

National School of Political Science and Public Administration, Bucharest (Romania)

Faculty of Political Science

DOCTORAL THESIS

Women's political representation in Romania, in the context of Europeanization

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RESUME

Women's political representation in Romania is most often reflected in a negative matter, based on statistics that show the difference between Romania and Western developed countries, as well as the less developed ones. *The Global Economic Forum* yearly classification on gender gaps in various sectors puts Romania in a poor position concerning *women's political empowerment*. When calculating women's percentage in Parliament, ministry positions and the Head of State or Government (President or Prime Minister), Romania occupies the 113th world position from a total of 140 assessed countries. From 2006 until 2015, this place varied, but women's political participation in Romania always received the worst place, compared with women's 'economical participation' (place

50 in 2015), 'access to education' (place 64 in 2015), and 'health' (place 42 in 2015)¹. Among the macro-sectors of the public domain (politics, economics, health, education), we can conclude that women's discrimination in Romania is most present in the field of politics.

This type of statistics deals only with the actual participation of women in political positions, respectively what I call in this research as 'a descriptive representation'. A second category, considered more important by certain authors, is the agenda of gender interests: issues that mostly concern women such as domestic violence, maternity and raising children, care services for dependent adults, gender pay gap, workplace discrimination, including sexual harassment, reproductive and sexual rights etc. All these are included in the concept of 'substantive representation' which I operate throughout the research study.

Both categories of representation were defined based on the typologies of political representation identified by Hanna Pitkin in her work *The Concept of Representation* (1967): 1. Formal Representation, when the representative is authorized to act for someone else (e.g., as a result of elections); 2. Descriptive Representation, when the representative has descriptive characteristics similar to the representatives (such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, social class); 3. Symbolic Representation, when the representative acts as a symbol for the representative or the nation itself (e.g. Head of the State, ambassador etc.); and 4. Substantive Representation, defined by the actions of the representative on the behalf of the citizens they represent.

I made the choice to deepen my analysis on two categories of representation – *Descriptive* and *Substantive* – because I consider them to best highlight women's political representation and its implications, as numerous studies show. I also tackle Symbolic representation whenever such implications arise throughout my research.

In order to have a clearer vision of women's political representation in Romania, I chose to study more than one parliamentary term. This can provide a better understanding of differences from one legislature to another, and also can assure that the results of my research are solid, accurate and ready to be used by any theoretician or practitioner who needs this type of information.

¹ The Global Gender Gap Index – 2015 (pp. 302-303), <http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GGGR2015/cover.pdf>, accesat noiembrie 2016

The research on the political representation at national level collected data from four parliamentary legislatures (2000 to 2016)². These were chosen in relation to the European Union membership (1st of January 2007): two parliamentary terms during pre-accession period and two during post-accession period. Regarding women's political participation in the European Parliament, I used data starting with 2005, the year of the first official Romanian observers, and until the European elections in 2014.

I propose two hypothesis for my research: 1. There is an influence of the europeanisation process, understood as a top-down approach, in regard to women's political representation in Romania. This influence was limited by a series of internal or external factors; 2. There is a connection between the presence of women as Members of Parliament and a political agenda for women (the connection between descriptive and substantive representation).

The objectives of my research are as follows:

1. Identifying the characteristics and particularities of women's political representation in Romania, in relation to the general theories about women's representation.
2. Analyzing the factors that influence, in the context of the europeanisation process, women's presence as political decision makers, at national level compared with European level;
3. Identifying and quantifying political interest for women's agenda;
4. Ways of using Europe's / European Union's resources in the area of political representation for women and in promoting and sustaining a political agenda for women;
5. Who were the political actors in the Romanian Parliament, how did they represent women's interests, what were the themes they tackled.

In following these research objectives, I use a double approach: one comes from the feminist political theories that favor women's political representation. The second one comes from the constructivist-institutionalist theories of the europeanisation process. I will explain below each approach and what I extracted as their relevant application for my research on women's

² Until June 2016

political representation in Romania in the pre-accession and post-accession to the European Union.

Feminist political theories related to women's descriptive representation gave me a series of arguments that allowed me to theorize answers to some questions that are still controversial for the Romanian political arena: Why do we need women in positions of political power? Does gender matter or the actions of our political representatives are more important? Various authors (Sapiro, 1981, Young, 1990, Phillips, 1995, Mansbridge, 1999, Dovi, 2008 and others) offer us strong arguments favoring women in politics, as a social group that suffered historical discrimination related to political and civil rights' recognition (along other groups, especially racial and ethnic ones) and is still facing structural obstacles in accessing positions of political power. In short, these arguments are:

1. Gender justice argument. Women represent the majority of citizens in most societies, therefore they should be at least half of the political decision makers (the absence or the under-participation of women, as well as other racial or ethnic groups, is the main proof of everlasting injustice and structural discrimination that maintain certain individuals, on the basis of biological and cultural characteristics, far away from power spheres);
2. Success models argument. Women's participation in the Parliament and other local, regional or super-national legislative bodies increases aspirations for other women who gain self-trust and self-confidence and who project higher careers than their mothers and grandmothers. It also modifies gender roles expectations, deeply rooted in society;
3. Legitimacy argument. Descriptive representation increases legitimacy for democratic institutions, as more people are more likely to identify with their representatives;
4. Transformation argument. Participation of representatives from disadvantaged groups allows institutions to undergo a process of structural transformation that will make them better respond to the needs and interests of the disadvantaged groups and, in general, make them more inclusive and more democratic; and
5. Common women's interests argument. One of the most debated arguments in literature, it claims there are gender interests shared by women beyond their differences due to other criteria: race, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, age, education, etc.

On the other hand, I look also to the objections identified in representation theories related to women's political presence in decision making. Jane Mansbridge (1999) highlights some of these objections, such as: "talent loss" that might take place when selections are made by using criteria of representation for certain social groups and not strictly based on the qualities of the representatives; the difficulties in determining what social groups need to be represented and in what proportion, and last, the problem of essentialism according to which there is erroneous to homogenize the represented social groups, when in fact inside the groups we find differences, sometimes fundamental, that cannot be ignored. Throughout my research, I raise also the 'classical' objections used against women's representation, among which the most important is the classical liberalism perspective that considers all citizens to be equal, no matter their gender, race, ethnicity, social class. It is what Anne Phillips (1995) describes to be 'the politics of ideas': all that matters are the ideas of the representatives grouped in political platforms, and not who they are, based on their descriptive characteristics (socio-cultural or biological).

As regards the women's *substantive representation*, I try to clarify some theoretical controversies before starting the actual research. First, there is the question of identifying women's common interests/needs, in spite of their major differences caused by education, income, age, residential area etc. In relation to this, the question of the "essentialism" I mention before arises: When we refer to 'women', who do we actually address? Which voices matter more, which ones are more important, and who decides to address these ones and not others?

The universal way in which "women" as a group and their problems were defined by the white occidental feminists from the second wave received fundamental critics from black, LBT, Muslim, post-colonialist and post-cultural feminists, who questioned the way women's experiences can be equated and to what extent the experiences of white, heterosexual, middle class, occidental or non-disabled women can be used as reference in the analysis on the condition of all women. After I present these controversies, the theoretical position I embrace throughout the research is the one of a 'strategical essentialism', a concept developed by some post-colonial authors (Spivak, 1993, Jhappan, 1996) to illustrate that, in spite of major differences between women or between racial or ethnic groups members, sometimes is in their benefit to temporarily assume a simplified identity in order to pursue their own interests. However, this doesn't mean that this simplified identity will define them forever and in all

situations, or that intersectionality of their identities doesn't exist. In this respect, I consider Sylvia Walby's observation (1992) to be reasonable: denying women's discrimination as a group would mean denying patriarchy itself. In spite of gender identity interaction with other group identities, a historical and transcultural continuity can be identified in the way "woman" and "man" categories were interpreted, enough to make generalizations about them in a geographic, historical and cultural context.

In addition to the section dedicated to theories about women's political representation, I also look to the relation between *descriptive representation* (women's presence in decision making) and *substantive representation* (the political agenda of gender interests), since this is one of the guiding line in my research about the Romanian context. There are some aspects I highlight from theories, as for example: besides having a critical mass of women in Parliament (or other spaces of power), it is more important to have critical actors, both women and men, that put issues concerning women on the public agenda. Empirical studies reveal that, most often in practice, these critical actors are represented by women. Therefore, women's participation in politics is important for putting on the public agenda issues otherwise marginalized or ignored by a Parliament with a masculine monopoly. Other factors are also related to this connection: affiliation to a political party, party regulations or ideological identity, since politicians from the left are more concerned about women's interests due to their egalitarian ideology and their regard for social inclusion of oppressed groups (Childs, 2006, Celis, 2008, Childs and Krook, 2009).

The study of women's political representation in Romania between 2000 and 2016 could not have been done without taking into consideration the possible influence of the Europeanization process. In the middle of the analyzed period, more specifically in 2007, Romania makes an important step with the adhesion to the European Union, with consequences in many areas. In regards to equal opportunities, the European Union was considered "the most progressive gender regime in the world" (Mushaben, 2013). The political system created at EU level in the last decades affects the lives of citizens from the member states, including gender relations. However, the pressure to adapt legislation exercised by the European Union over a member state, may vary from one area to another. As certain authors explain (Walby, 2004, Verloo, 2007), while EU has a considerable power in regulating the economy and the labour market, its power over other relevant areas of gender relations is limited.

Similar to the field of gender based violence, when it comes to women's representation in decision making, the Europeanization wasn't diffused through the use of legal compulsory instruments ("hard law") which would have conditioned the accession of our country by adapting the *acquis communautaire* or which, after the accession, would have caused infringement proceedings as consequence of violating European legal norms. The European influence on women's presence in decision making, as far as it was manifested, was spread by policies focused on promoting norms and through a learning process (Forest and Lombardo, 2015). More specifically, the transformation pressure coming from the European Union towards the national level was made by awareness campaigns, meeting, conferences, gathering comparative data creating indicators, encouraging best practices models (Kantola, 2009, p. 384). This is why, when analyzing the Europeanization influence on political representation in Romania, I choose constructivist type theories. They focus on the learning process and the positive model that the European Union/Europe has in the field of women's political representation, which political actors from national level can relate to. In the research I also look to the limits of the European influence caused by the diminishing European interests for this issue, after the implementation of the *gender mainstreaming* approach. Some authors (Stratigati, 2005, Verloo, 2007, Jacquot, 2015) show how the EU policy initiated in the '90s by which gender equality had to be implemented in all the areas, programs, documents and to all European levels of decision making (the gender mainstreaming), not only had an uncertain impact in several aspects (in the absence of clear indicators to measure results and in the absence of financed objectives) but also concluded to the "wrong interpretation": ending positive actions in various areas, such in politics (Verloo, 2007, pp. 53). The issue of women's political representation decreased at European level during the '2000s due to the fact that women's proportion within the national legislative bodies in most European member states from "old Europe" increased, exceeding 30 % for most of them. The European debate on gender quotes shifted to the economic sector, with a directive proposal that could enforce at least 40% women on boards for listed companies.

My research on women's political representation in Romania, in the view of feminist theories but also of the previously mentioned Europeanization theories, follows these two types of representation: descriptive and substantive.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The research is composed of two sections: one dedicated to the descriptive representation of women in Romania, the other to the substantive one (also including a content analysis of the way in which the descriptive representation of women is discussed by parliamentarians).

The first section, dedicated to the descriptive representation, is an explanatory journey in which I analyze various theories and factors influencing Romanian women's presence in politics in order to discover what are the causes of the difference between women's proportion in the European Parliament (higher) and women's numbers in the national parliament (lower).

Amongst various institutional, cultural, socioeconomic and political factors, identified in different studies as influencing women's political representation, I selected four possible factors. I found two of them in similar studies conducted in other countries, and the other two are based on characteristics of national / European elections in our country. For theory verification I used (and in some cases, I processed) official data published by the Permanent Electoral Authority, Central Electoral Office for European or national elections, euro-barometers, data bases of the European Commission and the European Parliament, data published on the Chamber of Deputies' website, plus other sources which I quote throughout my paper. All of this data is featured in connection with a content analysis on party statutes.

The second section, dedicated to women's substantive representation, includes a content analysis using the NVivo10 Program for the parliamentary transcripts (political declarations, legislative proposals, plenary debates over certain legislative proposals and other official documents). Documents were selected from the Romanian Parliament's Archive published on the website (the www.cdep.ro), using 'women' as search term.

I didn't engage the search with any pre-definition or list of issues concerning women. I excluded texts with sporadic and aleatory references to women, that were either citing individual cases or including women in general enumerations.

During 2012-2016 legislature, I used the website www.senat.ro to search senators' political declarations because it is the only period in which transcripts from the Senate were not published on the website www.cdep.ro.

Throughout my research, I take into account that political actors are fully aware of the implications their declarations have on women. This means I did not start from a pre-

definition of gender interests for women. This would have implied a very long list of possible subjects, over which there is no consensus in the literature.

The approach I propose in analyzing women's substantive representation is based on Saward theory (2006) of 'claim making': representation implies that representatives embody certain claims on the behalf of those being represented. From this perspective, substantive representation is defined with a performative dimension, as the actions of people claiming to be representatives of the interests of some categories of citizens: representing women implies claiming it in a conscious way, and then defining important issues for them. From this point of view, substantive representation of women can be seen as the result not only of feminists and progressists, but also conservative, traditionalists and even anti-feminists, as women are in their concerns also.

In short, my research highlights how topics related to women were tackled in the Romanian Parliament and the political actors who approached them. As listed in the research objectives, my interest was to find what were these topics, the debates around them (using feminist theories and europeanisation theories) and, last but not least, who were those who undertook these topics (what political parties, what gender, their connections to the European space etc.).

THE OUTCOMES OF THE RESEARCH

Section I. Descriptive Representation

With regards to descriptive representation, I sought to conduct a comparative study of Romanian women in the European Parliament versus the National Parliament, and find the root explanation for the difference between the women ratio representing Romania in the European Parliament (around 30% from the analysed structures) versus the women ratio at national level (around 10% in the same timespan). The original goal of this research segment is to complete existing studies identifying a variety of causes that lead to the poor presence of Romanian women in the national legislative structures throughout the analysed time range (Popescu, 2004, Băluță, 2007) or smaller studies such as Dubrow's (2006), where a connection was found between the women presence in the Deputy Chamber and the economic development in the precinct areas they represented. I am also further elaborating on Cristina Chiva's study (2012) on five Central and Eastern European and EU member countries,

including Romania, where a higher women presence in the European Parliament outlines the attitude of the national political leaders towards the European Union: the more Eurosceptical, the lower the effort of proposing more women in the European Parliament than in the national one (a phenomenon that she found amongst Eurosceptic political parties in the Czech Republic and Poland).

In all three Euro Parliament elections analysed (2007, 2009, 2014), Romanian women scored as high as 30% from all mandates³, which is three times more than their mandates in the National Parliament⁴. A better representation of women in European structures than in national ones is a common trait in most EU countries, with more or less differences⁵. I tried to explore the roots of this difference in our country, and started from four potential factors: less interest in European election than in national election, different voting systems between the two types of election, euroscepticism/europeism of political parties in Romania and the novelty of European election as an opportunity for women to become more visible.

The theory of a lesser importance of European elections (Reif and Schmitt, 1980) has been the starting point in analysing the differences of women representation in the two legislative bodies. The lesser importance of elections makes the fight for a seat in the European Parliament to come second place after the National Parliament, which sets the ground for an easier accession of women to these roles. This secondary importance has a twofold source: the perception of the European Parliament's decisions and their impact amongst voters, parties and mass media on the one hand, and the still significant weight of national politics in the European Union legislative and budgetary matters on the other hand. The competition for the election of European Parliament members is held between national parties in member states (there is no pan-European party, even though after election, EU parliament members gather in ideological groups); a part of the legislative decisions of the European Union depends on the national governors assembled in the EU Council; the European Commissioners are assigned upon the proposal of national governments. This perception of a less important role of the European versus national elections is reinforced by several indicators: a lower voter presence in Romania: voters who seem to punish the governing party (they use the European elections

³ European Parliament, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/country-results-ro-2014.html> (accessed March 2016)

⁴ The Permanent Election Authority, <http://alegeri.roaep.ro/>, accessed March 2016

⁵ The European Commission's database, http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/gender-decision-making/database/politics/national-parliaments/index_en.htm (accessed March 2016)

for national government interests); and partially by the fact that small parties obtain a better result in European Parliament than in the national elections.

A second factor referred to the different voting systems for the two types of elections, during the reviewed timeframe, if we were to take into account theories supporting the idea that the best voting systems for women representation are the proportional ones, followed by mixed and, on the last position, the majority-based systems (Norris, 2003, Matland and Montgomery, 2003, Kantola, 2009, Evans and Harrison, 2012). At a first glance, the replacement of the voting system for the National Parliament of Romania in 2008, from a proportional list system into mixed uninominal colleges had no impact on women representation: in 2004, women representation in the Parliament was 10.5% from total, whereas in 2008 it lowered just a little at 9,7%⁶. I have shown that, on the one hand, this new election system had a strong impact on women selection as candidates to national legislative elections: in 2004, women represented 27% of the total candidates⁷, and after the mixed voting system in uninominal colleges, whilst in 2008, women candidates halved as low as 13% in 2008⁸ and 14% in 2012⁹. On the other hand, I have analysed this issue in other new EU members where the proportional list voting system was kept, in order to test the hypothesis that no change in the voting system would result in an ascending trend of women presence amongst candidates and elected representatives. It has been found that most of these countries have noticed an improved women representation in the national parliaments within the same timeframe. We need however to be cautious as there hasn't been any significant increase, except in Slovenia which has gender quotas, and there are two countries (Cyprus and Latvia) out of the 8 with unchanged proportional voting systems in this period, when a drop in women representation has been noticed in the parliaments.

I also shown that Europeism amongst Romanian political parties is the third factor, representing the pro-European feelings across our country (Romanians rank highest to share a positive image about EU among the European citizens¹⁰) and Euroskeptical messages promoted by PRM and PP-DD have not targeted equal opportunities as it occurred in the

⁶ The Permanent Election Authority, <http://alegeri.roaep.ro/>, accessed March 2016

⁷ <http://www.agerpres.ro/documentareparlamentare2012/2012/10/30/alegerile-parlamentare-din-28-noiembrie-2004-18-20-03>, accessed March 2016

⁸ Data processed from BEC

<http://www.becparlamentare2008.ro/statis/Defalcare%20candidati%20pe%20partide%20si%20sexe.pdf>

⁹ Labour Ministry Report http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/images/Documente/Familie/ESFB-StudiiAnalizaRapoarte-2012/Reprezentarea_femeilor_si_a_barbatilor_in_alegerile_parlamentare_din_decembrie_2012.doc, accessed March 2016

¹⁰ Standard Eurobarometer 83, Spring 2015, PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION, accessed http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb83/eb83_first_en.pdf March 2016

Euroskeptical parties from Poland or Czech Republic, with political programs which include anti-abortion and pro-traditional family items (including the explicit ban of same sex marriage). As European Parliament elections weigh less than national elections, Europeism can therefore influence the parties' desire to 'look good' in the eyes of Europe from the angle of equal opportunities for men and women. A better selection of women seeks to win the party's respect from their own voters, where they would be in a closer position to that of similar Western parties.

The fourth and last factor of the analysis referred to the shared opportunity for both women and men of starting from scratch in European elections. In elections, usually some of those who had mandates (*incumbents*) have an edge against competition as they are experienced and already have public image and mass-media attention (Norris, 1992, Young, 1991). The higher the mandate rate (the re-elected rate), the lower the chance to trigger a change in the gender composition of the legislative bodies. In Romania's case, the analysis has shown that the first European election in 2007 never was a start from scratch: ever since 2005, Romania had observers in the European Parliament who had rights to attend debates, except voting rights¹¹. Later, at the beginning of 2007, the parties designated 35 European Parliament members who kept their status until the first elections. Ever since this first presence in the European Parliament, women ratio was close to a third, a better representation than in the National Parliament. They already started differently from the national situation. Another interesting aspect is that throughout the three legislatures in the European Parliament (2007-2009; 2009-2014; 2014-2019) a large proportion of women managed to renew their mandates, so that in 2014, 80% of those elected Eurodeputies (8 out of 10) were at their second or third mandate, which is a much higher mandate renewal rate than amongst men (54%)¹². In the European Parliament there is now a stable group of Romanian women eurodeputies. No one can tell how much of this can be attributed to their experience and professionalism or to the mere fact that they are women (so that the equal gender representation threshold of a third from total can be achieved), or how much to other reasons.

In conclusion, in the descriptive representation section, I have reviewed the potential factors, most of them found in specialized studies and tested on Romania's from official and available sources, which may be identified as the ground of the women representation gaps between

¹¹ <http://www.cdep.ro/pls/parlam/structura.dp?leg=2004&idg=1&poz=1&idl=1>, accessed March 2016

¹² Calculated based on data available on the European Parliament website <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/ro/search.html?country=RO>, accessed April 2016

European and national parliaments. The research does not outline all the factors which may influence women presence in politics and is only restricted to those susceptible of generating these differences. The outcomes of the research indicate that there is no specific factor with a decisive drive towards a rate of women presence in the European Parliament higher than the national rate, yet all factors do partially explain the gap.

I also shown that Europeism amongst Romanian political parties is the third factor, representing the pro-European feelings across our country (Romanians rank highest to share a positive image about EU among the European citizens¹³) and Euroskeptical messages promoted by PRM and PP-DD have not targeted equal opportunities as it occurred in the Euroskeptical parties from Poland or Czech Republic, with political programs which include anti-abortion and pro-traditional family items (including the explicit ban of same sex marriage). As European Parliament elections weigh less than national elections, Europeism can therefore influence the parties' desire to 'look good' in the eyes of Europe from the angle of equal opportunities for men and women. A better selection of women seeks to win the party's respect from their own voters, where they would be in a closer position to that of similar Western parties.

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Section II Substantive representation

In the second part of the research, dedicated to women's substantive representation in Romania, I focus my efforts to elucidate the way in which women's political agenda was constructed in the Romanian Parliament, during four national legislatures, and also to identify the main political actors in the Parliament who expressed their interest for projects and subjects concerning the social group of women.

The starting point for the substantive representation research was the curiosity regarding Romanian MP's references about women as a social group, during their parliamentary speeches (either political declarations or interventions during parliamentary debates). Besides their references about women, I also researched MP's gender, political party and ideology, the way they used Europe/European Union resources for their interventions. The research conclusions about Romania's Parliament political agenda for women were a sum up of three important directions: speeches/declarations for 8 March, domestic violence/violence against women and women's presence in decisional political functions.

¹⁵ Calculated based on data available on the European Parliament website <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/ro/search.html?country=RO> , accessed April 2016

The statements made by MPs during the International Women's Day - March 8, give an insight on how parliamentarians relate to women, as a social group: almost half of the male parliamentarians who make statements on the eve of this Day choose simple praises in which they glorify the "eternal feminine" and reproduce the patriarchal structures of power, disguised under the figure of chivalry and idolatry of women. Many tributes made on March 8 by men, but also by some of women in the Parliament, define an idealized abstract-woman, in relation with men and family and less as an autonomous being.

A woman is a mother, a wife, a daughter, a co-worker, a human being capable of great sacrifices for the greater good or capable of superhuman efforts in order to fulfill family and work responsibilities. As De Beauvoir stated (1949), women are defined as "the Other", their existence making sense only in relation to the masculine norm. Inside the patriarchal order, putting women on a high pedestal means setting a standard that all women should aspire to, with attributes considered natural: kindness, gentleness, self-sacrifice, indulgence.

Women are being judged and questioned in relation to this standard. Male parliamentarians' speeches on March 8 even become personal, with them expressing gratitude for the women in their lives, but never referring to the social and economic contexts in which women live as citizens of this country that they have the responsibility to represent. March 8 eulogy even includes religious references with Eve and Virgin Mary as biblical female figures, and also nationalistic references, stating the role of women for procreation and population growth.

For most of male parliamentarians, March 8 speeches are the only ones referring to women, throughout their entire parliamentary activity. This kind of shallow celebration and hypocrisy encountered some critique, especially from women politicians, which shows a sort of resistance regarding this type of discourse. Critics were even stronger during 2008-2012 legislature or during parliamentary sessions austerity measures were voted. The economic crisis affected women, mostly mothers who saw their parental leave being cut down by Boc government.

On the other side, March 8 is also used as an opportunity to bring to stage issues and subjects related to women, by parliamentarians who make it their interest throughout the year also. Pregnancy and mothers' issues are most predominant, as March 8 kept its Day of the Mother significance from the communist times.

As my final conclusion, I state that March 8 context has a double function for the substantive representation of women: 1) to “check mark” it, as being the unique interest for women’s issues for some parliamentarians; 2) to use it as an opportunity to bring back on the political agenda women’s issues and gender equality.

The first function is being used by politicians who normally ignore gender issues throughout their parliamentary activity, but when faced with it, they reproduce a romanticized image of the abstract-woman and consolidate traditional and stereotyped gender roles; the second function is used by politicians who choose the legitimacy of this symbolic day in order to put on the agenda women’s issues or to promote legal projects that benefit women. One of the main themes often discussed by parliamentarians is violence, and mostly domestic violence.

I have identified two types of approaches of the violence theme: a traditionalist/conservative one and a feminist one (which relates to unequal power relations as a source of male dominance that legitimizes the use of violence of men over women). In the first approach, women as victims of violence are treated the same as other family members (children and even men), without questioning gender power relations inside the family. Moreover, “protecting the family” is emphasized more than protecting the female victim.

To give an example for this type of approach, Law 217/2003 for preventing and fighting domestic violence contained an article that empowered a “Family Council” (formed by relatives) to manage violence acts before authorities intervened. This article lasted until 2012.

The family council example stands to show that the state was not fully engaged, not even legally, to remove violence from the private space and to politicize it in the sense given by radical feminism (“the personal is political”). Moreover, the central institution managing all violence policies was “The National Agency for Family Protection”, which, among other things, was entrusted with promoting “family values”.

My research focuses on highlighting the reinforcement of the patriarchal status-quo by “protecting the family” while violence acts occur, by not questioning gender power relations inside families, and ultimately, by not intervening in the private space, as a State, when violence endangers the life and integrity of women. Also, by proposing mediation by The Family Council, parliamentarians offered the aggressor the chance of impunity with no legal consequences for committing violent acts, and this was an issue that remained unquestioned

while this law was being debated in 2003. A conservative approach regarding violence against women was dominant during the 2 parliamentary mandates analyzed in this paper (2000 to 2008).

But in the studied legislatures we also find an approach to violence against women framed in the framework of gender equality and treated as a violation of human rights. In this respect, a key role in the adoption of measures in this area was the influence of a "velvet triangles" (Holli, 2008), composed by European institution-parliament-NGOs/academia. The European influence was manifested by invoking Europe/European Union by political actors promoters of legislative initiatives in favor of abused women, but also by various European resources - such as the fact that some women MPs become "reference parliamentarian" from Romania in the Council of Europe on the issue of gender violence or the fact that during 2012-2016 legislature they were involved in promoting the signature and ratification of the Istanbul Convention by Romania.

What I show in the investigation on the actions of the involved political actors is that the role of the Council of Europe was more important than the one of the European Union in their support for promoting gender based violence issue on the public agenda, but often discursively the two entities overlap. The area of gender based violence, like women's political presence in decision making is not covered by EU directive and, until the entry in force of the Istanbul Convention (September 2016), the provisions of the Council of Europe in this area weren't mandatory for Romania.

Invoking "Europe" or "European Union" was a discursive strategy of national actors in order to legitimate the politics against domestic violence/violence against women, strategy also undertaken by MPs from other countries from the region (Krizsan and Popa, 2010). The influence of the Europeanization in this case, as in the area of women's presence in politics, occurred through a process of socialization in which the national actors took note and interiorized the European norms and used them as tools for legitimizing their actions (Radaelli 2004).

What distinguishes fundamentally the area of gender based violence from the area of women's presence in the politics is the role that the nongovernmental organizations have played in putting the issue on the agenda.

Since the debates on the adoption of the Law on preventing and combating the violence in the family in 2003, the role of the NGOs was often mentioned and praised by parliamentarians, as for example by the deputy Mona Musca (PNL) who mention in a statement that the draft of the law was elaborated with the contribution of some associations¹⁶.

This kind of relations between MPs and NGOs are mentioned in other occasions, such as summarizing, in 2010 with the enactment of the protection order for violence in the family victims, in 2011 when several women MPS speak in their political statements about the study made by the national non-governmental organizations on how the protection order is implemented by the judicial courts, or in 2015-2016 when steps are made to sign and adopt the Istanbul Convention and, once again, some of the demands from civil society are mentioned.

A collaboration between MPs-NGOs of this magnitude is not found in the area of political representation, where the initiatives to adopt some measures, such as gender quotas in elections, were a failure. For this reason, the research leads to the conclusion that in the area of gender based violence, the successes of legislative changes (adoption of a specific law, introducing of the protection order, ratification of the Istanbul Convention, to mention the most important ones) were possible due shaping of a "velvet triangle", namely a triple pressure: European - political actors - NGOs.

The last theme studied in the research, of the three most important raised by Romanian MPs, is women's presence in political decision making. Apart from the statements made on this issue - unanimously towards the need to increase the presence of women at the top of political hierarchy, I analyzed the debates around some legislative actions and I identified the following categories of actions in which the issue was brought to the attention: when revising the Constitution in 2003 and during the proposal for a new revision in 2013 (unfinished), during discussions on the proposals for regulations on gender quotas in elections, when the affirmative actions were adopted in the law of financing political parties and, less, when the electoral system was changed. The depth research I made on this theme is related to the pros and cons debates of adopting affirmative actions to increase women's presence in politics. I sought to reveal the way in which MPS position themselves on the theme and how closely

¹⁶ Mona Muscă (PNL), <http://www.cdep.ro/pls/steno/steno.stenograma?ids=5579&idm=6&sr=&sep=and&idv=1031&idl=1>, accessed August 2016

they are approaching the arguments we find in theories about women's political representation.

The first and most invoked objection against regulated gender quotas can be framed to the classical liberal theory: all citizens are equal, regardless of gender, race, origin, age, etc. and elections are won by individual attributes and ideas (ideology) more than by being part of a social group (what Anne Philips, 1995, calls "politics of ideas").

What I have discovered in Romania's Parliament is that even those who try to contradict this objection also use the meritocracy argument for women. They do not express the conviction that women's voices need to be heard and that there are structural barriers preventing a social group's representation. Continuing with meritocracy issue, I point out that we already have rules of representation for ethnic and national minorities. The Deputy Chamber has reserved minority seats (18 seats during 2012-2016 legislature, but the number can vary).

Making this kind of a parallel could help deconstruct the belief that parliamentary representation should take into account only the individual traits and merits, instead of the group ones. Another objection to adopting affirmative policies like the gender quotas is what we call in theory "the balkanization risk" (Phillips 1995, 1998). It refers to the risk of splitting the political scene into several social groups, which endangers social cohesion because parliamentarians get divided, instead of united.

Affirmative measures for women stirred up discussions about other social groups: young people, LGBT, Romanians abroad, civil society. To what extent could we accept representation claims from different groups ("if we have quotas for women, why not having them for young people? Or LGBT?")

Another objection to gender quotas was the communist past. Before 1989, there were representation quotas for women (and other social groups) for the elections in The Great National Assembly. Using the quotas system highly increased women's representation to 33.8% in 1989 (Jinga, 2015). This communist past was invoked during the parliamentary debates mentioned by my research. Quotas for women are perceived as useless, decorative measures, lacking any real impact. But also as measures specific to a dictatorship, wanting to force a change that was never asked by the people.

Another argument made against quotas for women is that they are more suited for some political parties should have them (mostly leftist parties) and they should not be imposed by the Parliament to all electoral competitors. It was argued that political parties should adopt this kind of measure. My research shows that the Social Democratic Party and the Greater Romania Party both have quotas for women, along with Liberal-Democratic Party which had it until 2014 (after its merger with the Liberal Party, quotas were no longer listed). This type of quota refers to women's representation in the internal party structures, as stated in their statute. No quotas are mentioned for candidates' selection for the elections.

I also mentioned that the proportion of women selected in order to participate in elections (we analyzed the case of the year 2012) demonstrates an extremely low level of participation (10-11%). UDMR has a slightly larger proportion (19%) but most women were candidates in ineligible electoral colleges, so after the elections only one woman managed to get into parliament.

The last objections raised by the MPs against affirmative measures for women is related with legal and procedural issues, generally pretexts mentioned by the opponents of the quotas in order to reject proposals without further explanations.

Also, on the other side, I wanted to inquire into Romanians MPs arguments in order to defend the political representation of the women. I have organized four types of arguments: the argument of the theories of women political representation, arguments according to the Europeanization theories, conservative religious arguments and the fourth type where I have included the other arguments: legal-constitutional and economics.

First of all, the most used argument by MPS is the need to renew the political class and the argument that through a better political representation of women we will enhance the democratic legitimacy of the political class. The argument overlaps with the theory of Europeanization: more women in politics means being closer to a European model, which is more democratic (almost always the European model is presented in very positive ways). I am showing that the accent which is placed on adopting gender quotas as a solution for democratic innovation and modernization is specific to societies which undergo different phases of political reforms, socio-political movements and reconstruction processes - and it is in these circumstances in which some of the solutions for change have been tied with a better representation of oppressed groups (Duhlerupp et. al, 2013, p. 34, Piscopo, 2007).

Also, in respect to the presence of women in politics it is often that we see references to Europe/ European Union in the discourses promoting affirmative action. The arguments have been developed under different forms, from saying that “this is what the EU demands” , ”this is how we need to be in order to call ourselves European”, to critics made by comparing the degrees of women representation in politics from Romania to that from the parliament of other countries (sometimes even with non-European countries).

Europe and the European Union are first of all used to draw legitimacy: political actors refer to the European Union in their discourses in order to increase the likelihood that their ideas be accepted and taken over by the other political actors. They use the abstract idea of EU/Europe, which they present as a model of progress and ideal of implementing gender equality, with the aim of justifying their intervention and present it in a positive way (Woll și Jacquot 2003, 2010).

As a strategy they use examples of good practices and the experience they gained from European interactions. From a sociological discourse perspective of Europeanisation I am showing that the pressure that political actors try to exert by using the EU in their discourse is closely linked to the process of creating a sense of belonging of our country to an international entity, belonging which entails taking on new rigors and values. The pressure to change is based on the idea of “being European”, of “fulfilling the standards”, of “adhering to European values”. Other times, invoking Europe gives politicians an opportunity to present themselves as connected to European networks, with all of the implied positive associations that come with this.

We also have conservative arguments that support the idea of increasing women participation in politics. These are the ones through which it is stated that politics needs women because they add maternity values and feminine beauty. The contribution of women is seen through traditional gender roles which they fulfill within the family. The Parliament becomes a larger replica of the family. We also have religious references, which come from some women politicians that claim, and I quote “God left on this Earth an equal number of women and men so on the political scene it is only normal that we have equal representation, otherwise the Divine harmony would be broken”.

In the last category I also included the rest of the arguments found in the declarations made by MPs: ideological (for examples- it is important to have affirmative actions since we are a left

wing party), legal/constitutional (to preserve the constitutional principle of equality between men and women in holding public offices) and economic arguments (human resources must be used, otherwise by not involving women we lose in terms of economic efficiency and performance).

The research ends with an overview of the main actors which have made remarks to women in their political speeches, in each of the Parliamentary mandates analyzed. I show that there has been an obvious larger interest from women MPs on issues referring to women-citizens, despite the fact that their numbers in the Parliament was low. The general conclusion from this part of the research confirms that in Romania's Parliament there is a connection between the descriptive presentation of women (their presence as MPs) and the substantive representation (a political agenda of gender interests).

As an overview of the research on the substantial representation from the perspective of European influence, the conclusion is that we can obviously see an influence in some of the issues discussed by MPs, as is the issue of gender based violence and the presence of women in politics. As I have pointed out in my research the Europeanisation in these themes does not manifest itself through norms imposed at European level but through a process of adopting by politicians of what is believed to be "the European model of gender equality".

I show that in respect to the presence of women in the decision making process, there are serious limitations to the European influence, beyond the pro-EU rhetoric used by national actors. As explanations I find it useful to look at studies which show there are limitations because of gender-mainstreaming politics which have been interpreted in a wrong way, as replacing affirmative action (Verloo, 2007). At the same time I show that the European interest for gender quotas moved from the economic sector, after most West European States surpassed the 30% threshold of women who make it into national parliaments.

Romania, with a percentage of only 11.5% at the moment in which I write my research still has a long way to go to catch up with countries from other parts of Europe. What I tried through this research was to offer, as much as possible a deep and precise understanding of political representation of women in Romania and I hope that this might help accelerate the process.

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