

# **MEN AND WOMEN IN GOVERNANCE**

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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: [www.medijuprojekts.lv](http://www.medijuprojekts.lv)

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## INTRODUCTION

The present research has been conducted within the framework of the research project „Role of the Mass Media in the (Re)Distribution of Power”, financed by the European Commission and the Ministry of Welfare of the Republic of Latvia. Its task is to analyse factors that influence the participation of women in decision-making. The research study analyses the formulation of policy in the community and among politicians as well as various gender stereotypes that affect the access of women and men to decision-making, skills and knowledge that are required for involvement in decision-making.

The research is based on qualitative research methods – interviews and focus group discussion, encompassing an extensive spectrum of governance. It does not aspire to an exhaustive description of the situation concerning men and women in decision-making. The report analyses the manner in which politicians, public and municipal officials as well as representatives of non-governmental organisations discuss politics. The research is based on the stories of men and women about their experiences and it is not possible to check the link of the story with actual life. The authors of the research hold the opinion that stories told cannot be viewed only as stereotypes, because research data convincingly show how stereotypes influence the behaviour and experience of people.

As the practical task of the research was to identify discussion themes and potential target audiences for the actualisation of gender equality issues in the society of Latvia, the structure of the Report has been organised around this task. Themes for discussion have been combined in three sets, emphasising the ambiguous place and role of the woman in governance.

First, an analysis has been made of the dual political space in Latvia that is constituted by policy at various levels with rules of the game characteristic for each level. The higher the political level the more closed the policy and the more pronounced the manifestation of gender inequality. Women encounter many obstacles in politics that include access to resources as well as rules of the game in parties.

Second, the research studies the compatibility of the family and politics, analysing a politician's time distribution and the role of the family in the lives of politicians of both genders. On the one hand, the family experience provides the woman with advantages and skills in formulating a political perspective as well as organising work. On the other hand, the role of the woman in the family that traditionally has been subordinated to the man, is extended also into the public realm, thereby justifying the woman's secondary place in politics.

Third, the research analyses the image of a politician in Latvia. According to respondents, the politician's image is primarily masculine, thus a woman-politician finds it difficult to develop her own image. No convincing and strong image of a woman-politician has developed in Latvia, that would be treated as self-evident as in the case of the image of a man-politician.

## I. RESEARCH METHODS

A total of 67 respondents were interviewed in the course of the research study, of whom 49 were women and 18 - men. Respondents represented various levels of governance – deputies of the Saeima (members of the Parliament), rank-and-file party members who at present do not hold any elected posts, deputies of local governments (local politicians), managers, representatives of public and municipal executive powers, as well as employees working in the public sector. It is characteristic that a number of the respondents working in several governance sectors have diverse experience, for example, a respondent (man/woman) who at present works in public administration and is also a rank-and-file party member, or a respondent (man/woman) who is the chairperson of a local government with long-term experience of work in the public sector. In collating information about respondents (see Table 1), the status of the respondent as an elected officer has been taken as the baseline, although not infrequently the said person works as a politician as well as holds a permanent position at some public or municipal institution, thus combining the two offices.

The research was conducted during the period from April to August 2004, by interviewing respondents in three cities and in four district local governments.

The structure of interviews consisted of three basic blocks. First, questions were asked that would reveal the respondent's notions of politics, an understanding of the political process, the place of the woman and the man in governance, the necessary skills and knowledge needed for work in governance. A question was asked concerning the respondent's experience until now, motivation and the path he or she has had to take to come into governance. Another set of questions covered obstacles and advantages, benefits and losses caused by work in governance as well as questions concerning their family life and friends. The third set of questions pertains to the development of the public image and the role of the mass media in the formation of the image of a politician (man/woman).

The information collected and collated in the course of the research is confidential. The identity of those respondents whose opinion has been presented in the final report of the research, has been coded. Likewise the name of a city/local government, if it is mentioned several times, has been designated by various names (letters).

The interviewees were also asked to fill in a diary covering one week, indicating the distribution of time. A total of 13 diaries were delivered back to the researchers.

**Table 1. Description of respondents.**

	Women	Men	Total
1. Saeima (Parliament)	3	3	6
2. Executive power of the highest level (public administration agencies, ministries)	7	1	8
3. Municipal decision-making	18	9	27

power (local politicians, municipal managers)			
4. Municipal executive power	13	5	18
5. Women – party members who do not hold any elected posts	3		3
6. Public sector (representatives of non-governmental organisations)	5		5
Total	49	18	67

In addition, two random surveys were undertaken. The researchers, acting as observers, attended a conference – workshop „Let’s Share Experience” for women-entrepreneurs in Latvia on 16 April 2004 in Riga and the establishment of the Women’s Cooperation Network on 1 - 2 May 2004 in Sigulda.

Two youth focus group discussions were organised, attended by 15 students of Bachelor Studies in Politology and 1 student of Bachelor Studies in Communication Science.

## II. TARGET GROUPS IDENTIFIED BY THE RESEARCH

The research reveals several potential target groups for future project seminars. First, politicians in leading positions at the public and municipal level emerge as a target group. Gender inequality is an obstacle in a closed and non-transparent decision-making process. At the policy-making level there is a difference in the attitude towards the role of the gender in decision-making among participants in politics at the municipal and state level, outlining two political spaces with different rules of the game and the role of women in them.

Second, a significant target group is constituted by rank-and-file members of political parties. The majority of the membership is constituted by women who either feel restrictions on being involved in decision-making or do not want to get involved in decision-making.

Third, the research reveals women - the potential candidates who are preparing or would be able to take part in politics. If women – rank-and-file members of political parties, in the most part, have experience in governance or leadership, these women have acquired their experience in the non-governmental sector or community work. These women have a critical view on the political process and a high standard of moral ethics, however, they lack support and motivation to be active in politics. During the interviews, respondents linked positive changes in politics with the appearance of new politicians and the consolidation of new ethical standards in politics.

### III. RECOMMENDED DISCUSSION THEMES

The research revealed several themes, which in view of their controversial argumentation would be appropriate for generating discussions among decision-makers as well as the general public.

1. **Politics – the woman’s unsuitable suitability.** The paradox in views on the role of genders hides in the opinion that, on the one hand, a woman is better suited for decision-making due to such stereotypical features as logic and a purposeful, comprehensive approach. On the other hand, a view persists that politics is a very complicated and difficult area where the game is not always conducted according to open rules, that is why women are not suitable for this area and are unable to enter it. The research description below provides a detailed analysis of the understanding of politics and governance in the context of gender roles, reviewing argumentation that creates obstacles as well as opportunities for the participation of women in this area.

The discussion might encompass the change of the notion of power and politics, discussing resources and skills that are required for changing the quality of politics.

2. **Double standards of the family’s significant insignificance.** On the one hand, one of the most frequently mentioned reasons that make the woman stay out of politics, is the traditional perception of the woman as a person who belongs to the realm of home. In the argumentation provided by respondents this perception manifests itself in two ways. First, part of the respondents believe that the place and role of a woman has been designated in principle, maintaining that, proceeding from the gender-based division of labour, politics is the role of the man for which he as the head of the family is better prepared. Second, it is emphasised that after household work has been completed the woman physically has no time left over for politics. In its turn, the alienation of the man from the family is understandable and justifiable. Politics is perceived as superior to other areas of life – private life and the family, more frequently than other areas of activity. Thus, women-politicians with a child or children are perceived in a negative way. If such a woman prefers politics and does well in this area, she is held responsible for the neglect of her children. If she tries to combine work and the family, it is detrimental for her political activity. The low popularity of areas related to the family policy in Latvian politics is explained in a similar way.

On the other hand, politicians –men and women – emphasise the significance of their spouses and children in rearranging their duties at home and adapting to the rhythm of the politically active family member. Such political activity may bring a positive contribution to the family. It is interesting that men-politicians emphasise that in view of the husband’s absence and busy schedule all household tasks rest on the shoulders of the wife, while women-politicians speak about various strategies how they try to reconcile their home life, the upbringing of children and their working life by changing the model of their family life and by actively involving their family members in housework.

Yet another way that allows politicians to be together with their families, is the quality of politics. The abovementioned „masculine” style of politics requires particularly as much additional time as is dedicated to the „necessary people”, informal meetings and

formal events. In Latvia the family is not employed in the development of a politician's public image. Still, some politicians indicated, that their children had helped them in their work as assistants or had participated with interest at their meetings with the electorate.

The discussion of the given theme may be amplified when discussing the organisation of work and efficiency of local governments as well as the families' own strategies in the division of duties and roles at home.

3. **The politician's public image and the community: the uninterestingly interesting woman-politician.** First, by stereotyping politics as a masculine or potentially dirty area, a strict division by gender is revealed. Respondents describe women in contrast to men as more honest, more reserved and unsuited for political games. Alongside with negative perceptions of politics, women are confronted with higher demands because to ensure their efficient activities they must acquire both political standards that manifest themselves in their appearance, behaviour and in the way an active public image is formed. In comparison with men a woman-politician generates a more extensive interest among the mass media in a wider area of criteria. At the same time, results of the research reveal the opinion that the community is less interested in a woman-politician than a man-politician. It manifests itself in the party strategy during the formulation of the party lists for elections where one of the criteria is the popularity that the respective candidate has already acquired. An opinion prevails among the parties that it is more difficult to „sell” the image of a woman-politician, that is why women are placed in the leading position in election campaigns.

Second, a positive and convincing image of a woman-politician has not been established in the community. The most popular women-politicians are viewed as an exception. When developing her public image, the woman must take into account the investment of additional time and financial resources for maintaining her appearance as well as for attracting the interest of the community. These facts influence men as well, although to a lesser degree.

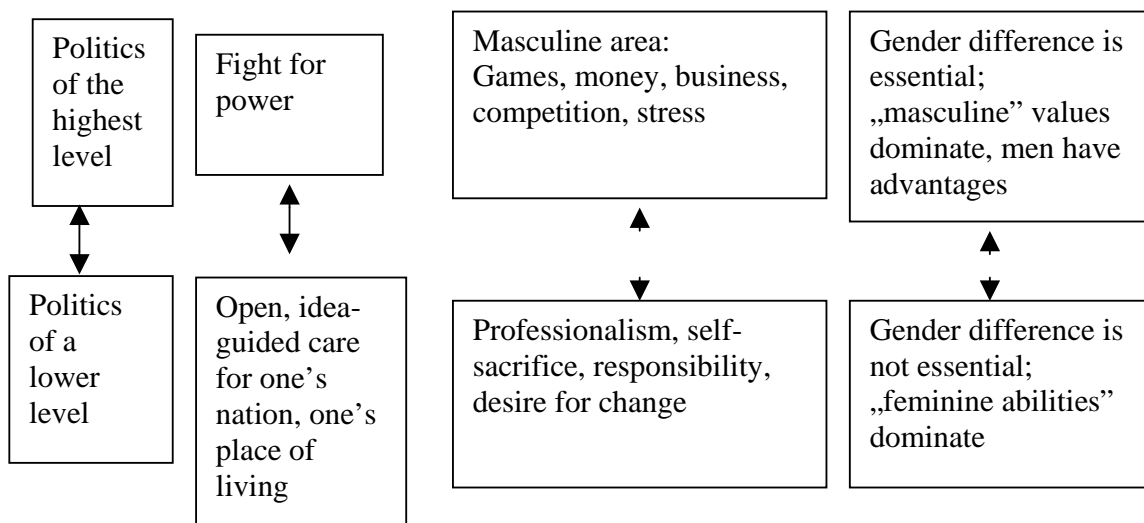
It is advisable to expand the discussion by focusing on requirements that the community puts forward for a politician, comparing demands of the public image and other criteria of professional activity. The relations among these criteria are particularly important in the context of the mass media, directing the public interest away from the quality of politics to the discussion of the politician's image and behaviour. This problem is closely related to the problem of manipulation in the mass media and the skill of politicians to work with the mass media.

#### IV. DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH RESULTS

##### 1. POLITICS

The paradox of the woman's unsuitable suitability for politics is found in the dual face of politics. On the one hand, politics is linked with the fight for power and competition. It is „masculine” already in its prime origin and men as its bearers and masterminds behind the rules of the game are more suited for this politics than women. On the other hand, there is talk about the necessity of politics of a different kind, where care for the community, search for compromises, well-considered and justified decision-making would dominate. In view of its features such politics better correspond to the characteristic features of women and are considered to be ideal, however, often out of reach in the present political environment of Latvia. Although these positive or „feminine” politics are given a positive assessment, their image among politicians and in the community has not been formed and has not taken root. It can be called „feminine” in relative terms, as gender inequality that is characteristic for the closed model of politics, disappears in this politics and open and transparent rules of the political game dominate. Features of positive politics are characterised in relation to the main - „negative” - model of politics. Such politics provide more opportunities for women to get involved as well as to maintain a high moral and ethical standard. At the same time these politics allow those men who are not satisfied with standards of „masculine” politics, to also get involved.

**Picture 1. Stereotyping of models of politics**



Interviews reveal the tendency of respondents to recognise that the more open and transparent the political process, the more important the professional criteria of politicians become and the gender and gender-related stereotypes become less important. Although the model of closed politics was recognised as the dominant model, many respondents remarked on having observed a trend that increasingly more often women entered politics.

*Women enter politics in a slower yet smarter manner. Men dash in quickly. However, it is the women's fault that they let men get ahead of them. (A man - manager of the K local government, with long-term experience in leading positions).*

Several respondents pointed out that they foresaw changes in the area of politics, as increasingly more women would enter decision-making and issues of the welfare of people would come into the focus of political activity, while the political process itself would become more open and qualitative.

The analysis of trends in politics confirms the assumption that the new parties are more open to women.

### **1.1. Closed politics: lack of ethics and the informal networks**

Notwithstanding the dual assessment of politics, the majority of respondents recognise politics to be a masculine area. The higher the political level, the more myths and negative assessment are expressed about it. This opinion is expressed by respondents holding high executive offices (for example, indicating „that prior to entering the party my public image was more positive”) as well as people who are not related to politics at the highest level. Young people in group discussions also emphasised the negative perception of politics – its ability to transform the human personality:

*I would not like to devote my young years, nerves and energy to politics. I do not want it because of its slops. (A young woman, a student of politics, the focus group discussion)*

Although closed politics is also linked with the masculine decision-making style, it is not an area where only men participate. However, interviews have confirmed that women more often than men believe that these politics are unacceptable in view of moral considerations, that is why they do not want to take part in it. In closed politics community interests and welfare turn into instruments in the hands of power for the achievement of some personal benefit:

*There should be the feeling that the civil parish exists for the people however, it turns out that the person exists for the civil parish. When will the understanding finally come... The son tells me that it can be done for the European money. I told him to go and tell this. However, it is easier for the civil parish lady chairman to take from people. One must account to Europe. A woman – a civil parish chairperson. A good figure, well dressed, a lovely smile. She has never been involved in economic activities. In the neighbouring parish everything is happening. The civil parish gains benefit, and it is the civil parish chairman (A woman with governance experience, a member of an NGO.)*

In closed politics informal decision-making networks are important. Among men the informal networks are better developed and have a longer history. Not infrequently these networks are based on the years-long experience of cooperation and corporative links that connect business and politics.

*I myself provided advice to the political party and the informal networks of men manifested themselves in a very strong way, where decisions are made concerning elections, campaigns, how things will be arranged inside the party, who will be the real one, these matters are addressed within the informal networks of men that have already existed for years and that do not change. (A woman, an active member of an NGO).*

Women are excluded from these networks and women lack the networking skills and solidarity for addressing political issues. The development of informal networks is discussed in more detail in the chapter on resources necessary for political activity.

At all political levels disappointment in politics brings on a sense of loss, as it is not possible to achieve the initial aims and initial moral standards are lost. A sense of disappointment is also brought about by a lack of satisfaction for what has been achieved. Closed politics lack continuity and justification, they are short-term and unable to give any feeling of gratification. The higher the political level the more often respondents confess that it is more difficult to retain their position and keep their self-respect.

### **1.2. Open politics: professionalism and community interests**

Respondents emphasised, for the most part, the positive and morally acceptable acquisitions, gained by work in the area of open politics. When working in politics, most frequently a positive acquisition is the satisfaction gained and the ability to address the problem in an efficient way. Another significant acquisition is new colleagues and people sharing the same views.

Values within parties change also with the appearance of new parties in politics. If in parties with long experience of work a hierarchy has developed where it is difficult for women to break through, the newly-established parties are more open to women. It is confirmed by the lists of nominees running for the elections to the 8th Saeima (Parliament) and the composition of the body of Parliament members. It is interesting to note that there was no difference in the views on politics among politicians of both genders who had recently started their political career and they were based on the model of open politics, emphasising the desire not to compromise themselves and the possibility not to do so while being active in politics. The fact that after the elections to the 8th Saeima politics has started to change, has been recognised also by experienced politicians.

Unethical politics with the existing power mechanism as well as the unwillingness to compromise themselves is one of the obstacles that deters women from entering politics. The formulation of politics determines, to a large extent, the accessibility of decision-making for women. Thus, employees and local politicians of the M local government confirmed almost unanimously the ideological determination to serve the people, identifying it as motivation for work as well as the aim of their work. Alongside with the identification of this aim, increasingly more women assume leading positions in the executive branch of the local government, and professionalism and knowledge rather than gender stereotypes dominate in the selection criteria.

*Such scrupulous work to really work for the people. At times anonymous, dumb questions come (...). We are aware that if a person is not satisfied we will not be here. Then it determines a lot, to satisfy every person's needs as far as possible (A woman, the head of a division in the M local government).*

A clear political aim and sustainability are factors that will allow women to get more actively involved in politics, seeing the sense of political activity. At the state level there is no convincing definition of open politics and a universally accepted and widely applied ethical code of a politician.

*We lack this support for each other. And you can achieve your aim with much calmer methods and techniques, rather than throwing strong abuse at each other. Look, how sometimes after a plenary session people start attacking each other. It is tactless, it is just showing-off for the community. But after that people must still get together, they must meet. (A member of the Parliament)*

Stereotypes expressed by respondents point to the role of women, including needs of the community in the focus of attention of politics:

*We have never ever had a case when women have been a majority somewhere. However, the participation of women and at least some voice still directs the politics of any party towards some social matters. Men do not take any interest in it at all. Men, for the most part, think about themselves and their electorate. (A woman, an official in public administration with governance experience, a member of a party).*

The material of interviews shows that the significance of social areas in politics is actually linked with the respondent's ethical views on the significance of politics in general. By bringing forward community interests and welfare as the aim of political activity, social issues come into the focus of politics. In this respect the political direction dominating in Latvia should be taken into account – rightist liberal policy as well as the long-term objectives identified by the state<sup>1</sup>. The interviewed women more often than men assumed the position of a representative of the community, emphasising that national development was a means for improving the welfare of the community.

### **1.3. Two political spaces: the state and the local government**

Statements made by respondents show that two different political spaces exist in Latvia. At the local government level the main role is played by personalities of local politicians. The small scale makes politics dependent on personal contacts. Respondents often spoke about lack of alternative candidates, as a result of which one and the same woman or man were elected to the office of a council or civil parish chairman for many years running, as there were no other candidates. However, in general, women have the possibility of moving forward at this level. As to the ratio of men and women in the largest local governments and at the Saeima (Parliament), there is evidence that the ratio of women tends to increase outside Riga. If the ratio of women elected to the Saeima (Parliament) in

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<sup>1</sup> Respondents emphasised that the long-term objectives of Latvia during recent years had been focused on accession to the European Union and NATO rather than on the individual.

2002 was 18%, then at the Riga City Council women constitute 13%, in Ventspils – 27% while in Daugavpils – 40%<sup>2</sup>. In the districts under research – Aizkraukle, Bauska, Rēzekne and Ludza districts – the number of women – chairpersons of civil parishes in percentage terms fluctuated from 25% to 40%.<sup>3</sup>

The administrative reform and the amalgamation of civil parishes is one of the threats that will affect the possibilities of women to stand for local government elections. In this case local government politics will be taken over by political parties where women have less possibilities of breaking through.

In its turn, at the level of the large local governments and the state, decision-making depends on party politics and corporate ties. At this level the men's lobby is attributed dishonest, brutal methods that are linked with intimidation or exerting influence on family members. Thus "big politics" is typically assessed as negative and dirty in the opinion of its participants as well as people not involved in it. Gender inequality manifests itself in politics of the highest level. The higher the political level, the more difficult it is for a woman to enter it on her own, without men's support. The woman feels much more lonely in politics as the cooperation networks of women are much weaker than the informal networks of men. Although women also hold several of the highest public offices, the view prevails that in reality decision-making and policy-making take place at the level of executive power, where women in Latvia have not yet progressed to the leading positions. In politics of the highest level the impact and the pressure of various interest groups manifest themselves more clearly by using financial resources and informal relations.

At the same time other trends emerge also in politics of the highest level. The weaker the presence of corporate ties in a party, the more possibilities there are for a woman to move forward and to cooperate with other participants of politics on the basis of equal rules. Not all issues are decided in a closed manner, thus equal rules of the game appear for both genders in politics.

In local governments there are good examples of open and transparent politics. Respondents do not generalise these examples as in the case of the negative perception of politics, thus they develop neither a positive stereotype about politics nor a moral-ethical standard for the political process itself.

#### **1.4. Role of parties in politics**

The role of parties in politics depends on the political level. Local politicians in local governments emphasise the formal nature of the party system, stressing that at the local level economic activity prevails over party interests and politics. The following factors dominate among local politicians when choosing party affiliation: the flawlessness of the party image, the most popular personalities in the party, however no close ties develop with the party leadership in daily life. Respondents point out that with few exceptions

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<sup>2</sup> Data from [www.saeima.lv](http://www.saeima.lv), [www.riga.lv](http://www.riga.lv), [www.ventspils.lv](http://www.ventspils.lv), [www.daugavpils.lv](http://www.daugavpils.lv).

<sup>3</sup> Data [www.lps.lv](http://www.lps.lv)

parties do not take interest in rural areas and in involving young people in party work. There are few parties which come to power and the financial and economic situation of local governments improves as a result.

Local politicians recognise the necessity of parties or election associations during elections. Thus, in the M city the most popular list has remained almost unchanged for many years, the members of the organisation assemble only before elections to approve the current list, while in daily life the organisation has no practical role. It is true that individual members of the organisation thus manifested their loyalty to the local government governance, pointing out that affiliation to an organisation facilitated their individual careers.

On the one hand, the study testifies to the weakness of parties in the regions of Latvia. On the other hand, it also shows that different criteria are applied in the smaller local governments where the electorate assesses the individual characteristics of nominees. Thus parties invite locally popular people to join the party – these are people who are known for their poise or who hold positions where the performance of their duties entails frequent contacts with the local community. Thus women have more opportunities to distinguish themselves.

*In civil parishes people still pay attention – Anna does not drink, Anna knows how to do this and that. They look at the professionalism. (...) In this case that chap Miķelis will vote for Anna because he knows that Jānis who is on the list, drinks, takes one drop too many and he cannot be trusted with the administration in the civil parish. As regards the Parliamentary elections, then the personality is not so well-known. Then stereotypes are at work (A woman – a party member with election experience, an active member of an NGO).*

The low role of parties in local governments is mostly emphasised by women – elected politicians, while men-elected politicians speak more frequently about the role of parties in defining the activities of the local government. The research data allows this difference to be interpreted as the orientation of the woman towards real results of activities, continuity and sustainability that is difficult to follow in the political environment of Latvia. The interviewed members of leftist parties in Latvia remarked on the more significant role of a party in political activities and in the development of their political identity.

At the state level, a party is a significant factor in organising political life. Most frequently respondents recognised that parties covered up the informal closed decision-making model. Thus, such a party does not operate according to principles of democracy and does not serve as a means of educating new decision-makers inside the party.

*I know that people from aside are invited [for elections]. However, I have a hazy notion how decisions are made. The programmes, charters are approved by all of them together. When listening to the party X, how they promote those active women. It is not the case in*

*the party Y. (A woman, a rank-and-file member of the party Y, an NGO leader, has experienced the change of parties)*

It is interesting that the majority of interviewees, holding elected offices, recognised that somebody had invited them to take part in politics by being nominated for elections. Thus, individuals, standing outside the party, become a party resource during the campaigns, at the same time impeding the movement forward for long-term party members.

One of the essential factors motivating women to be active in politics, is an idea. If the support of others, sharing his/her views in the party and the implementation of his/her ideals is important for a party member, the stage prop quality of the party and its implemented policy may cause disappointment:

*To influence anything? At the meeting of the party unit this was what we were told - you pray (to God) and we will take decisions. We have to pray for the party leadership. I thought I would split my sides. You will carry on deciding and we will pray for you. I am a Christian, I know the power of prayer, however, it is not related to the exchange of information in a party! (A woman, a rank-and-file member of the party, an NGO leader, has experienced the change of parties).*

Lack of members, sharing the same views, and lack of a team are particularly topical at local government elections where the party, in actual fact, does not operate as a support organisation. This question is closely linked with politics at the party level. The more closed the party decisions, the fewer opportunities party members have to influence the formulation of the party strategy and interests. Several respondents with party experience emphasise lack of strategy and a single ideological standpoint inside a party. Those party members who hold leading positions in public administration, have a more positive view on the situation, believing that party interests are formulated and implemented already when the party comes to power.

## **1.5. Resources for political activity by gender**

### **1) Networking skills**

As it has already been mentioned, contacts with the necessary people is a significant resource of the closed politics. However, networking skills are necessary also in the process of open politics as a means for developing these politics. Corporate ties that have often been established already during the soviet period, are significant in the negative understanding of politics. On the whole, women have less resources and this factor determines worse starting positions for women..

*In politics it is as follows, for example, a person was in business and said that this should be done this way and that should be done that way. However, after he came and worked for some time in this kitchen, he has already started speaking in a different way. It is necessary to weave in and out, resources, people and ways must be sought to achieve results with the given resources. What plays a part is that one must not commit a crime against the country, one's conscience or, employees (..) Male solidarity exists in politics,*

*however, it manifests itself when the working hours are over. Then they can arrange to go hunting, which I cannot arrange with a woman. (The chairman of the S local government).*

This resource is dangerous, as upon its accumulation there is a strong possibility to dirty oneself and lose one's self-respect. Women emphasised the unwillingness to compromise themselves more frequently than men.

*It is one of the reasons why there are so few women at the top political level where policies are really made and decisions taken, because they are not ready to go for compromises, they find it unacceptable. (A woman – a long-term party member with experience in leading governance positions).*

Still, respondents acknowledge that women have good contacts at the party rank-and-file level as well as the level of elected offices. Women know problems of women - members of other parties as well as the possibilities and the political „kitchen“. It is true that this knowledge and informal contacts are not used for decision-making. Women emphasise their potential in promoting cooperation among parties by using women's networks, however, they point out that such women's networks are not used in „big“ politics.

*We, women in the Saeima (Parliament), come together often. Just to have a cup of tea or coffee together, to chat about home, the family or, children. Sometimes we also talk about serious things. Once we went to the parlour X because women must be in good shape at all times (A woman – Member of the Parliament).*

One of the reasons might be women's weak feeling of identity in politics, another reason might be the inability to formulate women's interests. Such women's networks develop in the public sector, for example, consolidating the identity of rural women and establishing cooperation networks, formulating areas of interests. Discussions of the Women's Cooperation Network work group on women in decision-making showed that women, not involved in politics, did not know the daily activities of a party while women – party members had not been able to address women about those issues that were relevant for them.

The question is about the quality of the use of such networks where cooperation networks can provide an exchange of opinion and information inside a party as well as between parties and the electorate. The establishment of the Women's Cooperation Network showed that there was awareness of the necessity of such networking.

## **2) Financial resources**

All respondents point out that the quality of politics is closely related to the amount of involved financial resources. The higher the political level, the higher the financial stakes.

*In reality any victory that has been achieved, makes one remember the compromises and the money that stand behind it. That is a choice – either you let matters progress as planned by the large financiers or else you also enter the game and take some financial resources that your people are able to find (A woman - a long-term party member, with experience in leading governance positions).*

Financial resources are necessary for politics, which is assessed both positively and negatively. If in the first case the attraction of financial resources is related to ensuring and advertising the activities of the party, then in the second case money is needed for promoting and motivating contacts between politicians and the community.

As women get involved in political transactions less frequently, receiving on average lower salaries<sup>4</sup>, they have less access to financial resources. Besides, the practice that exists inside parties during the pre-election campaigns, places women in a worse starting position, forcing them to seek resources for their own personal campaign. Men have more possibilities and capacity to get started in politics. Within the framework of the Women's Cooperation Network, representatives of non-governmental organisations and parties expressed the opinion that the funding of parties from the national budget would give women a more extensive starting position in politics.

### **3) Recognisability**

The research shows that a large part of people in the highest executive positions and in the party lists have been invited, using their established recognisability, bypassing the career development within the frame of the political party. On the whole, this recognisability is lower for women.

*And one might wonder about it also in the government. Singers, actors – they have all got in there because they are popular. I worked in the election commission myself: please, give me and show me the list where Raimonds Pauls is included, he writes good songs at least. People are really strongly influenced by the image. (A local government employee).*

Besides, as it has been already discussed in the chapter on the image of a woman-politician, the man is recognised to be better suited for the image of a politician.

### **4) Knowledge and skills**

Men as well as women emphasised that work in governance required specific knowledge, in particular human psychology, as well as in-depth knowledge in some area. One must be able to perceive the interconnections of situations, thus prior governance experience is a prerequisite for work in politics. It is interesting that women, who were interviewed, accorded more relevance to the analysis of their knowledge and skills upon starting their work in politics. Interviews revealed the view that men were more confident of themselves and entered politics quicker and in an easier manner.

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<sup>4</sup> On the whole, in 2002 salaries of women in the country constituted 81,5% of the salaries received by men. "Women and men in Latvia". LR CSP, 2003.

Almost half of the respondents recognise that they have always been active and that their participation in politics has been a logical continuation of their career or lifestyle. This has been emphasised by almost all women – local politicians at the local government level. Communication skills become important in open politics – the skill of talking to people and the ability to find compromises in the dialogue with other participants of politics and the community.

## **1.6. Obstacles to women's entry into politics**

### **1) Male chauvinism and stereotypes unfavourable for women**

Almost half of the respondents stress stereotypes and male chauvinism as an obstacle to the participation of women in politics, although sometimes they themselves do not support these stereotypes. Respondents also expressed the opinion about the physiological unsuitability of women for the considerable amount of work and responsibility that is required by participation in decision-making. On the other hand, the stereotypes used are also expressed as the self-censorship of women – the duty to be at home and to take care of children and the family.

### **2) Low self-confidence and high moral standards of women**

The next group of obstacles – the low self-confidence of women – is related to the stereotyping of women outside the public realm. Women do not see themselves in an active public office. Besides, women, on the whole, have higher moral and ethical standards, which make women refrain from participation in politics.

### **3) Instability of political life**

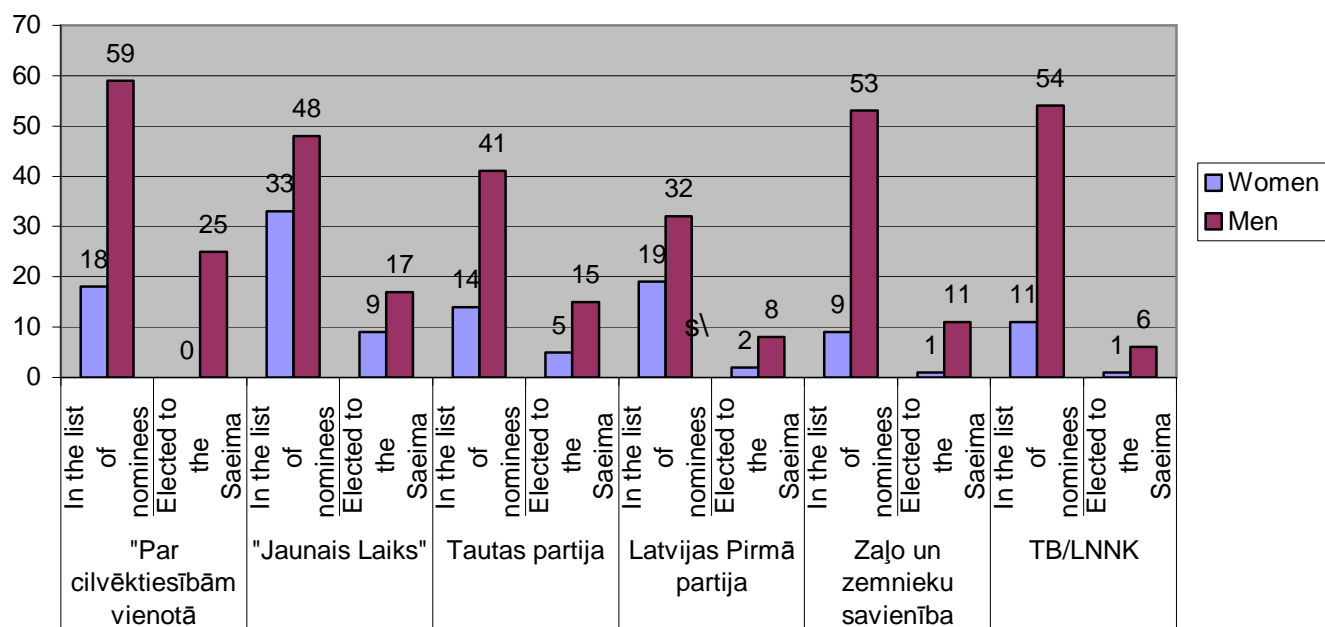
Politics is unable to provide stable work that is essential for a woman who feels responsible for the family. Results of elections are unpredictable and an elected office, in particular at the highest political level that is very volatile, is linked with a high risk.

### **4) Impact of closed politics**

Often a woman's desire to participate in politics cannot come true, as upon entering politics, a number of the next obstacles are brought into action. The lower the political level and the smaller the role of parties, the more possibilities for a woman to move forward. When speaking about obstacles to the entry of women into politics, for the most part it is the negative pole of the political process that is discussed. First, the perception of politics is negative among women at the rank-and-file level of political parties as well as among the active\_ women outside politics. If in the first case women emphasise the informal relations inside the party, then in the second case women have a critical view on politics at the general level and have no desire to compromise themselves. This obstacle is not mentioned by women who have already made a name for themselves in politics.

Second, party ideology, in particular inside parties that have existed for a long time, is conservative and does not promote women. The fact that parties become more open to women is proved by the increasing number of women who assume significant positions in the process of the establishment of new parties. These changes have less impact on parties with an already stabilised hierarchy.

**Picture 2. Ratio of women and men in specific lists of nominees for the 8th Saeima (Parliament) and among members elected to the Saeima (Parliament)<sup>5</sup>.**



The highest ratio of women in lists of nominees for the 8th Saeima (Parliament) was in parties founded shortly before the elections - “Jaunais Laiks” („New Era”) (41% of women) and the Latvian First Party (37%). The lowest ratio of nominees –women was found for the Green and Farmers’ Union (15%). The largest drop-out of women upon the establishment of the body of Parliament members, was found in the party “For Human Rights in a United Latvia” (23% of women in the list of nominees), where no woman was elected, and in the Latvian First Party where 20% of women were elected.

Women – rank-and-file members of parties disclosed several party strategies in nominating candidates. Most frequently, the decision-making process was closed; candidates were nominated by party chapters and approved by the party board in compliance with an agreement that had been reached earlier. Lists of nominees are compiled by rating commissions that assess the popularity of each nominee and the potential benefit for the party list. As a rule, women are placed in the middle of a longer list or at the end of a shorter list. An open procedure for the approval of nominees is not typical.

*We have four women against 5 men for the elections. It is not the rating commissions but the party chapters that nominate the most popular personalities. In the end 14 nominees were left of whom the Congress nominated 9 who would run for elections. Nominees were*

<sup>5</sup> Data from [www.saeima.lv](http://www.saeima.lv) and [www.cvk.lv](http://www.cvk.lv)

*presented at the Congress. You saw the person, how their eyes glittered, what they were like as personalities, how ready for work. (A party member with experience in leading governance positions)*

Failure to nominate women for elections has pragmatic reasons. Popular people are chosen for the lists of party nominees, taking into consideration the peculiarities of Latvian politics where the attention of the community is focused mostly on personalities. In this context the woman does not „sell” well to the general public that prefers the image of a man-politician.

Third, as it was noted also by the working group of the Women’s Cooperation Network, the procedure of party funding is unfavourable for women. Besides, participation in politics requires additional financial resources. If the woman has no recognisability, she must create it at her own expense. Women also mention restricted support resources of other types:

*The most important thing is whom we want to nominate. And then it is not women who are mentioned. The person’s knowledge and experience are assessed. And again we return to the fact that men have more governance experience. And also the support team. Several people who help them to prepare the material. You need a team at any level. And then there is the question as to what level it is, if it is paid for. Besides, that route was taken already some 14 years ago. (A member of the V party with experience in leading governance positions)*

Fourth, public opinion is disposed against women–politicians entering governance. The stereotyping of women-politicians as well as their low recognisability is at the basis. Men are considered to be better suited for the office of a politician. The female electorate and women-politicians do not feel any solidarity. In their turn, women – rank-and-file party members- reproach their women – colleagues in leading positions for lack of solidarity and for having lost the link with women in party organisations.

*At the moment when a woman gets to a leading position, not without male assistance, the link is broken. I am here and everything is alright – I have done better than you. There is lack of female solidarity in Latvia (A long- term rank-and-file member of the Z party)*

Women who have achieved the highest governance offices, in particular, are reproached for lack of female solidarity.

In order to address the above obstacles, the meeting of the Women’s Cooperation Network came forward with two proposals – the funding of parties from the national budget, ensuring the transparency of the flow of party finances also inside the parties, which was supported by part of the work group; and the implementation of the parity principle at elections, ensuring that women and men had equal starting positions, which was supported by all representatives of the working group. Although party members, interviewed during the research study, support equal opportunities for men and women, on the whole, still they do not support the immediate introduction of quotas and the parity

principle, believing that professional criteria are more important in politics than gender-based criteria. The possibility of encouraging women to participate in politics has been viewed as a more acceptable solution, which, in view of the above described obstacles, will hardly achieve any improvement in the participation of women in decision-making.

Parties themselves have attempted to address this issue inside the parties. According to a woman – a member of the K party, their party had taken the decision to follow the quota principle inside the party; however, she also recognised the fact that party members themselves failed to follow the given decision. Within the framework of the Women's Cooperation Network women supported the implementation of parity principles at elections, thus providing equal starting positions to politicians of both genders.

### **1.7. NGO as an alternative to political activity**

The non-governmental sector offers more opportunities for active work. Non-governmental organisations are the way in which several women – respondents saw an opportunity to implement their political efforts. This position allows influencing the political process, at the same time without accepting the rules of the political game. Several of the interviewed women - political party members, had chosen non-governmental organisations to participate in decision-making, as they had experienced disappointment and obstacles in their political career.

In future, NGOs may serve also as a stepping-stone for the involvement of women in political activities. It is more possible at the local government level, where the influence of the large power parties is not so great and note is taken of the nominee's individual features, skills and abilities.

## **2. POLITICS AND THE FAMILY**

The tradition division of gender roles in the family and its transfer to the public domain is at the basis of the above described obstacles that affect the entry of women into politics. The majority of respondents hold the opinion that gender differences are rooted in biology or the Bible and that is why they are objective and unchangeable. This division is used by women- politicians themselves as well as by men. Only two women-politicians emphasised the ethnic history of Latvian woman, which, in the view of these respondents, confirms the positive role of the woman in decision-making. According to this version, Latvian (Balt) women have always had a high status and a decisive role in the supervision and governance of economic activities. It is interesting, that, irrespective of the national ideology of several rightist parties in Latvia, this justification is not used for promoting the entry of women into politics.

### **2.1. Myths about women's inability to combine work in politics and the family life**

A strong discourse restricting women prevails among politicians. Work in leading positions in governance and politics is assessed as not being suitable for women. First, work requires much time that is taken away from the family. Thus, in extremely chauvinistic views the primary role of a woman is sought in the family, however, if the woman fails to perform this role, she loses her „normality“:

*I must say – those women for whom the family is an obstacle for their career, are not normal. If one has to chair a council, then she does not bring up children at home. I do not support exaggerations. Let my wife be in high offices. Because I see that a woman is a woman. Either nature or God has created two different persons. There is some logic that should be levelled out. (A man, a local government official).*

Similar views are expressed by women who have achieved high positions however, they themselves have not started a family or they have already brought up their children. Some men-politicians held the opinion that women entered politics to compensate for failures in their private lives. Although the same stereotypes are attributed also to men, on the whole, different standards are applied to men, under which a man without a family does not become defective.

*I have no family. At the time when I should have got married, it seemed to me that there was still enough time. By the age of 30 I had become a vice-mayor, I had so many interesting things, work seemed primary for me. I did not know when to stop. If we speak about the woman, then that is a misfortune. (The chairwoman of the B local government).*

In a milder form the traditional role of a woman in the family is interpreted as a social difference – women take more care of the children and the family, which restricts their possibilities of work and free time. Responsibility for the family and the need for a stable source of income is one of the factors that prevent women from participating in politics. Political instability creates a high risk for turning it into a full-time occupation. At the local government level this risk is lower; however it is influenced by the remuneration offered by other employment options. Relations and the distribution of roles in the family may serve as a factor restricting the entry of women into politics. The loss that is mentioned most frequently and emphasised by representatives of both genders in elected and top executive positions, is the unfixed working hours that take away time from the family as well as leave less for the people themselves:

*Women-politicians must count with an additional load for everything –working hours, leisure time, the family (..). There will be many additional duties, events to be attended, meetings with different people. Thus, the family is removed much further. If you are in business, you do not have much time for the family, however, if you are in politics, there is even less time left. (A woman-local politician in the C town, a businesswoman)*

The entry of a woman in governance is influenced by the status hierarchy in the family. Respondents of both genders emphasised that if the wife held leading positions this could cause a possible problem for the husband’s self-confidence.

*It is difficult to imagine, for example, Prunskiene, she is the Speaker of the Seimas (Lithuanian Parliament), and her husband a driver. And how does he feel? He does not feel fine. Remuneration is different and the status is different. The man will feel insecure as a man. (A man-politician, a local politician).*

On the one hand, the position of the husband and his status in the community must be equal to the status held by his wife who works in leading positions. On the other hand, those working in rural local governments emphasised that the wife's being in leading positions restricted the husband's employment options due to a possible conflict of interest.

*My husband also works at home. If he wanted to work, I would not be able to hire him because, how come, the husband of the chairwoman works while other people have no work? He keeps yelling at me: "It is because of you that I cannot go to work". (The chairwoman of the G civil parish)*

Following this hierarchy, women hold, like in their home life, the second, supporting position, assuming the role of First Lady:

*It is easier to help the man, as it is easier for the man to get on. Even unconsciously. I presume that there is a strong woman behind each strong man. (A woman - a long-term party member)*

Women have a similar role also in the party and in governance, taking a supporting position for men and retaining the traditional woman's role in the family also in the party:

*In actual fact, the Latvian woman is ready to drag (the cart), she is a fool to the end and is ready to drag and pull on. And she feels as the mistress of life. She does not feel that she should be fighting for her rights. No, she feels that she enjoys full rights. It is only when the list is drawn up, that she is not there. In that very last stage [of politics]. She has gone through the whole campaign, she has done everything, she has gone through the motions, and yet, in the list she is somewhere there, at the end. When all this is over, next time it is repeated all over again two or four years later. And even then she does not take up the respective activities. We failed; we did not consolidate as women (A woman, an official of public administration with governance experience, a party member).*

## **2.2. Woman-politician and the family**

### **1) Lack of family**

Of all the interviewees, work in politics had been the cause for the break-up of the family for 8 women and one man. Giving up politics for the family is perceived with disbelief and lack of understanding by the community and, in particular, among men, confirming the existing hierarchy of practical values, where the family is valued as inferior to politics.

### **2) Adult children**

The majority of middle-aged women-politicians indicated that it was possible to have success in politics if family obligations had been successfully fulfilled – children had already been brought up and had become independent. They treat the entry of younger women into politics sceptically, reproaching them either with inability to devote all of their time to work, or with failure to devote sufficient time to a child.

### **3) Family support**

Women and, in particular, women – local politicians emphasise the independence of children and the family support they received when they started to participate in politics. It must be noted that children in particular and providing for them, especially in large families with many children, serves as the motivation for women to work in elected positions in local governments.

The stereotypical division of genders that obstructs the entry of women into politics, has been particularly emphasised by women-politicians who themselves have refuted this stereotype in their own life, considering themselves to be a rare exception, having violated their gender role and feeling the public condemnation for it. The actual distribution of roles in families of politicians interviewed refutes and in part confirms the stereotypical division. It outlines also the way how women can combine family and work in governance as well as the change of the traditional stereotypes itself. The family has served as a significant support network and a source of stability for respondents of the study. As a rule, work in elected positions is related to the redistribution of home duties in the family, the children and the spouse taking on additional duties.

*We have no problems at home. The husband will wash the floor, tidy up the house. It is not like with many others who have a heap of dirty dishes. He will not reproach me for anything. We live on equal terms. (A woman, the manager of a department at the N local government)*

Equality in the family and relieving the household chores that are defined as a „high living standard”, are viewed as a possibility for women to enter politics:

*The husband and the family get in the way. Why are there so many women-politicians in Nordic countries – it is because the living standards are high. They do not spend so much time on tidying up the apartment, laundry, cooking, they have time (The chairwoman of the B local government).*

A second way is to combine work with child care and other household duties that, for the most part, are still the responsibility of the woman. Respondents' diaries show that, contrary to men, women either combine work of various types or try to do several tasks at the same time. On the whole, the planning of work by men is more heavy-handed, placing work first and subordinating family duties to it.

*I have one child, a true child of the Awakening. He was born then, in 1990, and I was running around with him under my arm. I have never ever seen any man going to work with a child under his arm. True, sometimes, among the „greens”. Where there is a more*

*up-to-date view on gender roles (A woman-politician with experience, an official of public administration).*

The family may also serve as an encouragement to get involved in governance. Responsibility for the family and children make women take on governance positions. The experience of women shows that the traditional family model does not always correspond to the actual life-model. Part of women, active in non-governmental organisations, part of women-politicians were mothers with many children, and they emphasised their family experience as significant motivation for their public activity.

*There are no people who could work locally; all the best have been taken away from the rural areas. Only those have been left who have families, who have already started to work, who have some property. Those, who have a tail trailing after them. If I did not have four children and a farm, I would definitely look for a job in town. That is my motivation and I try to work as much as I can in order to support my family. My husband works only on the farm, in the forest, in agriculture. Real cash comes only from this work. Children must have an education. (A chairwoman of a civil parish).*

According to respondents, women in depressed rural regions are forced to assume governance as there is a lack of strong men. The strength of the woman is seen in her responsibility for the family that does not permit her to fall into depression and alcoholism like the man.

### **2.3. The man-politician and the family**

The traditional role in the family stipulates that the man-politician is supported by his wife. Men-politicians feel grateful to their wives for reconciling themselves to inconveniences caused by their work. Women appear not only as passive victims but also as the „grey cardinals” who implement their political ambitions through their husbands – politicians and support their husbands' political activities. The traditional gender roles are continued also in politics, women serve as a support to ensure the activity of the man-politician, preparing documents, planning the agenda, conducting correspondence, organising the campaign.

Respondents stereotype men as the partner in the family who is less responsible for the upbringing of children, devotes less time to the family yet at the same time retains the decisive role in the family:

*Speaking in daily-life terms, the man has more free time. If we look at duties in the family, women have more duties. (A man –the mayor of the S city)*

Stealing time for the family is perceived as a loss for the family, however a justifiable sacrifice for the man. The view on the man-politician as an individual who is independent from the family, dominates also in the public image of the man-politician. This aspect has been analysed at greater length in the chapter on the public image of the politician. Those women, whose families have a distribution of roles, different from the traditional model, also have emphasised the stereotypes that have developed:

*For the man the situation is easier. The public opinion is that the man is the head and it is accepted that he is not at home, that he is involved in the further development of his personality. Women accept it; however, the man is not always that way. I was lucky; my husband helped me (A woman – a representative of the highest level of executive power, an active member of an NGO)*

Although the principle of gender equality concerning salaries is not under doubt in principle, however, it is pointed out that women are ready to agree to a lower salary. Men are characterised as having more self-confidence. The traditional breadwinner's role in the community is the justification for the man's higher salary.

Some women with governance experience emphasised that men in governance were discriminated against, as they could not afford working for such a negligible salary. Thus, the differentiation of salaries was perceived as a means for achieving a balance of genders at the middle and lower governance level.

#### **2.4. Distribution of a politician's time**

The comparison of accounts on time distribution presented in diaries among politicians of both genders at various levels, shows that the average number of hours devoted to work fluctuates around 9 hours and 45 minutes for women, 10 hours and 50 minutes for men. Men dedicated more time to party meetings while women give more time to the performance of work-related public duties. Time devoted to work does not depend on the governance position. A representative of the executive branch of local government may have the same long working day as, for example, a minister. Similarly, some Member of Parliament pointed out the possibility of establishing the length of his working time himself. Men indicated also a higher average number of hours dedicated to work during the holidays. If men devoted an average of 3 hours 20 minutes to work during the holidays, then the women dedicated 1 hour and 20 minutes.

Men also indicated a higher number of hours dedicated to children and relations in the family – 1 hour and 9 minutes, while women listed 45 minutes. Women spend more time on household chores during working days – 1 hour and 15 minutes, men – 45 minutes, during holidays women work at home for 2 hours and 50 minutes, while men – for 1 hour and 40 minutes. Men take part in the payment of bills, shopping, gardening, preparing their clothes, while women cover a wider range of tasks - cooking, tidying up the house and also performing tasks mentioned by men.

Women indicate more time devoted to themselves – 3 hours and 55 minutes on working days, 5 hours and 45 minutes during the holidays, in comparison with the time used by men – 3 hours on working days and 3 hours and 45 minutes during the holidays. It must be noted that a woman combines the time devoted to herself - watching TV, book-reading - with other tasks – babysitting, knitting etc. Women spend time also on taking care of their appearance and visiting the hairdresser, which is not mentioned by men.

On the whole, diaries show that the working time of politicians exceeds the standard 8 hour work- day by an average of two hours. The length of working hours for similar positions differs considerably that testifies to the skill in organising work, being able to achieve results with an more effective time investment.

### 3. PUBLIC OPINION AND THE PUBLIC IMAGE OF A POLITICIAN

The stereotyping of politics as a masculine domain creates also the image of the man-politician. Gender serves as one of the criteria for the politician's image. Thus, women are excluded from the stereotypical portraying of the politician's image. Different requirements are put forward for the public image of politicians of both genders. A convincing image of a woman-politician has not taken root. The link that the political area has with the masculine makes the image of the man-politician self-evident. .

#### 3.1. Women in politics

Lack of tradition in depicting the image of the woman-politician creates a rather vague and diffuse image of the woman-politician. Contrary to the man-politician women feel that more attention is paid to the woman's appearance and clothes.

*At times I think, oh, does it really matter – I will run to the shop in my slippers; however the fact that you are known makes you mobilise in everyday life, with your clothing and in taking care of yourself. It is essential for women. If it is the mind and the mastery of speech for the man, then the woman is, first and foremost, assessed by her appearance (A woman - local politician at the K local government).*

Women feel a stronger pressure to constantly prove their suitability for the position they hold and their professionalism. Several women mentioned with more painful emphasis than men, the exacting attitude of the media towards politicians, highlighting various unfortunate failures or ill-chosen utterances:

*I look at our President, I respect her, however when [they] write about her... For example, the President tripped. It has sort of aftertaste – a female (The chairwoman of the G local government).*

The image of the woman-politician is controversial – it is feminine in using her appearance and feminine cunning, and it is masculine in the sense that, upon assuming a leading role, women adapt to the demands of the office. If some women-politicians separate the masculine and feminine components in their image, then for many of them features of the „masculine” image are inseparable from their politician's identity:

*The woman is a cunning creature, we know how to entice with our energy, cunning, and this has been given by nature. (..) We are not so stubborn. If it is not possible to take one route we can take the other and get to the destination quicker. Earlier when I worked in the area of culture, it seemed to me that men who worked in the executive institution, the heating supply network, and the head of the utilities had a strong backbone. However, it turns out that it is not the case with everybody. It turns out that I am stronger than they, I*

*can bang my fist on the table, I can achieve what I want, and I can do so without crying and find a solution. (The chairwoman of the G local government).*

Part of women-politicians choose the masculine style in dress or governance, thus confirming their affiliation to politics.

*Since the beginnings of the world [politics] has been masculine. Alas. abroad it is very essential. The woman must adopt a masculine image.. Those women-politicians who are Senators (in the USA) wear trouser suits. Fewer in Latvia. (A woman – a party member with governance experience)*

A woman requires additional resources for maintaining her style of dress. If a man can make do with a few suits then the woman who wears the same suit for a long time, will attract the attention of the media and those around her. Students of politology paid attention to the change in the public image of the woman-politician when she assumes a leading position. The style of dress as well as physical peculiarities is subject to change, being adapted to the beauty requirements that dominate in the community.

*The first thing that the parliamentary group of women did was – they arranged to have a course on appearance and business style. Our Swedish colleagues – women teach women to be as they are. Do those things on the basis of what you are. They gave examples as to how fat, moustached ladies had moved forward only because they spoke sincerely, addressed the people and moved forward. (...) However, in Latvia, it is often the case that even to get onto the list, so that you are taken seriously, you must, first and foremost, look good. (A woman – a party member, a participant of an NGO).*

In the case of extreme chauvinism the woman is excluded from the area of politics according to the gender criteria. Drawing a comparison between women-politicians and businesswomen, a Member of the Parliament remarks:

*I always keep telling businesswomen never to try to resemble men. If you do this (...), the man will never consider you to be an equal partner. You have to gain success in your own business, in your activities with your feminine qualities –feminine charm, essence etc. If you start to work with such methods or behave or always wear trousers and consider yourselves [equal to the man]... That's what the stereotypes are; in reality each gender has its own place.*

Charm, intuition, cunning are recognised as being qualities that are characteristic only for the woman, which at the same time, place the woman in a worse starting position.

Respondents' answers show that women-politicians compensate lack of the masculine gender with professional skills.

*The man can permit himself many things that the woman cannot do. At my previous workplace there is a young handsome man working, and it is much easier for him than*

*for me. I was asked much more often to justify, providing argumentation, to prove, and not with questions that are put by men. If the woman makes the slightest mistake, it is taken very painfully. If the man permits himself not to prepare something, it is taken in a normal way. (An official of the K council with experience in public administration).*

In general, more positive qualities are attributed to women who are active in politics than to men-politicians. Most frequently it is mentioned that a woman is responsible, logical and constructive.

*If policies were formulated by women only it would be much simpler and far better. They would not take such ill-considered and hasty decisions. (The chairman of the K civil parish)*

Women are characterised as honest, responsible for people, with high ethical standards. These qualities are the transfer of the woman's traditional roles in the home to the public domain. Negative qualities of women, listed by respondents, are related to the mutual envy and mutual competition of women. Even though the woman is characterised in a more positive way and better suited with her traditional roles for open, people-oriented politics, it is the incongruity of the real politics that serves as the reason for the unsuitability of the woman for the area of politics. Looking at the woman in the context of the closed politics, the above described qualities do not fit in..

*If women tried at least once to show more opposition to men and tried to sit down at that roulette table and play, then, it is certain that some man would come out as the loser (The chairman of the K civil parish)*

Political activity and work in leading positions at public and municipal bodies requires prior experience of work and certain recognisability. A woman has fewer possibilities to acquire experience of work in leading positions and popularity because the gender serves as a discriminating factor in employment:

*As an entrepreneur I will not employ a young pretty girl. I will reason – soon she will get married, she will go on maternity leave; she will have children, one child, another child; the children will be ill, she will sit at home with a doctor's note. I do not need such an employee, I have a choice. If she was 30 years old, then it would already be better. The optimum age for the woman in a professional career is from 30 to 45. Women of the pre-retirement age are no good either... I speak as a woman; however this is also the way a man thinks. (A woman – a local politician in the C city, a businesswoman)*

The experience of women-politicians interviewed, shows that they do not correspond to the traditional stereotype. Women-politicians themselves confirm that they have high self-confidence, strength as well as experience in leading positions. It is also true that these women are treated as an exception to the norm. Women themselves also recognise that their achievements have been gained by constant effort and self-assertion.

### **3.2. Men in politics**

For the man, appearance is an essential criterion of the image in politics. Men are aware of these advantages in making their way in politics. In his answer about advantages of his youth, a local politician of the H party also recognises advantages created by the gender:

*In a way it is like that. However, an advantage, yes, with electors. I am liked more by mature women than young women (...) Last year I stood for elections with long hair. More than 3.5 thousand had put a cross opposite my name.*

The suitability of men with politics and the image of a leading serious politician already according to the gender criteria affect the employment options for women:

*When I came here, the choice had to be made between me and some man. Arguments in favour of him were that he was a man. It is important, because one must go, talk to the ladies at the ministry. A man is better for that. I was chosen only due to my professional ability. Now there is no more difference (A young woman, the head of a department at the N local government)*

Requirements concerning clothes exist also for the man-politician; however, they are lower than those posed for women-politicians. „Nice suit” is one of the compliments that men-politicians pay to their colleagues. In the public area an important attribute of the man-politician is ideas and the generation of thought.

Generalising the above, most frequently women characterise men-politicians as „strutting peacocks”, thus emphasising that men are more focused on showing off, achieving their goals without reckoning with others. Men are also characterised as more self-confident, brutal and less sensitive than women. These qualities of men are not unambiguously assessed as negative. The „thick hide” allows to weather clashes and conflicts better in the area of politics. The woman’s emotionality is given a negative tinge while the same quality may give a positive quality to the man:

*If the man shows emotions [at the Parliament] then it is good and it means there is something in him. If it is the woman – then it means that she is hysterical. (A young woman, a student of politics, the focus group discussion)*

Part of the stereotyped qualities are reflected in statements made by men. For example, the inability to get deep down, mentioned by women, was defined by men as a “global view, without getting lost in trifles”. Men more often than women emphasised an active necessity to develop their public image, viewing the development of publicity as an essential component of the work of a politician. Women view this strategy in a negative light.

### **3.3. Development of publicity and the image**

Holding elected offices at the municipal as well as the Parliamentary level impose an obligation on those holding these offices to develop their public image. If at a higher level of politics the development of the public image takes place with the assistance of the media, then at the level of small local governments direct communication with the

local community is important. The development of the image requires long-term investment and additional resources. On the whole, men have expressed a more active attitude towards a constant necessity to develop their image, stressing that a politician at the very basis is the image developed by the media.

*If the man moves on purposefully, he has already accumulated experience, points. The woman may work for a long time, it is more difficult for them to accumulate the political capital, a name in politics etc. The man starts to participate in politics or public work earlier. As concerns the age as well as the political experience. A young girl cannot come along with 20 kopeks and say, "hey, elect me". We will not elect her. (A man - a local politician of the C local government)*

A direct development of the image requires less resources and investment and that is why it is more accessible for women. The public nature of the politician's profession is one of the most frequently mentioned losses that the politician's profession may incur:

*You and your family are in the public eye. You must take into account that in some way you are an example for others. (A woman – local politician in the A city, an experienced leader)*

At the municipal level there is talk also about other more brutal methods of achieving publicity, influencing the choice of the electorate. Bribing electors with alcohol or money or indirect blackmail that is based on the dependence of the population on local government officials, characterise the model of closed politics. Such strategies require resources and, according to respondents, they are used by men-politicians.

In the politics of a higher level a significant place is held by the image developed through the media. The role of the media in developing an image is ambiguous. On the one hand, the media are dangerous, as they are subject to the possibility of political manipulation. A typical story told by respondents describes a scandal related to a politician, which later was not confirmed. The media reflect only the negative part of the scandal; however, the negative news gaining no confirmation, they lose interest in the further development of events, leaving the community with a negative image of the politician. On the other hand, the media constantly follow the politician's daily life, trying to detect every single failure:

*This is a dangerous job. Every day you are in the middle, you get into the bog. You seem to get one foot out and then you sink further down. You have to preserve yourself. (..) Your political career also depends on your ability to preserve yourself, your image. You have to organise yourself in a way so that you do not say a word too many. They even take note of how you look, how you speak, what intonation is used. You are on the stage from morning till night. You are an actress. The spectator will either applaud or throw tomatoes at you. An awfully hard life. (A woman, the chairwoman of the G local government, long-term experience in leading positions)*

As already stated above, men consider contacts with the media a necessity more frequently than women. Women, more often than men, mention public nature as a

shortcoming imposed by their position on themselves and their families. Family members are also affected by the publicity, the presence of the media that may invade their private family life.

*The woman is accused of alcoholism, men – of paedophilia. No other accusations. As the journalist P of a TV channel reproached X [a public officer]: you are said to have an alcohol problem. To ask such a thing! It can be done without scruples. ( A woman, an official of the highest level of executive power)*

Women more frequently emphasised that their elected position restricted their appearance in the public space, making them avoid visits to cafes and restaurants, carefully reconsidering the range of people with whom they appear in public.

Professionalism and communication skills, the ability to speak to different people with various interests are important in contacts with the media:

*You have to reconcile yourself with the fact that they can tell you to your face what they think about you. At the beginning it was the most difficult. How can they speak this way, I am doing my best. One must take into account that every person may have his/her own opinion, I may have mine, he may have his, and they may not be the same. It is very difficult to reconcile. (A woman – local politician of the J local government, a school principal)*

A negative opinion about the media generates the perception of the weakness of the politician in comparison with the media and prevents politicians from developing active cooperation with the media.

### **3.4. Media**

Respondents hold the opinion that the media pays attention to the women's visual image, while men more often express their opinion in the media. The party promotional campaigns are developed in a similar way, giving the women „the social” roles while men represent economy, finance, business activities where traditionally high intellectual and analytical ability should be manifested.

Women-politicians, who were interviewed, emphasised the constant pressure from the media and the community, directly or indirectly linking the image of the woman-politician with her traditional family duties or the traditional subordinate role in the family:

*What I do not like in the media is that usually women are asked questions – now, how do you combine it with your family life. (..) Men are asked – how do you combine your career with the family? Well, and then ask the man the same question. Because the man is also a father. (A woman- member of a political party, with experience at elections, an active member of an NGO)*

When discussing the manipulative character of the media, respondents perceive the media as a component of closed politics. In the politics of the higher level in Latvia, which is characterised by a weak link between politicians and the community, the media play an important role. In this situation the merging of the media and political power is dangerous and it is also pointed out by respondents, proceeding from their own experience:

*It is complicated as it is related to the independence of the media, false independence as the media do not operate as an analytical [instrument]... The merging of the media and financial power is another side of the same process, which is the merging of the financial power of political parties and which would be inevitable with the mechanism for funding parties and the mechanism of elections that has been established in Latvia. (A woman – an official of public administration, a party member with governance experience)*

However, there are some politicians who use the media for the development of their image, trying to control this potentially dangerous force with the help of regular contacts:

*It is important to make friends with journalists. It is the same as with terrorists. If you make friends with them, then later it is difficult for them to kill you. It is the same here. If you have made friends, then later it is difficult to write bad things about you. (A man – local politician in the B local government)*

Respondents point out that the media are interested in scandals and negative developments however; there is no established practice in the positive presentation of politics.

*The mass media do not exert themselves. Due to restricted resources they have no time. Second, the mass media have a very strong yellow tinge. They have no interest as to what could influence the community in a positive way. (A man, an official of the executive power of the highest level)*

Statements made during the interviews cause some doubt about the crucial responsibility of the media for the presented image of politics as a positive image of politics is weakly defined also among politicians themselves.

### **3.5. Public space**

Politics in the public space in Latvia has acquired negative features. A critical attitude of the community to politics has a negative impact on the implementers of policies, not enabling them to feel satisfaction for their achievements.

*It seems to me that the culture of the public space is awfully primitive. Primitive and ruthless. There is great satisfaction about anyone who can be levelled to the ground. And we almost entirely lack the ability to say "thank you". To the government, to ministers, to politicians, civil servants, anyone. We can say thank you to artists. (A woman, an official of public administration with governance experience, a member of a party)*

Many women-respondents emphasised lack of the positioning of the woman in politics, stressing that the dominating political model did not reflect women's interests. The majority of women interviewed and some men perceived politics as serving people, stressing that the dominating political model placed power and financial instruments in the centre.

*There are prestigious and non-prestigious questions – social work, education. These can be put to a woman. Economy, finance – and then it is men, with few exceptions. In the political party lists of nominees women appear with a certain mission. Then these are social issues and nominees of social issues – women. (A woman, a rank-and-file member of a party)*

Respondents – women have noticed the desire, expressed more often by women, to deal with public welfare also in the politics of Nordic countries. However, the overall political position does not allow putting forward social issues, giving the woman a political niche that would not be subordinated to the main political directions of Latvia:

*Where is the woman's profile? How could that woman's politics be attached? If you say what the woman might support, those social matters. No, they are not exactly compatible with NATO as there will not be enough money, how then will she raise that pension? The gender aspect is difficult to incorporate, and it seems to be insignificant. And to define it as the gender aspect directly – it is utterly stupid; nor will the electorate like it. Thus you can't get anything that might come as value added. Perhaps that is not the right way. The Scandinavian women did it in a rude way, they asked men to be deleted (...) And they communicated the message why it was valuable, and then you can speak about those benefits that social policy will give. And that the policy, on the whole, will change. (A woman – an official of public administration with governance experience, a member of a party)*

Concern about the electorate's attitude towards women-politicians forms an obstacle to the woman seeking her profile in politics:

*When I look at the list, it seems to me that women find it easier to delete a woman from the list. It is the phenomenon of our community that our women's NGO are not yet strong and we do not feel the necessity for a woman to support a woman. Therefore it has developed that we perceive the man as the head of the family and politics that is decision-making, brings forward associations with men. Women have not yet grown up and they emphasise stereotypes that dominate in the community. It would be logical for a woman to support a woman. (A woman – a representative of the executive power at the highest level, an active member of an NGO)*

On the one hand, women-respondents believe that the community is not satisfied with the traditional political model, like the women who intend to get involved into politics. On the other hand, the community sticks to conservative ideas and is afraid of the change to the political model.

### 3.7. Gender differences in the etiquette of behaviour

Stereotypes cultivated by the community influence the behaviour of people in governance. Communication models between men and women differ. If with the highest level governance behaviour is subject to etiquette, then at the lower levels it is subject to more pronounced variations. Typically men shake hands and exchange brief words during each meeting, while women greet each other at a distance with a nod of the head.

Although men often stated that etiquette was irrelevant, women emphasised the feeling of inequality that appeared as a result of gender – different communication:

*I am the only woman in that commission [related to business activities]. Men come and shake hands, I am left out. The mood around is like - I could go and bring coffee. Actually then I let them know that we were equals (...) In Germany as well, where we were on a visit, they were surprised that the head of such a division was a woman (A woman, the head of a department at the N local government with governance experience)*

*Psychologically the man is perceived as more qualified. It comes from the stereotype. A delegation from the L country had arrived together with their ambassador. We were all standing at the table, waiting for them. All of a sudden, the economic attaché dashes past me and stretches out his hand to the man standing beside me (a subordinate of the respondent). Insulting. At times that is the way it is. If people enter a room, initially everybody looks at the man. Then at the end we found out the positions (A young woman, the head of a department in the N local government)*

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### I. The public and municipal sector.

1. The research shows that the participation of women in decision-making is influenced by the political level. The system of political parties does not promote the entry of women into politics. As concerns the **administrative reform** in Latvia, it should be taken into account that one of the factors of the amalgamation of the smaller local governments will be a decrease in the proportion of women in the local governments of the new administrative units. Similar consequences will be caused by the change in the procedure of local government elections when only political parties will be allowed to formulate lists for elections.
2. **The procedure for the funding of parties is unfavourable for women.** On the whole, women have fewer resources for political activity; fewer women get involved in closed politics and enter into compromising deals for acquiring funds. Likewise women are excluded from informal decision-making networks. **The funding of political parties by the national budget will ensure more equality at the starting position for women.**
3. **The introduction of the parity principle** will provide equal starting positions at elections for women and men. There is more equality in the starting positions for men and women in the smaller local governments, where the influence of parties is not so strong, these local governments have a higher proportion of women than those local governments where the party influence is strong.

4. **The topicality of the issue of the organisation of work.** One of the obstacles that prevent the involvement of women in governance is unfixed working hours in elected and governance positions. The research study shows that in most cases longer working hours are related to taking up new duties and lack of skills in organising work. If necessary, those working in elected positions should be provided training. A significant role is played by the establishment of a support team for the politician and the distribution of functions among its members.

## II. Women's organisations and parties.

1. **The establishment of a women's cooperation network,** where women meet and discuss skills that are required for involvement in decision-making, sharing experience and formulating new demands for politics. Thus, on the one hand, there would be an opportunity to bring the community and politics closer, developing new forms of closer cooperation and encouraging women to participate in politics. On the other hand, the establishment of a cooperation network will stimulate the recognisability and popularity of women-politicians, increasing their competitiveness inside the party.
2. **The development of ethical standards in the area of politics,** by the community discussing political goals and areas of activities and the place of politics in the public space.
3. **The acquisition of communicative skills** by members of political parties as well as non-governmental organisations that is particularly relevant when working with the media. The research shows that, on the whole, women have a more passive attitude towards the media and the development of their image with the help of the media.
4. **The development of the image of a woman-politician.** A politician's image is largely determined by gender. Positive qualities are attributed to women-politicians however; there is no convincing and public image that would not be perceived as an exception to the norm. Such an image of a woman would enable other women to find their position in politics easier.
5. **The „opening” of issues concerning combining family duties and the professional career in the daily life of politicians – men and women.** The approach, strategy and the achieved outcomes are important. In Latvia the family is not involved as a value in the development of the professional career and the image.

## III. Media.

1. The ambiguous place of women in politics, when discussing the political process, the combining of the family and the image of politics, generates **extensive discussion themes**; thus it is possible to start the discussion of gender equality issues in a form that is interesting for the community.
2. Bringing into the focus issues related to **the ethics of media** by discussing the link between the media and politics, promoting trust in politics and, in particular, the trust of women-politics in media. Participants of the study criticized the manipulating character of the media, emphasising the merging of the media and political power.

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