

Fact sheet

Armenia is ranked the 105th in the Gender Gap Index-2015



According to the four pivotal spheres (economic, political, educational and health), set up by the Global Economic Forum to measure the Gender Gap Index, Armenia 2015 ranks the 105th out of 145 countries; moreover, in the sense of representation in political posts, Armenia ranks the 125th.

Women and sustainable development agenda CSW60



The 60th jubilee session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) took place in the UN headquarters in New York, March 14-24. The key theme was "Women's empowerment and its link to sustainable development". This aimed to reveal the direct link between women's progress and the sustainable development agenda, by showing that it is pointless to speak of development without the complete participation of women.

Planet 50/50 by 2030: What has Armenia committed to?



A meeting of world leaders took place in the UN headquarters in New York on September 27th 2015 at which UN member states including Armenia undertook commitments, agreeing to unite their efforts around the vision of Planet 50/50 by 2030. In the commitments undertaken by Armenia, it mentions that the state is obliged to promote the realisation of the RA law "On provision of equal rights and equal opportunities for women and men", and to sign the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention). Let us note that this high-level meeting was dedicated to the 20th anniversary of the Beijing declaration and Platform for Action and took place during the 60th session of the UN Assembly during which the new agenda for sustainable development was officially accepted on September 25th.

Woman & politics

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The RA electoral Code: What are the issues worrying women?



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200 years needed for the National Assembly to achieve equality

The number of women in the first session of the Armenian Parliament in 1995, was 6% and in 2015 it had reached 10% and then only because of the quotas being applied. Taking into account the rate of women's representation in the five National Assembly sessions, we can assume that in order to achieve equal representation of women and men in the National Assembly (NA), we will need at least 200 years. And at best we can reach the 23% representation that exists in parliaments around the world today, in about 50 years.

It only remains for us to arm ourselves with patience since according to the observations of our political elders, "they have no reason to hurry", and it seems that the fact that women in Armenia, who comprise 52% of the population, have representation of a mere 10% in the legislature, does not worry them at all.



Collage: Mediamax

Throughout the world, progress is directly linked to the proper representation of women at the decision-making level. Ten years ago, European structures substantially raised the bar on women's representation by suggesting that political parties include at least 40% women in their electoral lists for proportional representation, at the same time ensuring the sequence of women and men candidates. In the RA gender policy strategy plan (2011-2015), the RA government planned "to undertake special measures to provide 30% women's representation at decision-making levels in both the legislative and executive bodies". And although they did not succeed in realising this, during that time the UN proposed a more ambitious vision, that of the 50/50 by 2030 participatory resolution, which also entered the sustainable development agenda.

Taking into account that at least 3 parliamentary elections are to be expected in Armenia before 2030, it is obvious that the process must be speeded up in order to reach equality, ensur-

ing women's representation of at least 30% in the composition of the NA. It is this minimum threshold that is the basis for several proposals concerning the draft of the new electoral code. Four different structures have presented proposals for the provision of at least a 30/70 proportion in the NA: The Gender issues thematic group, which works under the co-chairmanship of representatives of the UN, OSCE and RA government and unites the representatives and experts of around 60 local and international organisations, the Association of Women with University Education with its regional branches, the Association of Young Lawyers of Armenia, and also two committees of the public council.

Why is the demand for 30% women's participation particularly emphasised?

The basis for this is international parliamentary practice. According to this, opportunities for impacting the decision-making culture, reforming political game rules, making politics more humanitarian only arise when the "critical mass" of

women's representation is ensured; that is, when women make up no less than 30% of parliament.

To what extent today's political party elite are prepared for such a sharp change is another matter. Political elders express their concern that the parties will not be able to provide women candidates with worthy qualities corresponding to the quotas and put forward the principle of "Better few, but good than many, but bad"; whereas, the percentage of women with higher education in Armenia surpasses that of men and, doubtless, the number of intelligent and active women who are able to successfully work in parliament is not just a few. And if such women are not in political parties, then that is the problem of the parties. In this sense, perhaps the quotas will force the parties to worry about the problem of preparing quality political cadres and freeing the electoral lists of the practice of including "bogus candidates". Besides, the "Better few, but good than many, but bad" principle is equally valid for men, whose numbers in politics in no way improves quality...

Journalism contest

"Achieving equality. The vision of women's political participation".

OXFAM International Organization and "OxYGen" Youth and Women Rights Fund Announce a journalism contest within the framework of the "EQUAL" campaign, on the theme "Achieving equality. The vision of women's political participation".

Key topical headlines are:

"Politics is women's business: Obstacles and solutions"

"Formula for Success: from women's economic achievements to political participation"

"Women in local elections: Characteristics of the race"

Journalists, civil activists, civil journalists, and blog-

gers throughout the territory of RA can enter the competition.

Materials should be published, broadcast or posted online from January 1 to October 31, 2016

The best works will be given awards which will be set in three categories: "Radio-television broadcasting", "Printed article", and "Online article". Applications will be accepted until November 5.

All details on the contest can be found on the EQUAL campaign Facebook page.

You can also contact the contest coordinator, Gor Petrosyan with questions or for additional information: academyoffamily@gmail.com. or phone 091 510 410.

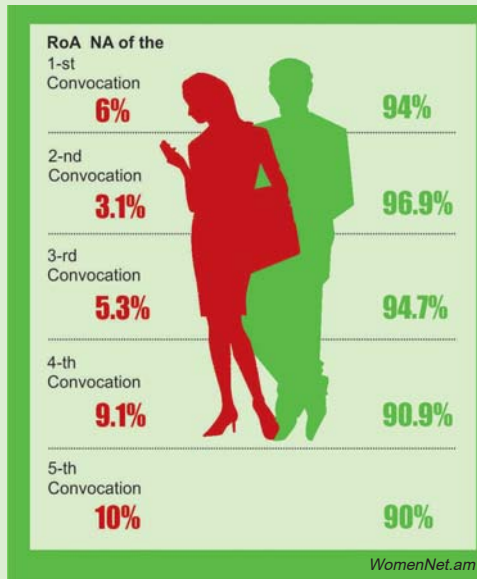


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Facts and figures

Women and men in the National Assembly



It is noteworthy that over a 20 year period, as a result of five sessions of the National Assembly, the increase in women's representation has only increased by 4%. During that same period, the representation of women in parliaments around the world has more than doubled from 11% to 23%.

The quality of female representatives can be witnessed by the fact that the number of women in the National Assembly leadership has increased. They now lead half of the National Assembly fractions, are represented in one of the two positions for deputy speaker and head 2 of the 12 permanent committees.

What is gender equality worth?



According to the recently published report by the management consultancy firm McKinsey&Co, complete gender equality can add 26%, or 28 trillion dollars to the global GDP by 2025. Let us point out that a growth of 28% globally would be approximately equivalent to the joint economies of America and China.

What is Armenia losing as a result of gender inequality?

As a result of the employment limitations for women and the prejudice against them in the labour market, Armenia's GDP is losing 50-60 million dollars a year. This is the conclusion that experts came to as a result of the Manifestations of Discrimination Against Women diagnostic study (2015-2016), initiated by the UN Population Fund. In essence, that was the first attempt to assess the losses to the economy of the country as a result of gender inequality.

In the opinion of 81% of those questioned, inequality is obvious.

Only 8.3% of those questioned in the "Armenia's gender barometer survey" (2015) consider that there is no inequality in our society between women and men. In the opinion of 81%, there is gender inequality in Armenia; moreover, there was no substantial difference in the opinions of both women and men to this question.

The majority of responders pointed out the low level of awareness of women's rights as a reason for gender inequality. This is the opinion of 59.7% of female respondent and 44.2% male respondents.

The survey covered the whole republic and was conducted by the YSU Center for Gender and Leadership Studies.

Electoral code: What worries women

"I compare the situation in our society to a family in which the mother is absent. As a result, we have a large residence which is dirty and washed once a month at best, the older and more crafty children in the family have stolen bread from the younger ones and, as they say, are fat and happy while the others who are weaker have become itinerants, roaming the world. This raises the question of how to return the mother to the family" This is the question that Jasmena Ghevondyan, chairman of the "Neruj" NGO raised at the National Assembly parliamentary hearings on the draft of the new electoral code on March 22, suggesting the allocation of 50/50 proportion of women and men on the electoral lists of political parties because, according to the RA constitution, women and men are equal in rights.

Let us mention that this was not the only speech that relates to increasing women's participation in the electoral process, during the hearings...

"The issue of increasing women's participation in decision-making is the focus of our attention. We are working towards that aim."

The mutual concern of the participants who spoke about this issue was that no plans for an increase in women's participation are provided for in the draft electoral code, while the introduction of open and closed proportionate lists could result in a sharp decrease in the number of women in the NA. In response, Minister - Chief of RA Government Staff, **Davit Harutyunyan**, noted that this issue had already caught their attention because they had also received similar comments from other organisations and they are currently working on them. "We do not as yet have ready solutions but I assure you we are

focusing our attention on the issue: we are working. Let us see what final solution we come to because there is also a debate going on in our working group. But I assure you that we will find solutions", he said. Davit Harutyunyan mentioned Armenia's international commitments, in particular the 50/50 by 2030 resolution proposed by the UN. He noted that he cannot see any possibility for placing such demands at this time and it is important that the demand should not come artificially but should arise naturally and today it is realistic to move forward step by step and talk about setting the minimum limit. "Here, the issue is, not using women's resources and potential, which in my opinion is, at the very least, not good sense. I repeat, we must set a minimum demand. But the aim is not some limit or other, but ensuring women's participation in politics," said the minister.



Photo by Parliament.am

Does the fact that of 866 village communities only 18 have women leaders bring us any honour?

Referring to the issue of the proportion of women to men in political party lists, **Jemma Hasratyan**, the president of the Armenian Association of women with university education, mentioned that in many countries, the density of women and men in the country is used as a basis for presenting women and men proportionally in the lists. Apart from that, the intellectual resources of the candidates are taken into account.

"Today, in Armenia, women comprise 60% of individuals with higher education and not to utilise that resource is, to put it mildly, wrong. I am convinced it is necessary to consider this seriously and to initiate appropriate steps", she announced

Expert's opinion

Do they not want to stand for election?



Women's chances to be elected with open and closed lists

Analysing women's chances to be elected with open and closed proportional representation lists, the experts of the Venice Commission write in their report that in the case of closed lists, everything depends on the parties. "If they put women in prominent positions on the parties' lists, women's representation can be effectively favoured. If they refuse to do so, women are likely to be under-represented in parliament" the experts write.

As for open or free lists, the report notes that voters will not necessarily choose candidates from both sexes. Instead, open lists may work to the advantage of well-known male candidates. Thus, this poses the danger that the introduction of open lists may result in the election of fewer women.

However, as experience shows, open lists need not hamper women's representation. The experts of the Venice Commission think that this depends on how

The Report on the Impact of Electoral Systems on Women's Representation in Politics adopted by the Venice Commission (2009) specifically addresses this issue. It turns out that the arguments that "women do not wish to enter politics" or "women do not wish to stand for election", which are usually used by politicians to explain their reluctance to create additional opportunities for women's advancement, are also widespread in other countries.

"In general, women's willingness to run for elections is fostered by a friendly socio-economic, cultural and political environment and by the backing of political parties and the civil society, particularly women's movements. From a rational perspective, the personal ambition of women to stand for elections may also be dependent on the prospects to be nominated and to be elected. The electoral system and gender quotas may influence such prospects and, thus, the decision of women to stand for elections", the report reads.

ready women are to self-organize in their society and to actively support female candidates.

The efficiency of temporary special measures

The most important preconditions for the effectiveness of quotas or (as they are more politically correctly called) "temporary special measures", are the existence of women's movement, the support of the state and the responsibility of parties...

How come around 23% of the candidates in the 2012 party electoral lists were female, but the number of women who entered parliament did not exceed 10.7% (10% as of today).

According to local experts, this was the result of displacements and withdrawals done for inter-party purposes, which often remained incomprehensible to the public. With regard to this issue, the final report of the OSCE/ODIHR observer mission on the 2012 parliamentary elections noted "the

efficiency of candidate nomination quotas should be reviewed".

According to CEC of the RoA, 25% of candidates who withdrew from the lists of parties which entered parliament after the elections, were female. As opposed to men, who mostly withdrew in order to take on higher positions in executive bodies, the majority of women preferred not to speak about the real reasons for their withdrawal from parliament. Only one conclusion can be drawn from this, if one cannot present convincing reasons behind one's decision, then the decision has been taken without their knowledge. And if the party takes the decision because it considers that those women are not worthy of becoming MPs, then we cannot but ask why they agree to be included in the list, with the certain prospect of resignation. It is worth mentioning that the proposals to keep the women's quota are being considered by the group working on the RoA Electoral Code.

Parliamentary hearings

and added that the Armenian Association of women with university education, with its almost thirty branches in all regions, together with more than ten other NGOs have presented proposals for raising women's participation in the legislature and local self-government system.

The speaker also reminded those present that in his address of March 8 the RA president, Serj Sargsyan, said, "Nowadays women in our country have a much greater role that they have ever had and the process of constitutional reforms will intensify this trend."

"If you agree with our president, then let's see how we can achieve that goal in the legislative field. Does the fact that, of 866 village communities only 18 have women leaders bring us honour? Is it proper that we only have 32 female council members in our 48 urban communities, and we are talking about such large towns such as Abovyan, Vagharshapat, Armavir, and Hrazdan which has a population of over 40 thousand yet we do not have even one female council member there. I don't understand, how can those council members gather and discuss social, educational and other issues about which women may be a little more aware, and suggest the right solutions?" said J. Hasratyan, expressing the hope that men will be well-disposed to the increase of women's participation in politics.

"The danger of a decrease in the number of women in the NA can be detected"

Tamara Hovnatanyan (president of Pro-Media-Gender ngo) stated the Gender issues thematic group's proposals concern-

ing the expansion of women's political participation. She pointed out that the group, having discussed the draft electoral code, noticed a real danger in terms of a decrease of women in the National Assembly. In the opinion of the group, that may result in the implementation of the national and regional political parties' lists model, as proposed in the draft. With the intention of preventing this trend, the group has come forward with proposals which are aimed at increasing women's representation. In particular, a change is proposed to the clause in the third point of Article 84 concerning political party national and regional electoral lists, setting down that the first two on the list should be allocated to representatives of different gen-

« **"Women and men are recognised as equals in the Constitution, so let's start implementing it beginning with party lists".**

Jasmina Ghevondyan
President of "Neruzh" NGO »

ders and then, from number 3 onward, the number of representatives of each gender should not exceed 70 percent. In point 9 of the same Article, it is proposed that the number of representatives of each gender on the regional electoral lists should not exceed 70%. As the speaker clarified, the sequence proposed for the national list will allow there to be at least 2 women in the first five elected, thereby avoiding the situation that was created during the previous elections due to the formula set by the code; that is, that women must be included beginning from

number 2 in any complete set of five (2-6, 2-11 and so on.)

T.Hovnatanyan noted, "Experience has shown that the clause including women in the 2-6 positions was the basis for discrimination and in effect deprived the women of being included in the first five. The majority of parties included women beginning from the 6th position and in 2012 the number of them falling within the elected groups of five was four times less than that in 2007 when such norm were absent. As a result we have a party which entered the NA without a single woman in its ranks, although they had included over 25% women in their electoral lists". She added that the proposal given for the NA elections also covers the regional elections based on proportional representation taking place for the local self-government bodies in Yerevan, Gyumri and Vanadzor.

It was also mentioned that the group proposes to enlarge the list, to also use the proportional representation system for elections in other cities and large communities. The Gender issues thematic group proposes to also apply mechanisms which will guarantee the said proportion of genders in party lists in all phases of the election process and in the elected body. "We are speaking about withdrawals, as a result of which a lot of a lot of women elected in 2012 did not enter the NA for reasons unknown to the public. The use of the following clause is proposed "In case of handing in of their mandate by a candidate less represented in the party lists through withdrawal, their place must be filled by the next candidate of the gender less represented in the lists", concluded the speaker.

The voice of the masses

How many women should there be on party lists? Comments from the younger generation

The younger generation interested in politics also participates in the heated discussions on the draft of the new Electoral Code, which are taking place on various political platforms these days.

We tried to find out their opinions on the provisions and proposals of the Electoral Code which regulate women's representation in party electoral lists and the NA.

This mainly refers to the number of women who are being included in party lists and their withdrawals.

Hayk Torosyan, 27: "Nowadays a minimum of 30% women must be on electoral lists. In the future, when Armenia becomes a democratic state, this can be changed in order to allow fair competition. But until we have that, we should impose, so to speak, "positive discrimination" in order to support women. If a woman hands in her mandate, it should be passed on to the next woman, because often women's presence on these lists is a formality; later they are forced to hand in their mandate, which then passes on to a man".

Esther Petrosyan, 25: "We should not discriminate between the genders. There should be equal conditions, and the strongest should be at the front, regardless of their gender. And if the conditions are equal, there will, certainly, be more women everywhere. Dividing into equal quotas is artificial and, in a sense, unacceptable; it will also be unfair towards men who are more worthy than those women who will be pushed forward just because they were born women and not due to their virtues and skills".

Lusine Gevorgyan, 31: "Women should make up 50%, and a hand-ed-in mandate should be given to the next women in order to maintain the balance."

Lilit Aleksanyan, 27: "Party lists should not be drawn up based on gender. Rather a person's knowledge should be considered and whether they are an appropriate candidate to be included in the list. However if the law requires that a certain percent of the list should be women, then that percent of women should actually become MPs".

David Asatryan, 27: "Women should make up at least 30%, preferably 40-50%, and not hand their mandate in after being elected. Otherwise men accept their mandates in their place, which is a rather unpleasant practice".

Lily Minasyan, 25: "For now 50% should be ensured. Of course, in the beginning it will be artificial, but it is necessary for the public to see women in different positions. Later, when our society is used to seeing women in politics, the percentage may be increased or decreased depending on women's preparedness.



Hayk Martirosyan, 30: "I want to see 50% of women in parliament. And if the mandate is rejected it should be passed on to a female politician. It is common sense – equal to equal".

Marat Stepanyan, 24: "50% percent would be actual equality, but I don't believe it's possible for Armenia, so I will answer – 30%. If we ensure this, it will still be considerable progress".

Vardan Avanesyan, 27: "Women's inclusion in politics, even more so in party electoral lists, their number should develop naturally. It is useless to increase their number or to ensure a certain number just to show that there are women in the list. If women are so active in society that they engage in politics and

have serious achievements, in that case, I am sure that it should also be reflected in the lists. Passiveness should also be reflected. The individual is what is important, and there is no need to set quotas by gender".

Mane Saroyan, 26: "I don't want percentages to be set. And if a mandate is handed in, it should be passed on to the next person without discrimination based on gender.

Edgar Babayan, 33: "It's hard for me to give a specific percentage, but without doubt, it should be a few times more than the current number. We have few occasions to be proud of women who are in the NA now, but in general women engaged in politics, activists fill me with great hope".

Counter argument

The issue of women's participation cannot be secondary



During the hearings the opinion was voiced that the women's issue is of secondary importance and it will easily be resolved when fair elections are held in the country. This was not the first time this opinion was voiced during the discussions on the draft of the Electoral Code. In fact, it was even expressed by some human rights activists.

This time around such an opinion was expressed by Aram Manukyan, MP of the ANC fraction, who urged civic society to join the opposition's demands against election fraud and vote rigging and not to waste its energy on solving other "small" issues, including that of women's equality. "Do not stick to your small proposals, they will all be solved in time. The demands to stop electoral fraud and vote rigging are a much higher priority. Let's unite around them", said the MP.

Responding to his remarks, Anahit Aghoyan, committee member of the Armenian Association of Women with University Education, mentioned in her speech that the issue is important to the extent that currently we need a change in our political culture. "And perhaps, it is precisely for that reason that it's necessary that more woman enter parliament, and we change our positions and attitude towards politics and political values and criteria", she added.

Let's also note, that dividing the demands of justice into important and not-so-important, especially by legislatures, is unacceptable. As for fair elections, there are many countries in the world where the results of elections are not questioned by the opposition or society, but women are not always fairly represented in the elected body after those elections. In fact, fair elections are certainly a necessity for democracy. But they are not enough to ensure the desired participation of women.

"There are gentlemen, but there are no seats"

Once, speaking about the necessity for quotas, one of my colleagues described the situation with a well-known joke. "A woman gets on a bus, looks around and doesn't see an available seat. All those seated are young men. She waits for a few stops, hoping that someone will give up their seat for her, finally she decides to speak up. "Isn't there at least one gentleman on this bus?" One of the passengers replies from his seat. "There are gentlemen, but there are no seats".

It's the same situation in parliament – most of the seats are occupied by men who find it difficult to accept the demands for gender justice, especially if nobody reminds them about it, whereas voters are much more progressive than politicians with regard to this issue. According to the data of surveys carried out right before the previous elections, at least 57% of those surveyed had a positive attitude towards setting quotas in different political and state management levels. In fact they considered that the optimal gender quota in the legislature should be around 30-40%. This means that ordinary citizens are ready to see more women in parliament than parties include in their lists. In fact, they think that discrimination against women is expressed more in politics, in the electoral system.

Stance

A discussion which hasn't yet taken place

We have tried to sense the attitude of members of parliament towards the draft Electoral Code, prior to the launch of discussions concerning this matter in parliament. Let us remind you that the draft proposes ensuring a 20/80 proportion in the lists of the political parties, in fact, for nationwide or closed lists – beginning at number 2 in each set of five.

“The proportion of women must be increased from election to election”

I think that there are quite a few people in the party who would not want for the provisions in the new Electoral Code to somehow make women's entry into the parliament difficult, as they truly believe that we need progress in the matter of women's participation. Moreover, we are definitely going to meet and discuss this issue with a number of non-governmental organizations dealing with women's issues, through the initiative of the RPA Women's Council, as we believe that the proportion of women defined by the Electoral Code must be increased from election to election, consequently creating more just opportunities for the inclusion of women in the political decision-making process. Thus we will support the proposal to ensure a 30/70 proportion in the lists. We also support the notion that a woman who withdraws should be replaced by the next woman candidate on the list.

Hermine Naghdalyan,
Vice president of
National Assembly
RPA Women's
Council Chairperson

“We shall try to identify the version which is the most correct”

The role of women in socio-political life and especially in higher-level positions must certainly be increased. I think that the requirement for inclusion of 20% of women in the voting lists must at least be maintained, if not increased. And if there are political powers which have not met this requirement previously and therefore have no female members of parliament in the National Assembly, then in this sense the Republican party is the leader. As for the proposal to replace a

woman with another female candidate in the case of withdrawal, it will be more difficult to implement, because we also have the issue of sequence; thus there may be a conflict of interest. Nevertheless, of course we will conduct discussions concerning this issue to identify the version which is the most correct.

**Hovhannes Sahakyan, RPA
Head of Standing Committee
on State and Legal Affairs of the
National Assembly**

“The objective is to encourage women”

Setting quotas aim at encouraging women and increasing their representation, and is justified as experience shows that it is possible to ensure real participation this way. Since we also have international responsibilities, we are prepared to agree to any percentage; it is not significant to us whether this will be 20, 25 or 30. As a member of International Socialist Organization (ISO) the ARF party has an obligation for 25 percent and this was introduced in the previous parliament, on our proposal.

**Aghvan Vardanyan, ARF
Fraction secretary**

“The number of mandates available to women is going to be cut in half”

Judging from the mechanisms foreseen by the Electoral Code, it can be assumed that the representation of women will reduce even further in the forthcoming parliament. I think that the number of mandates available to women is going to be cut in half as a result of implementation of regional or open electoral lists. I do not exclude the possibility that women will be included in these lists; however, taking into consideration the incomplete and concerning electoral system in our country, I am very skeptical that any of those women will receive the sufficient number of



Photo by Parliament.am

votes. I should note that NGOs dealing with women's issues also have this same concern and are currently preparing to present a package of proposals to the National Assembly.

**Elinar Vardanyan
PAP, Protection of Human Rights
and Public Affairs
Committee Chair**

“Manipulation in this matter must be eliminated”

Personally, I am in favour of quota setting as our society hasn't developed enough to conduct this knowingly. Moreover, manipulation, by including a woman in the list- to be in line with the law- and then asking her to resign so that she can be replaced by a man, must be excluded. If we are speaking of means that support women, then a certain number of spots in each party's list must be reserved for female representatives. I think that only in this case will it be possible to solve any problems concerning securing women's representation.

**Alexander Arzumanyan
“Heritage” Fraction**

“Female politicians are viewed under a microscope”

I believe that the approval of a proportional representation system will promote more active participation of women in the political process. Let me note that the RPA has developed a strategic project within its party, which is aimed at raising the role of women, as well as increasing female representation in the National Assembly and Local

Self-Government bodies. Unfortunately, to this day, in our culture, women and especially female politicians, are viewed under a microscope. Women themselves are more demanding of these women. Everything is at the center of attention: their family, behavior, clothing, and even the tone of their voice. For example, male politicians never have an issue such as this. However, none of these should ever hold back a woman who has decided to participate in political developments and play an active role.

**Ruzanna Muradyan,
RPA Fraction**

“Even the seemingly slightest details of the Electoral Code are important”

I think that in order for the democratic institutes to become established, the proportional representation system must be conducted through closed lists and not in the form proposed by the draft being circulated. In general, as far as the issue of women's involvement is concerned, then without a doubt even the seemingly slightest details of the Electoral Code are important if we are striving to become a democratic nation, as a lot depends on them. These can hinder the full participation and overall advancement of women. We have already presented proposals and naturally we must also insist on the complete involvement of women in the election process.

**Zaruhi Postanjan,
“Heritage”
Head of fraction**

Main law

The amended constitution and women's rights

From December 22nd New Articles on women's rights have been added to the RA constitution (included in the second chapter “Fundamental human and civil rights and liberties” of the amended constitution) with the amendments entering into force on December 22nd.

Article 28: Universal equality before the law

Everyone shall be equal before the law.

Article 29: Prohibition of discrimination

Any discrimination based on any grounds such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or other personal or social circumstances shall be prohibited.



Article 30: Equal rights of women and men

Women and men have equal rights

One of the objectives included in Article 86 is also of interest.

Article 86: The main objectives of the state's policies

The main objectives of the state's policies in the economic, social and cultural spheres are:

4) Promotion of factual equality between women and men

According to the experts, the changes in the constitution are based on not only the confirmation of the equality of women and men under the law but also the concept of creation of mechanisms for the realisation of equal rights. Thus, if equal rights for women and men are confirmed by Article 30th, then the necessity for equal opportunities arises in Article 86th when “promotion of real equality between women and men” is declared the main objective of the state's policies. In this regard the constitutional clause, according to which the government is obliged to present an annual report to the National Assembly addressing the mechanisms in place to ensure de-facto provision of fundamental rights, is of importance.

Initiative

“Maintain the places of elected women for women”

Our interlocutor Edmon Marukyan – “Bright Armenia” party chairman, independent Member of Parliament – came up with a legislative initiative in October of last year. He proposed that in case of a female Member of Parliament laying down their mandate, it should be passed on to another female Member of Parliament. However, the RA Government rejected this proposal

The Member of Parliament sees a problem with women's participation in politics in Armenia. “There were issues with the electoral Code, about which I had presented a bill at that time. Specifically, I had proposed to maintain the proportions of men and women in the parliament formed through electoral lists by regulating the issue of withdrawals from women. However, as you already know this proposal was rejected. I am going to insist on this again during the new Electoral Code discussions. I do not see any issues in other areas. There aren't any shortcomings at the constitution level; however, we truly have issues

with practical enforcement of various laws, including protection of equality between women and men. 99% of our problems lie in practical enforcement, in how our citizens and officials perceive legislative guarantees” – states Edmon Marukyan.

According to him the issue also comes from the political system: even though on the one hand women's participation is not encouraged, on the other hand, measures are taken to encourage it artificially, which does not have desirable results.

“The inclusion of women in the lists shouldn't be obligatory. Their inclusion should be from a

value standpoint and not as a formality. It is very important that the political participation of women be appreciated, as it can bring new ideas to the political system and refresh it. On the other hand, as a representative of a newly-created party, I must state that we too face difficulties, as women and young girls are not prone to being politically active. The reason for this is that in Armenia there is the general attitude that considers politics dirty work, that it isn't necessary to get into it and that there are specific individuals who are already dirty and will engage in politics instead of you”- he says, stating that the “Bright Armenia” party is developing a political generation-change agenda, where priority is given to the political participation of women, appreciation of their role and utilization of their potential.

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