

Political parties in the pillory



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Stup Srama (Pillory)

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Despite electoral reforms dating back to 2000, the number of women elected to Croatia’s parliament and local authorities remains at around a quarter or fewer. Since 2008, political parties have been legally obliged to include at least 40% of each sex in their electoral lists – but this quota is widely ignored.

Since 2007, the Stup srama campaign, run by the feminist organisation CESI, has been naming and shaming those political parties that persist in ignoring this equality legislation, by setting up ‘pillars of shame’ in the streets during each election campaign.

CESI also operates a website that publishes the worst examples of sexist or discriminatory speech by politicians and other public figures, and every month gives the public the chance to vote for the most outrageous among them.

The campaign is thought to be one factor that has contributed to a small improvement in gender representation in recent elections, as well as a higher public awareness of the issue

Electoral reform takes women's representation halfway

Changes in Croatia's electoral system in 2000 increased women's representation in politics, with the share of women in parliament rising from 4-7% to 22%. However during the 2000s the position stagnated, with 18-21% of women in the parliament, 10-29% in the government and 7-21% in municipal councils. Currently there are 26% of women in parliament, 19% in the government, 16% in municipal councils, 23% in city councils and 21% in county assemblies. Only 7% of municipal mayors and 8% of city mayors are women.

In 2001 a further measure to enhance women's participation in politics was introduced, which allows parties to claim a 10% higher state subsidy for each representative of the underrepresented sex – i.e. each woman – elected. Finally in 2008 40% gender quotas were introduced: political parties are obliged to include at least 40% of each sex in their candidate lists, subject to a transitional period of three election cycles.

However these laws have not brought about significant improvements in practice. While the share of female candidates is rising, they are generally put forward by smaller political parties which have no realistic chance of winning a mandate. Women are also usually given lower positions on the electoral lists. The political will to truly implement gender quotas is also lacking, as was clearly seen at the last local elections, when the introduction of fines for political parties which do not respect the gender quotas was postponed until the local elections in 2017 and the parliamentary elections in 2019.

Putting the parties in the pillory

Given this situation, visibility campaigns in pre-election periods are called for, to warn the public of this problem and advocate change. "Electoral law needs to be changed so that electoral commissions at all levels reject lists that do not respect the legislation on balanced representation of women and men," says the feminist organisation CESI (Centar za edukaciju, savjetovanje i istraživanje – Centre for Education, Counselling and Research).

In 2007 CESI designed and initiated the Stup srama ('Pillory') awareness-raising campaign, which has since become a regular activity. The campaign has been organised four times so far – in the run-up to the 2007 and 2011 parliamentary elections, the 2009 local elections and the 2013 local elections.

The campaign's main activity is a street performance in which CESI presents to the public a pillory – literally a 'pillar of shame' – which lists all the political parties that have failed to respect the 40% gender quota of women in their electoral lists. This piece of theatre has become a pre-election tradition in Zagreb, but has also been organised in smaller towns by CESI's partner organisations such as Split, Vukovar and Poreč. The action, which relies on CESI's previously analysing all the parties' electoral lists, is attractive to the public and the media and it usually gains a lot of public and media attention.

A second campaigning activity is publicising the most sexist and discriminatory statements made by politicians and other public figures. CESI has created a Stup srama webpage on the [portal](#), where it uploads such utterances. Every month, readers' votes are used to compile a 'best of' list.

The campaign is funded by the Croatian Office for Gender Equality, the French and American embassies to Croatia, the National Foundation for Civil Society Development and the City of Zagreb.

Stup srama has several strong features: it is small in scale but attractive to the public, and has been covered extensively by the media. It is held regularly before each election, and is accompanied by a website containing sexist and discriminatory statements of politicians and persons from public life, which is updated daily. Though it started in Zagreb, it has been spread to other towns by CESI's partner organisations.

Women's representation improves

The Stup srama campaign has certainly raised the public visibility of problems related to gender quotas. Without it, the importance of gender-balanced participation in politics would probably be absent from the public agenda during election campaigns.

It is hard to say whether the campaign has any impact on political parties and whether they are selecting more women candidates in order to improve their appeal to female electors. However it is true that recent years have seen some improvement in women's participation in local elections. Between 2005 and 2013 the share of women in municipal councils nearly doubled from 8.4% to 16.1%; in city councils it rose by 44% to 22.6% and in county assemblies by 42% to 20.7%. There is also a small increase in the number of female mayors: in municipalities the share rose from 4.9% in 2009 to 6.8% in 2013 and in cities from 4.7% in 2009 to 7.9% in 2013, although they are elected in direct elections.

At parliamentary level, the share of women elected in the 2011 elections was 19.8%. One year later the share of women in parliament rose to 25% and it is currently at a high point of 26%. There has been no improvement in the number of female ministers.

Contacts/Further Information

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Further information

[Libela list of sexist and discriminatory utterances](#)



[CESI annual report 2011](#)



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