

**GENDER INEQUALITY AND POLITICAL GOVERNANCE:
SUMMARY OF COUNTRY RESEARCH REPORTS**



Community
Framework Strategy
on Gender Equality
(2001-2005)



Ministry of Welfare
of the Republic of
Latvia

Project Mass Media in (Re)Distribution of Power

**GENDER INEQUALITY AND POLITICAL GOVERNANCE:
SUMMARY OF COUNTRY RESEARCH REPORTS**

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About the project

The project “Mass Media in (Re)Distribution of Power” is executed in terms of the Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality (2001-2005). It seeks, by challenging and changing the existing stereotypes, to reach a situation when both genders are motivated and enjoy equal opportunities to participate in decision-making on issues important for the whole society. The project partners are the Ministry of Welfare of the Republic of Latvia, the Danish Research Centre on Gender Equality, the Giacomo Brodolini Foundation (Italy), the Ministry of Social Affairs of the Republic of Estonia. More information can be found at the project website:
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Introduction

This paper summarises and discusses key points arising from recent research conducted in four EU member states – Denmark, Italy, Latvia and Estonia – on the issue of gender inequality and political governance. The research projects were executed as part of a larger project entitled “The Role of the Mass Media in the Redistribution of Power” financed by the European Commission (Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality (2001-2005)). Although the research projects were managed quite independently of each other, broad covering agreement about the scope of the research and some degree of communication on the matters of methodologies has been present throughout the period of project execution. The aim of the projects was, on the one hand, to look at the issues of gender inequality in the political life of the respective countries. On the other hand, the research aimed at detecting and analysing the role of mass media in influencing this inequality. In other words, what is the role of media in maintaining gender inequality in the political field?

This summarizing report is based on below research reports (by country).

Latvia: *Men and Women in Governance*, by Putnina, A. and Ziverte, L.

Estonia: *Research on Governance: Women and Men Politicians' Equality*, by Raitviir, T.

Italy: *Mass Media and the Redistribution of Power*, by Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini.

Denmark: *The Handbag, the Witch and the Blue-eyed Blonds: Mass Media in (Re)Distribution of Power*, by Moustgaard, U.

This summarizing report includes several parts.

First is a brief outline of the scope of the problem and orientation of the research undertaken in all four countries.

Secondly, the key findings of each country report are presented in a structured way.

Thirdly, a discussion of common themes and arguments (so called *minimal consensus*) is presented. A brief evaluation of the key arguments, findings and recommendations is provided as a conclusion of this summarizing report.

The research projects executed in four countries and analysed here can in principle be associated with what is commonly called *gender mainstreaming*¹. A strategy of *gender mainstreaming* is a strategy of addressing gender equality basically by means of bringing a gender equality perspective into everyday policy-making (i.e. mainstream). In other words, the issue of gender equality/inequality is not confined to the issues of gender balance in representative and administrative bodies only. Instead, gender equality/inequality in political governance is viewed as having wider fields of operation – such as being rooted in diverse roles men and women play in society; how political field is influenced by other institutions such as family; the imagery and gender stereotypes upheld at the level of collective representations (public opinion) and in particular, the role of mass media vis-à-vis the issues.

Gender equality/inequality in the field of politics and public governance traditionally has been and still is a contested concept; opinions and notions of it vary enormously. In the presented research reports gender inequality is nowhere explicitly defined. It is defined rather implicitly as viewed along the following thematic lines – gender balance in political institutions; key barriers that confront women who put themselves forward as candidates for elections and promotions to the offices; strategies that may be pursued to enhance women’s representation (including quota and equal opportunity principles); the impact women have on policy formation at different levels of governance (as political representatives, officials in local governments, activists in NGOs, especially women’s organizations). Given the agenda of the larger project, particular attention is paid to how mass media and public opinion impact the operation of gender linked forms of collective representations (such as stereotypes, myths, images, public opinion) onto the political process in general, and carrier possibilities of female politicians in particular.

¹ “Gender mainstreaming is the (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making. (Council of Europe 1998: 15)”.

The issue of gender inequality in the reports is scrutinised in several directions. Still, the crucial one has been the influence of female politicians on political decision-making process. Among the main questions the researchers asked are the following. Is the equal number of the female representatives in political bodies enough? Are the female and male politicians equal in their capabilities and potential to influence the political process? When it comes to political decisions, occupying political posts, attending one's duties – is gender still relevant and to what extent? How does gender affect one's 'electability'?

In the research reports the traditional tripartite typology of arguments in favour of increased gender equality in the field of politics and public governance (*rights, resource and interest*) is not explicitly addressed. Yet, elements of resource and interest arguments are more vivid. Especially the resource argument comes out quite strongly. The *resource argument* contains acknowledgement that women are contributing to politics something that has previously been absent. This argument also means that more women into politics should change the substance and form of politics – put new issues on the political agenda; bring new ways of dealing with old and new issues. Also, in the reports covered there is rather strong agreement (implicit, not openly acknowledged) that gender equality/inequality in politics has much to do with personal characteristics, especially *attitudes* that are formed in the society at large (family, public spaces, work, and media). In this way, the research reports, intentionally or not, treat gender inequality as significantly related to the field of social psychology. Consequently, gender inequality in politics cannot be exclusively or easily approached by political means only. In the light of this stance, limiting gender inequality in politics has very much to do with attitudes and disposition change in the society at large.

All current research reports adopt predominantly *qualitative* research methodology as a source of primary data although the methods used vary greatly and include, interviews, time-budget diaries, group discussions, event observations, press articles and TV programme analysis, use of secondary statistical and public opinion data. Indeed, methodologically the research reports are quite independent and varied. Still, the broad consensus on the key issues, rather strong relation to resource argument and attitudinal

perspective as well the adoption of the qualitative methodology give enough grounds for the elucidation of the common themes in all four country reports. These research projects to some extent can be viewed as a welcome attempt for a more *comparative overview* of the problems and barriers that exist at various levels and in subfields of political governance process in several countries of the EU. Such comparative perspective allows a clearer identification of the impact of each country's particular historical and cultural background on actual gender inequality present. The comparison is also possible as to the different/common forms and magnitude of the expression of such inequality in the field of politics as well as directions where changes in the way mass media relate to the issue should be considered and acted upon.

In the context of the research project, two country research reports directly deal with the issues of gender inequality and political governance (Latvia, Estonia). The other two country reports analyse the issues mostly from the prism of the role of mass media in redistribution of power (Italy, Denmark). Consequently, the overview of the research follows the above order.

The Latvian Report

Aims and objectives

The task of the Latvian research team is formulated very simply - to identify and analyse factors that influence the participation of women in (political) decision making. In achieving this aim, three broad areas are covered. First is the *nature of politics in Latvia* that includes looking at its characteristics, role of political parties, resources necessary to successful politician, obstacles that preclude more intensive

women's participation in political processes and alternatives to political activity, such as NGOs. The above issues are discussed having in mind multilayered character of political life (national level, local/municipal).

The second broad field is how *the institution of family* affects the chances of a female and a male politicians to advance their careers.

Finally, *public opinion and images of a politician* as they are communicated in mass media and upheld in the Latvia's society are put to scrutiny to arrive at the parameters of genderised image of 'a typical politician'.

The research is openly positioned as proactive and explicitly defines a set of recommendations aimed at specified target audiences. As the authors state, this is indeed the aim of their study – to activate public discussion on gender inequality in politics and propose specific themes for such discussion.

Methodology

At the outset, the qualitative methodological approach is chosen, although comprised of several methods. Firstly, women and men holding representative and executive positions were interviewed. The respondents were chosen so as to cover maximum variety in terms of fields of activity, experience and positions. The questions asked directly corresponded to the set aims of the study (characteristics of political life, family, and public imagery respectively). In addition to the interview material, two focus groups (students at the university level) were held, two observational studies conducted of the conference events, and self-administered diaries of one week's time-budgeting were collected.

Rules of the political game

The researchers point out several features of the political milieu as it has formed so far in Latvia. The first feature is its dual character. The politics as the field of power and competition is almost unanimously recognised as ‘masculine’. At the same time there is widespread expression of the need for more positive ‘feminine’ politics. This positive/feminine politics is thought to be more open and transparent, more guided by ideas and care for public interest. In such ‘positive’ politics gender differences should become less apparent, the demand for genderisation – decrease, and what are called ‘feminine abilities’ – get more valued. The negative/masculine politics is closed, characterised by the advancement of one’s personal interests, especially money and power. This type of politics is akin to business and here genderisation is essential, and ‘masculine’ values dominate. This type of politics is closed, here informal networks predominate and ethical principles are put to disrespect.

Interestingly, the research authors, according to their findings, position the closed politics at the higher levels of governance (national, large cities) whereas open politics – at lower/local levels of governance.

This contrast between open and closed politics helps the authors to bring out various characteristics that depict the contours of women’s participation in the political and decision-making processes. Since the closed politics is associated with the lack of ethical principles, women who, according to the research, take rather seriously moral considerations, find the decision making style practiced in the realm difficult to accept. Secondly, in the context of closed politics, political activity hinges upon the operations of informal networks predominantly formed and managed by men. Women who do not belong to such networks are less capable of influencing what is decided. They also do not ‘acquire’ the necessary networking skills for ‘doing politics’. In short, the closed politics ‘keeps women out’ or at the boundaries of the critical decision-making sites.

In contrast, open politics is where ethical principles are higher on the agenda, where community interests prevail, where working for a common cause gives feeling of

gratification, not attainable in the closed political circles. Being able to take a stance in the interests of a community, follow ethical principles – these characteristics of the political activity more closely resonate with what women would define as ‘proper politics’.

The open/closed differentiation partly overlaps with another division activated in the research – that of the state and local levels of governance. At the state and large city levels, party politics and corporate ties flavour the way the decisions are taken whereas at the local level it is more a personality that matters. In general, as noted by the research, it is at this local level that women have more opportunities of moving forward and upward. Still, the higher level of governance the more female politician needs support of men alas acceptance of the ‘rules of the closed politics’. At the local level, party politics and its corporate ties-based decision-making has a weaker grip. Here women have more chances of ‘equal participation’ and advancement of their constituency’s interests. In contrast, at the state level, the political party is the crucial organising factor thus bringing onto the surface more aspects of the closed politics and thus fewer chances for the women’s involvement.

The research authors assert that gender inequality can clearly be seen in the distribution of the resources necessary for successful political career, such as *networking skills, financial resources, recognisability, knowledge and skills*. Not being part of a corporate network puts female politicians at a disadvantage; on the other hand, unwillingness of women to compromise in moral terms hardens their later engagement with the already existing networks. Also, the access to financial resources needed for one’s promotional campaign is lower for a woman than for a man. The fact that women as politicians on the whole get lower public recognition place them in a worse starting position when entering and later advancing their careers as politicians.

The authors research findings pinpoint a number of other obstacles to women’s entry into politics – male chauvinism and upheld stereotypes unfavourable for women, low

self-confidence of women themselves, high respect of moral principles not commonly appreciated in the current political realm, instability of the political life and its association with the involvement of risk while women are more risk averse; the dominance of the closed politics, and public opinion more favourable to males as politicians.

Politics and the family

The research authors acknowledge that gender inequality in the political field to a great extent stems from the traditional division of gender roles in a family. This division is supported and upheld by specific ideology expressed in what the authors call *myth about the woman's inability to combine work in politics and the family life*. The variations of the myth range from the extreme view that the family is the primary duty of a woman, to milder forms depicting the responsibility for the family and the need for stability as something that prevent women to be equally active in politics as men are. There is also a version that the maximum a woman can hope to reach in politics is to be the First Lady, for if she strives for more and occupies higher position than her male partner, this may damage the male partner's self confidence and consequently ruin the partnership/family.

What are the effects on family if a woman enters a political field? It may cause the break-up of the family; the entry may happen when the children are grown up and 'family obligations have been successfully fulfilled'. Yet on the other hand, it is precisely the need to take care of children that has served as a motivational force for women to get involved in the politics. The family, especially children, has served as a significant support network and a source of stability for a number of female politicians. Interestingly, in depressed rural areas of Latvia where women basically take care of all the management of their families, their involvement into politics seems quite natural and obvious.

From the perspective of a male politician, his wife/partner's role is to serve as a support and consultant. In the contrast to a female politician who does not give up 'her family duties', the male politician views 'stealing time from the family' as justified sacrifice.

Politician and public imagery/opinion

The Latvian research authors strongly assert that gender of a politician is of great significance in public domain communication due to the *perception of the political field as masculine* in nature. From here follow different genderised requirements and expectations towards the image of a politician.

For a woman politician the image is controversial. She has to prove that is eligible to act as a politician, suitable and professional. This means that the media would be less forgiving in the case of failure or mistake. On the other hand, the feminine features – attention paid to women's appearance and clothes, style of dress – are issues high on the agenda when media is covering career and doings of a female politician. There are also some characteristics expected only from the female politician, such as charm, intuition cunning. Having been considered by the public opinion as more honest, caring, taking responsibility and high moral standards, the female politicians are often 'given'/allowed the role of being active in 'the social issues field' as the proper domain of their political endeavours.

As the authors point out, given the lesser prior experience in the political field, in public opinion women are seen as scoring less on the account of prior experience and recognisability.

For a male politician, although appearance requirements exist, they are fewer. The key attribute of a proper male politician in the public imagery is his ability to generate ideas. Men are also characterised as more self-confident, brutal and less sensitive (than women politicians).

The research stresses that male politicians view the development and maintenance of their public image through cooperation with media much more seriously than the female politicians do and female politician find their relations with the representatives of the mass media less comfortable and more complicated.

The Latvian report has the most elaborate section of suggestions and recommendations. The action points address not only the above described issues as themes for public discussion (raising awareness) but also suggest practical ways of reorganising the political field towards more openness and inclusiveness.

Estonian Report

The research team which studied the issues of gender inequality and political power in Estonia from the very beginning set two targets. The first is to reflect on the development of the idea and practice of gender equality in Estonia since 1992 (or from the point in time when Estonia regained its independence from the USSR). The second part is an independent study – an overview of Estonian female politicians' attitudes toward gender equality and the role the mass media plays in shaping the public opinion on the issues surrounding gender equality/inequality.

The research strongly asserts that the low representation of Estonian women in politics, especially in the highest and leading political positions should be generally viewed as a waste of social capital in the context of very limited social resources. Social capital is defined in the report as the possession of social networks and presence of supportive ties. With regard to 'decision-making sites' within the context of politics, this type of capital is not proportionally distributed among Estonia's men and women. Consequently, the outcome is keeping women away from politics and from decision-making that in turn weakens Estonia's social fibre.

Several strong assertions seem to emerge from the research performed. First are those Estonian women who do not have equal opportunities as compared to men to reach elected positions. Secondly, mass media plays the crucial role in reinforcing gender stereotypes in the society at large and in application to the political realm in particular. This makes the life of a female politician much harder and burdensome than that of a male politician. Third, the researchers have observed the worrying slowdown in the development of more gender equality in the last five years.

Methodology

The research authors have relied on a combination of several methods. The overview of the developments of women's participation in the political life of Estonia over the last 12 years is largely based on secondary sources. For the independent study part the authors used semi-structured in-depth interviews of women politicians who represented all major political parties. The main topic of the interviews was the issue of gender equality. The interviews touched upon developmental and socialisation issues, entering politics, women in important positions, gender quality in politics in general, relations with mass media, and a 'balance sheet' of being a woman politician. The interview material has been combined with the summarised results of public opinion polls held among young Estonians.

Gender inequality in the political field

Despite the fact that the female membership in the power holding Estonian political parties currently is close to 50 percent, in terms of leadership they amount only 16 percent. There are 19 percent of women as MPs. The number of women candidates in

local elections is considerable (37.7 percent in 2002) but substantially less in the parliamentary elections (21.4 percent in 2003). Currently in the Estonian Parliament 30 percent of the seats are occupied by women members. There are very few women in leadership positions such as councils, regional departments and associations. These findings provide grounds to assert that women do not have significant impact on political decision-making process.

Electability and ‘reaching the top’

How does it happen that women do not get elected to the representative positions equally often as men do? First reason given in the research is that the number of women candidates for the parliament is rather small (21.4 percent in 2003). Second reason is the format of the elections (according to the party lists). Since men are considered to be more popular, they are customary placed at the top of the candidates’ lists. Thirdly, men candidates as being more recognised get on average more votes than the women candidates (in 2003 elections an average woman candidate get 83.3 percent of the votes cast for an average male candidate).

Yet the growth in the total number of women candidates on the lists (if national and local elections considered together) over the past years has been greater than among men. Unsurprisingly, this resulted in the situation that in smaller municipalities and peripheral towns the share of women in elected positions is now larger than in larger cities and centralised regions. Yet, the share of women in *leading positions* in representative bodies is small. Among city mayors women are 10.3 percent, 11.9 percent of township elders are women. At the same time, assistants –secretaries of these positions are predominantly women (55 percent and 94.1 percent respectively). In business the situation is not substantially different – 5-15 percent of businesses have women in executive positions, 10-11 percent of the executive offices of municipalities are occupied by women.

Despite the high visibility of gender inequality in terms of political representation, the largest political parties do not have considered the issue of gender inequality within their

own organisations as worth a special attention. Political parties do not recognise or place importance on the gender structure of their own parties. Gender inequality is usually treated as a secondary issue (as compared to economy and society). None of the biggest parties have considered putting this issue on the priority agenda so far.

Noteworthy though, the largest Estonian political parties have a women's association, albeit not a particularly active one. Women members of the Parliament belong to the Women's Association of the Parliament. There is also the non-political women's organisation called Estonian Women's League. Yet, according to the authors of the research, when it comes to elections, the campaign „Woman, elect a woman” (borrowed from the neighbouring Scandinavian election experience) has not been very successful.

On the other hand, the existence and activities of different women's organisations in Estonia has played an important role as training grounds for female politicians. They have also brought the issues of political importance to the attention of women and therefore women have become more informed about public issues.

The simple conclusion that follows the first part of the report is that *women have become more interested in the political life but they face more difficulties to become elected as compared to men.*

A career of a female politician

As indicated by the research, the typical female politician in Estonia is having higher education, self-reliant, self-made, and not from the patriarchal family of origin. The key motivational stimuli to go into politics have been self-actualisation and ambition as well as feeling of mission and altruism (i.e. fighting AIDS, stand for large families, improvement of conditions of the disabled). Yet, as the research indicates, female politicians see causality of them entering the political field as depending on external conditions or circumstances. They have come into politics thanks to chance, social ties, or by being recognised. The reason by and large is seen as accidental, not the result of

deliberation. Initially they were brought in, later they had to manage themselves and stayed over. It began through club-like activities or in relation to something that was close to one's heart. Yet, they had less knowledge and experience and had to catch up their male colleagues. To a great extent, women, to be treated as equals to men politicians, should have been much better than the men.

Public attitudes toward gender equality and women in politics

As the research clearly points out, the gender misbalance and barriers to be more influential in political decision-making process, have much to do with publicly held attitudes and here mass media plays a very important role to play.

There are several strongly held attitudes that make the life of a female politician much more difficult than that of a male. First, as noted by the authors, is a view of Estonia as a very traditional country in terms of gender roles. Mass media and education reinforce such roles. The balancing of work (politics in this case) and family for a woman is still considered to be a substantial burden. Secondly, in public opinion politics is not considered to be a suitable occupation for a woman. Thirdly, there are no widely known and culturally rooted models of success of women in executive positions (be they in politics or business). Fourthly, and in a rather twisted way, the idea of gender equality attitudinally has been affiliated with the rejected Soviet past (with its declared 'false equality'); therefore the claims for more gender equality in substantial sections of the Estonian society are perceived with suspicion. The researchers also find it necessary to warn that hopes that the younger generation shall be less affected by the stereotypes may be wrong, as the study (in 2001) showed that even young people were in the grips of many gender role stereotypes.

Interviewed Estonian female politicians reported mostly negative feelings when dealing with media. These negative feelings in turn are to a great extent a result of gender stereotyping which, in its most explicit form, appeared to be the accusation on the part of journalists that the female politician acted unwomanly. Secondly, the media sets a female

politician apart from the male politician in paying a very close attention to her appearance, wardrobe, and manners. She is also stereotypically associated with the so-called ‘soft matters’ - social cultural, ethnic issues and concerns. A female politician is expected to be able to respond and reflect upon how she manages her family life and yet is able to be politically active.

Suggestions for change

The research on gender equality and political participation in Estonia does contain several recommendations. Most of them have the direction of raising public awareness and breaking gender role stereotypisation at various levels and sectors (the media, schools, Parliament, society at large). However, there are two less traditional points. The first is a suggestion of gender quota – addressed to the political parties – as a radical and speedy measure to introduce changes in the process of leadership position acquisition. The other is a valuable suggestion to take up a matter of how media deals with female politicians in their coverage as a serious discussion point in the circles of the mass media people themselves.

The Italian report

The Italian research team clearly states that their interest lie in identifying some of the ideological and cultural reasons why gender inequality still persists in public life, and more specifically in political milieu. They narrow their research focus on analyzing female images and stereotypes linked to what they call ‘traditional roles’ which, according to the authors, can hinder the participation of women in decision-making process. They advance their argument by stressing that the gendered stereotypisation should be viewed as a reaction towards the changing female role in the Italian society. Much of their research is devoted to discussing and analyzing the facets of gender stereotypes and stereotypisation. By stereotypes the authors mean “a clear and simplified form of the mental representation of reality through categorized generalization that also assumes a static connotation”. Moreover, their stability and static nature lends to these

forms of social representation a sense of biological truth - something that is fundamentally so. In other words, gender inequality in politics is solidified by the persistence of gendered stereotypes – still strong even in the face of changing social roles and the position of a woman in the society.

Along the agreed contours of research, the main field where such stereotypes/prejudices are identified and explored are mass media. The topical reference subject has been female politicians.

Methodology

Methodologically the authors of the research undertake four steps. First, and as a conceptual background, they provide an in depth analysis of gender stereotypes, their cognitive functions and possible operational power at a cross-national level. Secondly, the authors explore the trends of women's participation in political life of Italy and their labour market situation. Thirdly, through interviews with female politicians as well as journalists and communication experts, the authors analyse those factors that hinder and/or promote greater participation of women in political processes in Italy. Finally, they take a closer look upon political information programmes (talk shows) with the participation of female politicians during the electoral campaign period before the European Parliament elections of 2004 (using the techniques of content analysis). Yet it is worth a mention, that most of the research has concentrated on genderisation of mass media communication with particular look at female politicians – both in the way they are portrayed and how they themselves relate to such depictions and 'the rules of the political game' in general.

A female politician in politics

The research findings clearly point to significant socio-economic and political structural forces at play when analyzing the processes of stereotyping. There is a long-standing

division of sexual roles maintained by the dominant Catholic culture. On the other hand, there are strong pressures to change these roles – increased participation of women in different fields of work, representational parity of men and women in most jobs. These contradictory trends inevitably led to the process of rebalancing political representation that started some 30 years ago. Yet and still, at a national level there are few female representatives in governmental institutions. The picture is somewhat different at a regional level and especially in central and Northern Italy as well as in some cities where the proportion of female political representatives approach those characteristic of Northern Europe. In addition, the research reports a substantial number of associations, cultural initiatives and centres for women, which definitely involves and trains them for more active decision-making roles. Clearly, strong rebalancing of positions and political representation of men and women is in the making.

The interviews with female politicians reveal more nuanced picture of women's participation in the political processes. The motivational force that drives female politicians (in their own words and understanding) are first, passion and idealism, and, secondly, need to sustain one's identity through self-realization. The power and politics in general is perceived as valuable because it gives an opportunity to do good things, to advance certain cause that is highly valued on moral grounds. These properties, in the view of the female politicians, are not in demand in the political field of Italy which is characterized by its 'brutality, competitiveness, self-reference, cynicism' and domination of hidden interests. Political environment is perceived as the field lacking ethics, degraded and used for personal goals. These considerations are sufficient enough to form an obstacle for more active involvement of women in politics.

The other strongly felt barrier for a woman to enter and advance successfully in the political field, are societal expectations with regard to traditional roles. The pressure of role expectation is so deep that only those who, for some particular reason, are able to circumvent them can act more or less successfully (i.e. do not have family). Or, alternatively, a female politician should suppress her non-political life to a minimum.

The third barrier is exclusionary, co-optative nature of political recruitment and advancement, especially in political parties. One of the constituents that sustain the barrier, as reported by the Italian female politicians, is the nature of inevitable competition within the parties. The competition for a decision or position gets gendered and by means of that a female politician is forced to play with or around the socially 'expected gender role'.

It is then that above-mentioned 'passion' that is needed to overcome the mentioned barriers. However, by not playing according to the rules, female politicians are led to feel alienated from the political field at large. The interviewed female politicians report the feeling of not belonging to what is currently practiced in Italy as politics. Another consequence for the need 'to have passion', ability to sacrifice (e.g. family) for some morally highly valued goal is that the possibility to be viewed by public 'as knowledgeable, competent' then is reduced. Being knowledgeable and passionate, according to the research, in the public opinion of Italy does not go together; this contradicts the image of 'the nature of a politician'.

The marginalisation of female politicians because they do not match the publicly widely held opinion 'what is meant to be a politician' is furthered by another prejudice- that a woman cannot be a leader, only a spokesperson, a person who voices people's concerns.

The female as a politician in mass media (TV programmes)

The image sustained by mass media when covering and depicting female politician is that of a more or less aware motherly figure, with strong and intense emotional life, having greater power at an emotional level. Especially the TV still maintains traditional female role models. Women professionals/politicians are portrayed in vividly different manner

than their male counterparts. When interviewing and discussing on TV with female professionals (including politicians), the professional topics such as job, career, competence, are suppressed and the topics of job-family relation, domestic matters, even cooking abilities are brought to the forefront. The female politicians are also predominantly invited to the programmes that deal with 'soft' matters, such as family, health, social concerns, and human relations.

The female politicians in Italy though then are either those that are contained by or play within the traditional role model, or quite the contrary, exit and enter this model in unpredictable ways, yet still, by these moves, reproduce the model itself, reactivate gender roles and socially expected behaviour. Paradoxically, independent female politicians are those who are capable of imposing themselves as politicians due to their skills of playing around with gender stereotypes, in other words, being somewhat eccentric. Gender stereotypes in the Italian society and mass media are too strong to be ignored if a woman intends to be an active politician.

The Danish report

Aims and objectives

The Danish report aims at analyzing the state of gender equality in the sphere/area between the media, politics and the politicians in Denmark. In particular, the research looks at how female politicians experience equality/inequality in the parliament and the media. The Danish situation is particularly interesting since Denmark is among those countries that have experienced growing presence and influence of women in politics and decision-making over the last 30 decades. Currently 38 percent of the Danish parliamentarians are women (as compared to 17 percent in 1971); there is a high representation of women from Denmark in the European Parliament. 28 percent of the ministerial offices in the present government are filled by women, including the prominent ones previously dominated by men (Minister of Finance, Economic Affairs).

Yet, as the author stresses, gender and gender stereotypes are still heavily negotiated both in political discussions and media coverage of the politics. Media reports involving women tend to be 'gendered'. Surprisingly though, the Danish female politicians are quite aware of the existing stereotypes and do not hesitate to utilize there 'genderisation' for their own advantage, for example to gain publicity.

The Danish report aims at measuring the degree of stereotyping of Danish politicians within a gendered framework. In particular, it looks at how media portray female politicians, how one can determine the measures of equality/inequality of female politicians to their male colleagues.

Methodology

The methodology of the report combines insights gained from two perspectives. First is the collected experience of the Danish female politicians in relation to the importance of gender in the Danish political life. The second perspective scrutinizes how the female politicians are portrayed in the Danish media. In developing the first perspective, a survey poll was organized and 51 responses from female members of the Danish Parliament were obtained². Representatives of all political parties were included and the female politicians were chosen on the basis of their 'visibility' and recognisability.

The media analysis performed was more complex. Many concrete examples of media coverage of the Danish politicians were chosen for the subsequent analysis. Then in depth interviews with the portrayed female politicians were held and supplemented by comments from experienced media consultants who also participated in the survey. In order to select media coverage events, electronic database of the newspapers (*Infomeda*) was used³. In order to deeper analyse the representations of the female politicians, the

² By phone, personal meetings and email

³ The selection of articles was done by searching for the names of particular female politicians.

author also compared descriptions of the male and female politicians primarily taken from the leading daily newspaper *Dagbladet Politiken* and concentrating on the cabinet reshuffle in 2000.

Gender inequality experienced in the political field

Denmark and Sweden are well known as among the most leading countries in the world in terms of gender equality. Despite this common wisdom, even the most recent surveys (2004) among the Swedish parliamentarians indicated the experience of the gender inequality. Although the Danish parliament does not score as high as the Swedish parliament in terms of the proportional number of female parliamentarians, similar reported experience that gender *does matter* (although is not seen as a great obstacle) can be observed in Denmark. The significance of gender, as seen from the survey (see above), can be described in a number of ways.

Firstly, rather indicative experience of *greater* gender equality has been noted in terms of influence within the party. The female politicians also agree that the criticism in the party group is not gender related, and so goes for the praise in the group. Even less gender is experienced as a barrier in the group work.

More divided are opinions regarding such issues as to whether or not men and women can talk for an equal amount of time in the group sessions? It also seems that gender does make a difference (party members are not fully gender neutral) in the distribution of posts.

In the Parliament, as the survey shows, the female politicians experience much more gender inequality. Gender is much more at play and the respondents are more divided in their views of gender equality issues. From responses it is visible that female politicians think that there is unequal distribution of 'talking time' (though perhaps due to the fact that there are more male politicians de facto), that there is bipolarity as to whether men and women are addressed in the same manner and are taken equally seriously. It is even

more vivid that the respondents feel that men and women do not possess the same share of power (men definitely have more). In other words, despite high proportion of women parliamentarians and common acceptance of the principle of gender inequality, the feeling and experience of such inequality is present in the Danish political life.

Female politicians, media and the public – or gender inequality in the media

One strong research outcome is that it is the Danish media that treats politicians based on their (politicians') gender. There seems to be far more focus in media on women's private life, mother's role, appearance, even age. This focus tends to come out and become recognisable in the content and form of the issues/questions discussed with female politicians. The research does not uncover the tendency that males/females are not given the equal share of time/ space to express their views. Where the genderisation comes more strongly in is with regard to how male politicians position themselves as politicians. Females recognize that they have to do much more work and put more effort in persuading the public that they – women – are in fact 'normal' politicians.

There is an interesting twist through to the fact how female politicians evaluate the gender of the reporter they are meeting. The views are divided, so half of the female politicians do not see here any difference whereas the other half does see the difference but consider this to be quite positive and advantageous. Yet, the majority of the respondents strongly reject the idea of using their gender for their own advantage. Instead, they unambiguously wish to be seen primarily as politicians, not as females at first, only then as professionals.

Female politician as a public person feels that her behaviour (or the behaviour of other female politicians) is more under public scrutiny than that of a male politician. In other words, the public seem to be more forgiving if something socially dubious/less conventional is done by a male politician than if by a female politician. Media no doubt is also more interested in the appearance and private life of a female politician as compared to the male politician.

If the situation of how female politicians are treated by the Danish media is looked upon more closely (second perspective), then the key issue is the following. Part and parcel of one's political life (or life as a public person) is heavily influenced by the way the media takes up on him/her, the way one is compared with other actors, the mode of communication between the citizens (voters) and their representatives, what is one's access to media channels and the modality of one's presented image. As already mentioned, the Danish situation is thoroughly discussed in the light of the in-depth interviews with well-known female politicians and also two experienced media consultants. What emerges from the discussion of the results of this research is that there do exist and are available certain strategies available to those willing to figure as politicians in the Danish media.

First, it is clear that perhaps even more than in their own political parties or the Parliament itself, gender of the politician plays much greater role in the media coverage. There are both advantages and disadvantages of such increased significance. The female politicians can be picked out as *special* – either as divas or because they have become mothers – there are attention grabbing opportunities the male politicians would never have. On the other hand, there is reported strong publicly held prejudice (*eligibility barrier*) that a woman has been elected to the position only because she is a woman. This indicates that whatever is explicitly declared, in Denmark the prototype of a politician is still a man. A woman has to prove that she is capable of being a proper politician.

Secondly, the Danish mass media operates and thus reproduces certain gendered images of the politicians. If for the male politicians the images are 'caveman', 'left-wing' and so on. For the female politicians the key images are 'blue-eyed blonde'⁴, 'iron lady' (with the handbag) or the witch.

Thirdly, very vividly, the Danish research points to the current pressure on the female politician – to relate to her gender whether or not the person herself wishes so. Rules of

⁴ With rather uncovered allusion to being stupid or at least naive

the game are so that the female politicians cannot but play two games – that of a political actor and the person who is forced to play with the notions of masculinity and femininity. They are related to and described in much more gendered terms. The media in Denmark is treating female politicians as something special. Still, the rules of the political process in Denmark that make a politician inevitably to be publicly available through media reproduces the genderisation of the political field, despite growing number of women representatives in the public bodies. The gender and related equality/inequality concerns as well as stereotypes are still a solid and usable resource the political life of Denmark.

Common themes.

Gender inequality in the field of politics and public governance.

As mentioned in the introductory part, the research reports are very varied in nature and not easy to compare along the same lines. Still, some common features across countries emerge.

The reports commonly deal with a distinction between legally posited gender equality in the countries surveyed and the de facto inequality that is sustained by various social, political and communicative trends in the public life of the respective countries. Common conclusion is that gender inequality if expressed in several ways in public and political life and their lesser representation in political and administrative bodies is but one present feature of public life. Despite the legal and institutional measures to foster and develop gender equality, the experience of inequality is strongly present in all four researched countries, albeit to a various degree. In this respect, the reports seriously focus on the gender roles and gender role stereotypes prevailing in the societies. A common theme and undoubted emphasis is on how female politicians relate to those roles and stereotypes.

There is an indication of a tendency – in the three countries out of four (Latvia, Estonia, and to a lesser extent, Italy) that female candidates in local and regional elections fare

much better than at the national level. Also, the activities of women's organizations in the three countries are mentioned as very valuable for a women to get training in public decision-making process – through these women get better informed about public and political issues, they gain courage and their self esteem is increased. Consequently, it seems that female politicians are more represented at regional and local/municipal levels of governance than they are at the national level (Italy, Latvia, and Estonia).

In Danish and Latvian research one possible structural barrier to higher gender equality in political decision-making process is described – *the prevalence of informal networks* that seem to be gendered (also indirectly hinted at in the reference to the Swedish poll among the Swedish female parliamentarians).

Estonian, Latvian and to a lesser extent Danish reports touch upon the issue of women's networks (or alternatively, the inability of women to influence political decision-making process because they cannot access or are excluded from the informal networks formed by male politicians). Linked to this is a wider theme raised by the Latvian, Italian, and Estonian papers that concerns the process of political recruitment and advancement in political parties. On the one hand, women are tolerated and open exclusionist approach cannot be clearly observed. On the other hand, when the matters come to listing candidates for elections and promoting to leadership positions, women, especially at the national level, are given lower priority as compared to men. In three out of four reports (Italy, Estonia, Latvia) one of the key motivating factors that motivates women to participate in the political life is an idea, a cause.

The Latvian and Estonian research reports stress that there is personally experienced and publicly communicated work/family dilemma that is expected to be solved by a woman than a man. Although the Danish report indicates that the mass media in this country are still more interested in the private life of a female politician, the balancing of family and work is not a strongly felt, visible obstacle for one's career as a politician.

Gender inequality, politics and mass media

It is definitely a valuable outcome of the four country research projects, if put in comparison, to acknowledge that even if a great political representation of women is achieved (Denmark), this does not eliminate important facets of inequality, especially when it comes to dealing with the mass media. The comparative perspective also allows seeing in greater depth that, especially in public opinion, gender inequality in governance has much to do with how the realm of politics as such is viewed and what gender-linked associations are built in and cultivated through the public image of politics and politicians.

One common theme in all reports is the view that in all four countries, again, with a differing degree of expression, the field of politics is defined and perceived as primarily 'male world' with specific functions/roles allocated to the female politicians. The nature of political process that is perceived as more suitable to men, forces women politicians to manage their gender in one way or another. The political field in all four researched countries cannot be considered to be gender neutral. In particular, in media there seems to be a common additional perceptual barrier which the female politician should overcome, namely, the suspicion that female is/can not be really a politician. In contrast, males do not seem to be in need of proving that – they may be automatically accepted as eligible for the duty/work of a politician. So, reports of all four countries signal the existence of what might be called *eligibility barrier* in public perception of a female that enters/acts in the political milieu.

In all four reports one single message comes out strongly. The media, when dealing with a female politician, pay special attention to her looks, manners and are much more interested in her private life; the male politicians are reported to be much less under such 'visibility pressure'.

Methodology

As mentioned earlier, the research reports basically rely on qualitative methodology. The methods used vary greatly. Still, some of the common features are noticeable.

Noteworthy, the reports directly or indirectly used the election process in the European Parliament of 2004 to scrutinize the issues of gender equality/inequality, in particular focusing on mass media coverage. All four research projects include, as a substantial part of their data and idea sources, interviews with leading female politicians in their respective countries. They do give very much space to the research participants to voice their concerns. Especially Latvian and Danish reports are rich in quotes from the interviewees. This methodological stance allows women, especially female politicians – to speak for themselves and have the reflections of male politicians or experts to second ‘the core story’

Suggested action points and lines

Each of the reports has its own suggestions and recommendations, yet it is possible to discern some common themes or action points. The four country research reports strongly point out that gender inequality in the field of politics and governance may be reduced or, ideally, eliminated over a long term only with many more proactive activities towards the media and the public opinion.

The reports suggest a number of themes to be thrown into public discussion. The most critical among them are the following. First, the definition of the political field and rules of the political game. The reports repeatedly point to the common/public perception that the political field is perceived as one where males ‘fit in’ better, where the style of power execution and decision-making have gendered attributes that privilege males.

Second, the imagery of a woman as a politician versus male politician. The characteristic interest in woman’s appearance, her strategy of solving the work/home dilemma, giving more attention to her private life, ‘allocation’ of ‘softer social concern’ fields as more appropriate, seeing women politician as more a ‘concern voicer’ than a leader and a

thinker – all these attributions constantly and uncritically reproduce a collective representation of a ‘proper female politician’. Redoing the imagery is much in the hands of the media since the female politicians do not see themselves this way in reality.

Thirdly, the relations and communication between female politicians on the one hand, and mass media representatives on the other hand are not easy. Yet, the public appearance and communication through mass media is part and parcel of one’s career as a politician. So here, more conscious and considered policies from the mass media as to how to interact with female politicians seem to be very much in order.

In short, the suggestions (more explicitly spelt out in the reports from Latvia and Estonia) go in three directions. Firstly, to raise awareness, educate public, overcome stereotypes and prejudices, to counteract gender stereotyping in education and career. Secondly, reformulate and redefine the relations between the mass media and female politicians. Thirdly, by political means to restructure the rules of the political game so as to make it more open, transparent and inclusive thus enhancing gender equality in the realm. In other words, all reports are advocating a reorganisation of political and policy processes as the existing practices are, at best, gender-blind and, at worst, gender-biased. The political activity is not gender-neutral. Unreflected assumptions of such nature favour existing gender inequalities in the political field whereby men’s and women’s social, psychological, economic, and welfare benefits are unequally reproduced.