despite such gains, women played but a marginal role in political decision-making. While rubber-stamp parliaments with no real power welcomed female representatives, women's participation in bodies with real political power, especially at the party level, was extremely limited. The more powerful the political body or industry, Graham and Regulska note, the lower the representation of women (Graham and Regulska 1997). Women did not exceed 10 *percent* in Party central committees and practically did not feature in Politburos. While the absolute number of women in executive positions almost tripled between 1970 and 1989, they only rarely assumed significant positions (Forest 2011: 5). When women were allowed access to political office, it was primarily at the lower and/or local level. Women organizations were also deprived of real initiative. Since the communist state declared the woman question solved as early as the 1950s (Harvey 2002: 31), women's organizations became an instrument of party control and were hardly propagators and defenders of women's rights. Thus, political equality came to be associated with women's superficial presence in political bodies, demonstrating the hollow commitment of communist regimes to women's emancipation.

The Bulgarian case provides a good example of the questionable success of the communist regime in promoting women's political representation. Bulgarian women were enfranchised in 1937, but it was not until 1945 that they were able to compete for parliamentary seats. The introduction of gender quotas ranging from 20-30 *percent* led to a female representation of 21.8 *percent* in the last communist parliament (Kostadinova 2003: 304). In the 1980s, women constituted 50.5 *percent* of the membership of the Fatherland Front (the largest mass organization in the communist period subservient to the Communist party), 50 *percent* of the Communist youth organization, and 46.4 *percent* of the trade

unions, while 35.4 *percent* of women held leadership positions in political organizations (Kostova 1998: 212). The Bulgarian People's Women's Union founded in 1945 united all existing women's organizations and actively encouraged women's political participation. By 1980's, 34 *percent* of the members of local government bodies were women (Kostadinova 2003: 307).

At the same time, women's political involvement was limited to the local level and lower-level positions, with very limited presence in national decision-making bodies. For example, in all governments between 1946 and 1989, there were a total of five women cabinet members, with no more than two women ever present in a single government and a number of cabinets with no female representation.⁴ Women's involvement was further limited to less important ministries such as culture, light industry, and justice.⁵ The supreme body of the Communist party, the Politburo, accepted only two women for the duration of its existence, one of whom Lyudmila Zhivkova, the daughter of the communist dictator Todor Zhivkov. Women constituted 25 *percent* of the Communist party leadership at the local level, but only 5.6 *percent* at the national level (Kostova 1998: 213). Such numbers indicate a lack of real commitment to women's equal political representation on the part of the communist leadership. The relatively large share of women who participated in the political life, Kostova argues, was simply a result of the socialist value system and the image it aspired to create. Many of the women in the Bulgarian National Assembly, for example, were weavers, seamstresses, heroes of socialist labor, and women with low-status jobs. The fact that these women did not have the experience to be taken seriously in important decision making was the exact reason they were chosen (Kostova 1998: 213).

⁴ During that time, the Bulgarian Council of Ministers numbered between 25-30 people, hence women's representation in government for the entire communist period remained in the single digits.

⁵ The judicial system in communist societies was not independent, being completely subservient to the Communist party. Thus, judicial positions were not considered to be part of the top leadership positions. Lacking real clout, the judicial branch was highly feminized.

Women's political involvement in the communist era is best described as women with no voice. While descriptive representation (in state legislatures) was even higher than in Western countries, one could hardly speak of substantive representation of women in these societies. The political agenda in communist countries was dictated by the party leadership which, as the Bulgarian case demonstrates, was almost exclusively comprised of men. Hence, women's issues were present on the agenda only when they were related to other, higher priority goals. The generous welfare provisions communist regimes are known for, for example, were guided primarily by pro-natalist policy which tied a growing population to industrial growth and increased production. The practice Kostova refers to of "electing" to parliament women with low-status jobs that cannot be taken seriously further speaks of the lack of symbolic representation of women. In other words, women at large hardly viewed female MPs as capable of changing the political agenda and influencing political outcomes. Women's presence in political decision-making bodies did not result in significant action. Just as communist regimes became ideologically hollow, commitment to women's emancipation and equal political representation remained but another meaningless slogan.

The Communist Legacy and the Post-Communist Context

The communist experience left a legacy of high level, yet passive political involvement of women. As Kostadinova points, women's political participation under the communist regime has had a dubious effect on access to power in the post-communist period. While women became skillful and knowledgeable in the public arena, she argues, they have remained relatively passive with regard to competing for and winning public office (Kostadinova 2003: 318). Such passivity can be explained by an all-dominant state that encouraged, in fact commanded, political participation, yet choked and persecuted any independent initiative.

Another legacy of communism is womanism, a term Harvey applies to contrast Western feminism from its East European counterpart (Harvey 2002).⁶ Womanism, as opposed to Western feminism, views the state, not men, as the oppressor. Under oppressive communist regimes, men were considered partners and fellow victims of state oppression. Hence, womanism rejects the feminist fight against male dominance. Womanism is also essentialist, recognizing biological and psychological gender differences. Such view stands in opposition to the regime's ideology set on erasing both class and gender distinctions. Thus, the fact that East European women overdress and overuse make-up is not simply an expression of bad taste, but a rebellious act against a state that constrains diversity and gender differences, an argument skillfully elaborated by Drakulic (Drakulic 1991). Furthermore, the feminist distinction between public and private, the former being the male domain while the latter the female, rings no bell for East European women who viewed the family and the private sphere as a shelter from the all-intrusive state. In a country where the public sphere is monopolized by the state, the private sphere provides freedom and independence, hence the widely acknowledged in research "retreat to the private" in communist societies. Lastly, womanism opposed communist women's organizations which were seen as yet another instrument of state oppression. Women's grassroots organizations, however, never emerged (at least not of the scale witnessed in Western societies) as women activists were attracted and absorbed by dissident organizations. Indeed, women played a prominent part in dissident activity throughout the region.⁷

The legacies of womanism and passivity were key in shaping the nature and degree of women's political participation in the post-communist context. A

⁶ Womanism, in its modern use, is a term coined by Alice Walker (Walker 1983) and is associated with the distinct experiences of African-American women and, more broadly, women of color. Also known as black feminism, womanism rejects "white" feminist thought which ignores and silences the voice of women of color.

⁷ A notable example in the Bulgarian case is the "Committee for the Defense of Ruse" a dissident organization founded by mothers who opposed pollution from a Romanian factory across the Danube river.

passive view of politics and womanist attitudes are directly responsible for women's political involvement characterized by (1) an aversion to political mobilization, (2) hostility towards a Western feminist agenda, and (3) negative attitudes towards affirmative action for women. The immediate result of such outlook was the abolition of gender quotas for state legislatures and a subsequent 50 *percent* drop of women's political representation (United Nations, 2005). Following the first post-communist elections, women's share of seats in the lower houses of the legislature plummeted to 4.6 *percent* in Romania and 10 *percent* in Czechoslovakia (Chiva 2005: 969). The proportion of women in the Bulgarian National Assembly in the 1990s ranged between 8.8 – 13.8 *percent* (Kostova 1998: 214).

Decreased descriptive representation is further coupled with lack of substantive representation. The transition context proved particularly harmful to women's representation and interests as women's issues were submerged to the "larger" issues of democracy and economic restructuring (Graham and Regulska 1997: 6). As Chiva argues, the transition from state socialism institutionalized the low representation of women (Chiva 2005: 971). Women's interests were bulked with those of larger groups such as the unemployed or the pensioners, preventing once again the emergence of distinct women's agenda. Hostility towards women's equality as a state project which recalls memories from the communist part, as well as rejection of the Western feminist discourse seen as irrelevant to the East European context, further hinder substantive representation and the emergence of a genuine discussion and understanding of women's issues.

Given such context and legacies, the absence of strong women's parties in post-communist political life is not surprising. Women's parties were found in few post-communist states, mostly within the Post-Soviet Republics (Krook and Rashkova, 2006). Only three of these parties – the Shamiram Women's Party of Armenia, the Lithuanian Women's Party, and the Women of Russia – managed to enter national parliaments in the early and mid 1990s. Women of Russia who sent

23 deputies to the Russian Duma in 1993 stands out as the most successful women party in Eastern Europe, while the Party of Bulgarian Women (PBW) has been one of the parties with the lowest registered performance (Krook and Rashkova, 2006). A relatively late-comer in transition politics, PBW was founded in 1997, right before the parliamentary elections where PBW scored a meager 0.38 *percent*. In the subsequent 2001 elections, PBW joined the National Movement Simeon II (NDSV) as a partner in a winning coalition, thereby gaining several parliamentary seats. This unique position allowed PBW to negotiate the nomination of a much larger number of female candidates (Kostadinova 2003:311), which resulted in NDSV exhibiting the highest percentage of women representation in Bulgarian post-communist politics (see Table 1). While PBW managed to preserve some parliamentary seats in the 2005-2009 parliament, it virtually disappeared from politics thereafter, failing to gather the necessary 7,000 signatures to register for the most recent 2011 local elections.⁸ Though succeeding in improving women's descriptive representation, PBW had no significant impact on women's substantive representation. PBW does not characterize itself as feminist, nor does it promote or draw support from feminist groups (Kostadinova 2003:310), thus providing a clear example of the legacy of womanism. The brief history of PBW further demonstrates that increased descriptive representation does not necessarily lead to improved substantive representation.

Although women's parties have remained weak and underdeveloped, the number of women occupying executive positions in Eastern Europe and in Bulgaria in particular has dramatically risen in recent years. In Slovenia, Croatia and the Baltic states, for example, 68 women headed 80 ministries and at least 122 women held 132 executive positions in the first decade of the transition (Forest 2011: 6). In Bulgaria, there were 11 women with rank of ministers and 27 women with rank of state secretary and deputy minister for the period 1989-

⁸ „Партията на жените а аут от изборите” (The Women's party is out of the elections), *Trud*, August 11, 2011.

1999, while these numbers for 1999-2009 period were 14 and 53 respectively (Forest 2011: 5). Female executives have further enjoyed greater access to “big” ministries such as Economy, Finance or Defense, in addition to the more traditional for women Environment and Social Care (health, education, social policy), as well as to other high rank political positions. For example, Bulgaria currently has female vice-president, European commissioner, parliamentary chair, co-chair of the governing party’s parliamentary group, minister of health, minister of environment, mayor of the capital city, head of UNESCO, and more. Although efforts to feminize the executive have had populist undertones at times, particularly in the case of Bulgaria and its current government⁹, the increased prominence of female executives is undeniable. It is yet to be seen whether such presence would have an effect on women’s substantive representation.

One of the most significant factors in improving women’s representation and placing gender equality high on the agenda has been the role of the EU (Anderson 2006). Legislative and policy transfers entailed by EU accession have resulted in a smaller gap in women representation between new member states and EU-15 average (Forest 2011: 5), as well as legal frameworks more sensitive to women’s issues. Along with regulatory changes, European values have been making headway, slowly changing rigid views of gender relations. The EU has been the key external force in increasing women’s representation, but it is domestic channels for political participation that have the greatest influence on the degree and quality of women’s involvement in politics. To see how national legislation has influenced the gender balance in Bulgarian politics, we next turn to the regulatory framework governing the establishment and operation of political parties.

Regulatory Framework for Political Parties

⁹ In Bulgaria, feminization has been used as an electoral strategy, Forest argues, both by NDSV and the current ruling party GERB, and means to overcome widespread corruption and meet European values (Forest 2011: 6).

A central role in the development of Bulgaria's political life and culture, and thus also in women's political involvement as independent political entities or part of already established political parties, is played by the Public Law. As in most modern democracies, the establishment and fate of political parties, as well as their participation in politics is governed by three key laws - the Law for Political Parties, the Electoral Law and the Constitution. While there is little in these laws that pertains to women *per se*, how political parties are regulated is key to the development of the party system, and thus indirectly to the male/female representation in it. Casal Bertoa et al. (forthcoming) note that the liberal principle of non-intervention in parties' internal affairs which existed since the very emergence of political parties as organizations is no longer dominant and parties have increasingly become subject to regulations. Most notable of these are the rules that concern the setting up and registration of political parties, as well as their financing and the control over the origin and the destination of parties' funds.

Bulgaria has fairly limited barriers to formation, as political parties may be established with the initiative of 50 Bulgarian citizens with voting rights (Art. 10. 1, Party Law 2009) who must adopt and publish in one national daily media a declaration of association, where the basic principles and goals of the political party are defined (Art. 10. 2-4). Within three months of the adoption of the declaration, political parties have to hold a constituent meeting with at least 500 supporters and adopt a charter of the political party to be signed by 500 founders (Art. 12 & 13). Party organization is left relatively open, and unlike the constitutional ban of organizing parties on an ethnic principle (Art.11.4, Constitution)¹⁰, the party law offers a provision encouraging political parties to create their own youth and women's organizations (Art. 20. 2). This right is

¹⁰ A ban that has not effectively prevented an ethnic Turkish party, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) from becoming one of the largest and longest-lasting political actors in the country. For more on the registration and constitutionality of MRF, see, Venelin Ganey, "The Bulgarian Constitutional Court, 1991-1997: A Success Story in Context," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 55 (4), (Jun., 2003): 597-611.

exercised by most of Bulgaria's political parties which perhaps explains the short-lived Party of Bulgarian Women and the non-existence of other attempts to mobilize around women representation since.

Bulgarian political parties enjoy a substantial amount of public funding. Each political party that has received more than 1 *percent* of the vote in the last parliamentary elections, is entitled to receive 5 *percent* of the minimum national wage for each vote that it has received (Art. 27. 1), which currently amounts to €6.15 per vote. Given that the electoral threshold for parliamentary entry is 4 *percent*, the state subsidy allows even electorally weaker parties to exist and pursue political goals. Parties are also granted state owned premises for rent (Art. 31. 1) and they can get bank loans up to two-thirds of their accounted income of the preceding year (Art. 23. 3). Political parties are further entitled to free media use if they participate in elections.

Perhaps the largest stumbling block in women's attempts to representation are the changing requirements for electoral parties. Since 2005, a signature and a deposit requirement for all those wishing to compete in national elections were instituted by the Electoral Law. Parties and coalitions needed to provide 5000 supporting signatures and pay respectively, a 20000 BGN (around 10000€) and a 40000 BGN electoral deposit. Only parties that acquire more than 1 *percent* of the national vote get reimbursed. The barriers of entry were put even higher with the 2009 amendments to the Electoral Law (for more detail, see Rashkova and Spirova, 2012). These developments have had the largest impact on the smallest political parties - those with less than 1 *percent* electoral support, within which falls the attempted Party of Bulgarian Women.

The rights of women are most directly stated in the Constitution of Bulgaria. The most prominent right, that of equality among all persons, regardless of their race, ethnicity, sex, or social origin is established in Art. 6.2. The family, motherhood and children are also constitutionally protected by the State (Art. 14) and women and men are said to have equal rights and obligations

in matrimony and family (Art. 46. 2). While the question of equality and non-discrimination are guaranteed by the Bulgarian law, and here not only by the Constitution, but also by the Labour Law, the Family Law, the Law for Protection against Discrimination and others, Bulgaria has not adopted any special legislation concerning gender equality yet (Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, 2012). As laid down in the National Strategy for the Encouragement of Gender Equality for the Period 2009-2015 (NSEGE), a large part of the national regulatory frame on gender equality has been implemented as part of the adoption of the *acquis communautaire*. During the harmonization process, national norms were made conducive to EU norms on gender equality and equal treatment (NSEGE, 8). The gender equality project admits however, that despite the existence of legal rules on equal treatment between men and women present in different laws, the conditions that guarantee such equality are not yet present in every sphere of the public life (NSEGE, 12). The policy makers state that some of the deficiencies are the lack of a mechanism for coordination of a unitary national policy on equality, as well as the fact that specific legislation for the achievement of gender equality is not enacted to date. These concerns resonate in the words of our interviewees through whose stories we analyze the situation of women in Bulgarian politics, with a special emphasis on the women on the *Right*.

Post-communist Women of the Right

The representation of women in post-communist Bulgaria changed mostly in numbers in comparison to communist times. The number of women involved in politics significantly lowered, especially during the first ten years of the transition (see Table 1). Between 1991 and 2000, there were on average 12.3 *percent* women, most of whom were part of the Bulgarian Socialist Party, the successor of the Bulgarian Communist Party. After 2001, however, center right and right parties begin to send female politicians to parliament. The peak was undeniably achieved by the NDSV, whose MPs in 2001 were 40.5 *percent* female. As we discuss earlier in the paper, this development is likely due to the fact that NDSV

which was a movement at its establishment, used the mandate of the Party of Bulgarian Women (PBW) to register for the parliamentary election. Other parties of the *Right* followed suit and we see the Bulgarian National Union (BNS), the United Democratic Forces (ODS), the Democrats for Strong Bulgaria (DSB), and later the Blue Coalition stage a significant amount of female legislators. Even the extremely nationalist party, ATAKA, included a significant amount of female candidates on their party lists, a relatively large percent of who were elected. The fact that in the last decade not only left parties have placed women in parliament may signify that a process of awareness about gender and gender equality has begun. However, the increase in the descriptive representation of women is still far away from women being represented in a substantive manner. This is evident not only from the fact that Bulgaria has no specific gender equality legislation, no gender quotas, be it on national or intra-party level, but also through the accounts of female politicians of the *Right*.

Table 1. Women Representation in Bulgarian Politics, 1991-2009

Political Party	1991	1994	1997	2001	2005	2009
BSP / Coalition for Bulgaria	18.9	16.8	10.3			
				10.4	18.3	17.5
BBB	--	7.7	0.0	--	--	--
People's Union	--	5.6	--	--	--	--
Euroleft	--	--	14.3	--	--	--
NDSV	--	--	--	40.5	37.7	--
BNS	--	--	--	--	7.7	--
UDF/ ODS	10.0	8.7				
			11.7	17.6	20.0	--
DSB	--	--	--	--	23.5	--
Blue Coalition	--	--	--	--	--	13.3
RZS	--	--	--	--	--	20.0
MRF	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.0	8.8	7.9
ATAKA	--	--	--	--	4.8	14.3
GERB	--	--	--	--	--	27.6
<i>Parliament (total)</i>	<i>13.8</i>	<i>12.9</i>	<i>10.4</i>	<i>26.7</i>	<i>20.0</i>	<i>20.4</i>
<i>Government</i>				<i>11.8</i>	<i>16.7</i>	<i>23.5</i>

Sources: Kostadinova (2003) and own calculations.

To explore the issue of substantive representation we interviewed two influential female politicians, one a former leader of the center-right Agrarian party, the other as of later a co-chair and chair of the parliamentary group of the most right

political formation in Bulgaria – Democrats for Strong Bulgaria (DSB). Our interviewees were chosen based on their political popularity and significant role in post-communist politics, their rightist political views, and of course their gender. While the accounts of the two women sometimes exhibit significant differences, both of them show that substantive representation of women in Bulgaria is still lacking. And contrary to more developed countries where feminist scholars would claim this turf for the *Left*, in Bulgaria, and perhaps in most former-communist states, the parties on the *Left* are no more representative of women, than are parties on the *Right*. In fact, all female prime ministers and head of states elected or designated in post-communist Eastern Europe have been recruited to the center-Right (Forest 2011: 19)

Men and women are equal. Both of our interviewees stated this in one way or another. Yet, one admitted that despite her belief gender equality in Bulgaria exists only on paper and when she entered politics she was the only female in a high-level political post within her party and the only female party leader (Moser, 2012). Anastasia Moser, the daughter of the well-known agrarian leader G.M. Dimitrov who sought political asylum in the US because of persecution by the communist regime, emigrated to the States in 1962 where she studied at Georgetown to follow a career in the World Bank and later on in the Voice of America radio station covering the fall of the communist regime and the transition to democracy in Eastern Europe. Soon after 1990 she was invited to return to Bulgaria and take an active role in the political life of the Agrarian Political Party (BAPU)¹¹. After some convincing, as Moser never had political aspirations herself, she and her husband relocated back to Bulgaria in her own words “because we were all curious” (Moser, 2012). What was supposed to be “only a few years”

¹¹ The Bulgarian Agrarian People’s Union (BAPU) was founded in 1899. A major player in inter-war politics, BAPU was subjected to communist power for the period 1944-1989, formally participating in government but enjoying no *de facto* power and independence. Following the collapse of the communist regime, BAPU split in two sections – BAPU-State (later BAPU-United) and BAPU “Nikola Petkov” (later BAPU). BAPU-State included the faction that collaborated with the communists, while BAPU “Nikola Petkov” united agrarians who opposed the communist regime. Moser became the leader of the latter faction.

turned into almost a 20-year political career, for the majority of which Moser was the leader of the Agrarian Party. As a politician, she sees her largest contribution to keeping the centrist-right position of her party and not allowing it to sway left or right or to be engulfed by the many phony agrarian parties which mushroomed in Bulgaria during the first decade of the transition period.

As a female politician, Moser's most significant contribution is in increasing the awareness of gender equality. As evident from the other interview and also from Moser's account of the state of the art in Bulgarian society, such awareness is, at best, still very modest. In her opinion, what shows how democratic and advanced a country is is the percentage of women in politics and in high-level positions in general, yet, she admits that while this percentage in Bulgaria has increased, it is still quite low. Moreover, Moser notes, that it is the mentality and the perception of equality that need to change. Bulgaria still has a very patriarchic culture, where "women are still running around men, slaving, instead of establishing an equal partnership in marriage and in the family" (Moser, 2012), a trend also seen in the political sphere. During the mid nineties, as part of the evidence for the low substantive representation, there was an attempt by a female parliamentarian to start a female lobby group within the parliament. Yet, Moser remembers, that men, who "do not give up their spots easily", "took their bags and left." While unsuccessful, Moser commends that women must be more assertive and must stand up for their rights and for equality, a point she repeatedly emphasizes. The majority of the lobbying for women in Bulgaria is done by feminist NGOs, and in emphasizing her position that change comes with time and experience, Moser noted that whether they succeed or not is not the most important, what is, is that they are there. One of the recurring factors which would lead to more gender equality is a change in perception. While Moser recognized the importance of the law, she argued that respecting the law and having a mentality and perception sensitive to gender issues are more important in achieving equality. To our question, what does she think will contribute to a

change in mentality and change in perception, or in other words bring the end of the denial era and start the era of awareness of rights (be they gender rights, minority rights, or gay rights), Moser stated time, upbringing, example and will. She emphasized the need for individuality and independence, both characteristics which were persecuted and punished for during the reign of Communism. One of the steps forward in this often slow and hardly visible process of change is the greater openness to appointing females to leadership positions within her own Agrarian Party, but also within other political parties as well. As Moser accounts, when she first came to politics and the political leadership of different intra-party institutions was chosen, no female candidates were ever nominated, until one day she asked the men 'why not propose a woman for this post, why not nominate me?' Her bold move at that time started an avalanche for women's future role in Bulgarian politics. After leading the Agrarian Party for over a decade, Moser is now succeeded by another woman, who won the internal party election with 80 to 20 *percent* to the male contender for the post. Many other political parties, especially other centrist and right parties, have also included a number of female politicians in key posts. Continuing the communist legacy, no left party has had a female leader up to now (Moser, 2012). Another point of distinction between women of the *Left* and women of the *Right*, is that the latter more often occupy more powerful positions while in parliament – being members of the Foreign Affairs Committee or the Constitutional Changes Committee, for example. As in every other aspect of life exposure and networking are part of the factors which determine influence. For female politicians, this turns out to be no different. Moser, who as a leader of a party, was included in all "hard" policy committees sees this as a channel through which she enforced her influence in Bulgarian politics and also on pushing for higher women representation, encouraging female politicians to step up and apply for leadership posts, as well as increase public awareness on gender equality in general.

Our second interview is exactly with a woman who stepped up to the challenged and worked her way up to a number of leadership positions. With an over 20-year uninterrupted parliamentary career, Ekaterina Mihailova is one of the veteran politicians in the post-communist political arena. Having worked as a lawyer in the city of Pazardzhik for a decade before the changes, Mihailova started her political activism by founding a branch of the Association for Free Elections which monitored the first free elections following the fall of the communist regime. In 1991 she was invited by the democratic opposition to run for parliament. Ranking 4th in the party list for her region after a rigorous internal selection process, Mihailova entered parliament and has been an MP since. She has occupied a number of important positions, including chair of the parliamentary group of ODS, co-chair and chair of the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), and currently co-chair of DSB and chair of its parliamentary group.¹² Mihailova has been a member of a number of parliamentary committees, such as the Legal Affairs Committee and the Committee on Constitutional Changes, and has participated in drafting key legislative proposals pertaining to the judicial system, the electoral system, political parties, and more.

Mihailova identifies ODS's rule (1997-2001) as the high point in her political career. As a chair of ODS's parliamentary group at the time, Mihailova's most important task was preserving the parliamentary majority – a challenging task indeed, considering the fact that the previous two parliaments have dissolved with early elections, and a task she succeeded in fulfilling. Her greatest contribution to politics, again during the government of ODS, is her effort and the effort of her governing party to reorient the country towards EU and NATO memberships. Mihailova sees herself first and foremost as a *Right* politician. The core principles of her position as such are the protection of private property and the defense of the national interest understood as preserving national sovereignty.

¹² ODS was a coalition led by the UDF, while DSB is a faction that emerged from the UDF. Hence, Mihailova has not changed allegiance to her party or political views.

Mihailova does not hold a strong identity as a female politician. In fact, she insists on being judged by her skills not her gender. "I believe that one should occupy a position not because of their gender but based on qualities", she argues, "I would be rather insulted to know that I've been elected to parliament only because I am a woman" (Mihailova 2012). Hence, Mihailova is a strong opponent of gender quotas, subscribing to the general negative view towards affirmative action for women that we noted above. Similarly, she does not envision a different role for male and female politicians, but points to differences between the two. Female politicians, Mihailova holds, are more moderate and tolerant, abstaining from rude behavior. While rudeness is not tolerated at a general level, such behavior has been exhibited on rare occasions by male politicians. Furthermore, women are less likely to engage in corrupt practices. Negotiating an unregulated dealing is harder with a woman than it is with a man. "Somehow, I don't envision sitting at a table with a drink and salad, talking over some scheme" Mihailova humorously points, "it is a question of different behavior" (Mihailova 2012).

According to Mihailova, the question of gender equality does not stand in Bulgarian politics. In almost all post-communist governments, she argues, we notice the promotion of women to high posts, not simply as numbers. In the parliamentary committees in which Mihailova takes part, for example, women constitute at least a third of the members. And in her party, women have a serious presence both at the local and national level. Equality is one of the legacies of the previous regime. "To a large extent Bulgaria is blessed in this respect", states Mihailova, "this is one of the good things we inherited from socialism" (Mihailova 2012). Given such legacy, it is not surprising no true feminist parties emerged in Bulgaria and feminist organizations have not flourished. At the same time, Mihailova notes that women are always expected to deliver more – give a bit more effort, have a bit more knowledge, be a bit more confident. According to Mihailova this applies not only to Bulgaria but everywhere

and especially in politics, which is traditionally a male domain. There is an assumption men are those who should lead political and social processes, therefore women are expected to deliver more in order to be accepted as a leaders. "It is not that women are looked down upon", Mihailova argues, "though I have seen on several occasions such attitude – spiteful remarks and attempts to humiliate female politicians" (Mihailova 2012).

While Mihailova does not see an issue of gender equality in politics, she immediately admits to serious problems at a broader social level. There is pronounced discrimination in employment practices – hiring women, particularly young women who are yet to become mothers, as well as lower wages for women. Such practices, Mihailova argues, have led to the total feminization of some professions. Judges, for example, because of the low pay are primarily women which is also a problem. Those are hard professions, Mihailova states, where male presence is needed. Another major problem on a global scale is women trafficking, forced prostitution, and violence.

These are serious problems that, according to Mihailova, need to be addressed at the legislative and executive level. In contrast to Moser, Mihailova does not discuss the need for a change in mentality. Instead, she views legal action and institutions as the driving forces for addressing women's issues. In fact, Mihailova and Moser were the first to introduce a non-discrimination law for women which, unfortunately, failed to gather enough support. Instead, a general non-discrimination law was passed by NDSV. Mihailova argues this is not enough as it bulks women's issues with other problems and minority groups that gain greater priority.

Mihailova does not expect the emergence of strong feminist organizations. In addition to the communist legacy, another reason for that is the existence of women's organizations at party level. While DSB does not have a women's organization (but offers training for female politicians), Mihailova views positively such organizations as they create an opportunity for cooperation with other

women organization of European parties, thus an extra channel for cooperation. The feminist discourse, however, is very far from us Mihailova states. Overall, she sees gender relations evolving in a positive direction.

Our interviews indicate the presence of gender inequalities and discrimination both in politics and at a broader social level. At the same time, there is lack of awareness for such inequalities. While women notice discriminate behavior, they do not identify it as such. This lack of awareness makes it hard for women to organize and act to eradicate inequalities. Thus, we can argue that substantive representation is rather limited. While women in post-communist politics have been much more influential than their communist predecessors, they rarely champion initiatives that promote women's interests. The interviews further confirm the legacies of passivity and womanism. Recognizing the women's passive behavior, Moser repeatedly argues that women need to take action on their own. Mihailova's disapproval of gender quotas, in turn, recalls the negative attitudes towards affirmative action. Resonating with womanist essentialism, Mihailova ascribes inequalities in the political sphere to differences in gender behavior. Legislative and institutional instruments are an important first step to addressing gender equality. However, unless the change of perception and mentality that Moser speaks of takes place both in the minds of men and women, substantive representation of women is bound to remain weak.

On the question of the role of women from the different ends of the political spectrum, we can provisionally say, that while the women in the *Left* outnumber the women on the *Right*, the later have had a much more marking political path, and this is largely due to the fact that they take much more influential posts. And while substantive representation of women as the term is understood in the West is still at its footsteps in the Bulgarian political reality, the substantive presence or the substantive position of women is definitely there.

Conclusion

One of the key components in modern day studies of democratic development and the quality of democracy is the study of (in)equality and more particularly, the presence of minority groups in political institutions. A core question for gender scholars has been the representation of women in politics. What started out as a quest on tracing the *descriptive* representation of women, and the use of the critical mass theory in explaining when women matter, has now evolved into the more sophisticated study of *substantive* representation which puts an emphasis not so much on numbers but on deeds. In that vein, as part of the novel way of looking at substantive representation proposed in Celis and Childs (2011), by changing our focus from women on the Left to conservative women, we examine the representation of women on the Right, presenting the case of Bulgaria.

As an East-European country where *conservatism* and *gender equality* are still terms in-the-making, Bulgaria exhibits an unexpected perhaps by Western scholars trend – one in which the number of conservative women is significantly smaller than the number of socialist women, yet, the former have and are making a larger mark in the country's daily politics than have done many women of the *Left*. Through the accounts of two conservative women, our paper shows that while still a minority, women on the *Right* have held much more influential positions and have had a larger say in key political developments which have been at stake. A few examples are that these women have not only held key leadership positions in their respective political parties, but they have also participated in decision-making committees of Bulgaria's foreign affairs, Constitutional amendments, and judicial oversight. Our interviewee's accounts present an extremely interesting case, as albeit both being members of the *Right*, they show divergent positions on the status of gender equality in the country. One clearly admits that gender equality is indeed still only on paper and the attitude and perception of equal rights is still missing in the social mindset (Moser 2012), while the other maintains that women and men are equal and at the same

time claims that the former are fewer, receive lesser pay, and are expected to work twice as hard to deliver (Mihailova 2012). As a result, we conclude that substantive representation in Bulgaria is still at a very nascent stage, but what we observe at the moment is substantive presence, which we argue is a necessary condition for changing social attitude, acceptance, and awareness of (in)equality. For the future, we would like to encourage gender scholars to pay particular attention to the countries of the East, since while in developed democracies we are already at the stage of what and by whom is being represented, in new democracies, we are still grappling with the question is there any inequality? We believe that a key component to understanding the East European reality and the status not only of gender equality but also of equality among ethnic minorities or between people with different sexual orientation, is the unpacking of the process of awareness and the key factors and players that contribute to its existence.

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