

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT'S ELECTIONS 2019: towards parity democracy in Europe

Written by A. Irigoien



A policy paper presented by

G5 + ♀
Gender five plus

**European Parliament's Elections 2019:
towards parity democracy in Europe**

INDEX

Introduction 3-4

Part I - Why is parity democracy important to the European Union (EU)?

- 1. Stand with EU's values 4-5
- 2. Strengthen EU's democracy
 - a. Address the democratic deficit 5-6
 - b. Increase diversity among women 6-7
 - c. Challenge populism 7
- 3. Strategic gains 8-10

Part II – Why are the EU and parity democracy important for women?

- 1. What has the EU done for gender equality? 10-11
- 2. Taking action at EU level
 - a. What would have happened in the absence of EU action? 11-12
 - b. Advantages of EU action 12-13
- 3. What could have the EU done better?
 - a. Gender Mainstreaming 14-15
 - b. Response to the 2008 economic crisis 15-16

Part III – Why is gender balance important in the EP and in EU decision-making?

- 1. Under-representation of women in decision-making
 - a. Persistent gender inequalities 16-18
 - b. Gender imbalance in EU decision-making 18
- 2. The state of play: women in the European Parliament (EP)
 - a. Women MEPs 18-19
 - b. The role of women and the FEMM Committee 19-20
- 3. How can we achieve gender balance?
 - a. Gender quotas 21-22
 - b. Electoral system 22
 - c. The role of political parties and their values 22-23
 - d. Increase the number of women aspirants 23-24
 - e. Fair media representation 24
- 4. Participation in the EP's elections

a. Women’s political participation in the EP’s elections 25
b. Women, less interested in the EU than men 26-27

Part IV - Challenges and opportunities in view of the 2019 EP’s elections and beyond

1. Challenges
a. Rise of populism and far right 27-28
b. Gender stereotypes and views on women in politics28-30
2. Opportunities
a. Commitments by the EU 30-33
b. New gender quotas 33-34
c. Civil society movements 34

What future for Europe? 35-36

Some Recommendations 37-39

INTRODUCTION

Since its creation, the European Union (EU) has progressively turned towards building a social Europe. One of its objectives has been to end discrimination against women and promote gender equality in Europe and beyond. At the same time, the EU has continuously strengthened its democracy. The European Parliament (EP) has evolved from being a consultative assembly to a co-legislator¹, resulting in a more democratic EU. The EU stands now as a democracy that grants the same formal rights to both men and women. However, despite this evolution, flagrant gender inequalities persist in Europe. While half of the population is female; women are systematically under-represented in power decision-making positions in most fields, including in Parliament, the democratic institution *par excellence*.

As the EU is facing new and old challenges, it is crucial to reflect on what the EU really needs to reinforce its legitimacy and comply with its democratic foundations. Parity democracy, which first emerged on the EU agenda in the early nineties², comes as a necessary next step in the European project to strengthen democracy and adopt an approach that makes gender equality effective and sustainable.

The concept of parity democracy, contrary to what many might think, it does not limit itself to increasing the number of women in politics, decision-making positions and democratic bodies. **Parity democracy entails a transformation of our understanding of democracy, political culture and structures**, and a true embracement of equality between women and men as a fundamental principle in which a democratic system is based.

Parity democracy is both a concept and a goal which aims to acknowledge the equal value of women and men, their equal dignity and their obligation to share rights and responsibilities, free from prejudices and gender stereotyping. This constitutes a radically new approach to gender equality policies, where the correction of past discriminations is complemented by **the fundamental right to equality, which becomes a legal requirement**. As Eliane Vogel Polsky³ wrote on the concept of parity democracy:

“The construction of the right to equality as it has been developed so far is difficult to implement because it is subject to legal systems created without women. **If parity representation is recognized to be a necessary condition of democracy rather than a remote consequence, then the rules of the game and social norms will**

¹ EUR-Lex, Access to European Union Law, Glossary of summaries, Democratic deficit definition, consulted at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/summary/glossary/democratic_deficit.html

² The concept of parity democracy, initiated in the Council of Europe, entered the EU agenda in the first European Summit of Women in Power, held in Athens in November 1992.

³ Eliane Vogel Polsky, who died in 2016, has been the most knowledgeable and creative specialist in European Equality Law. She brought the case of Gabrielle Defrenne to the European Court of Justice (ECJ) in 1976.

have to change. This could radically transform society and allow for real gender equal relations”⁴.

This implies that democracy and gender equality should be read together. **This policy paper aims to reconsider the concept of parity democracy in the current context of the EU and focusing on the upcoming elections to the EP in May 2019.** As developed in the Athens Declaration, adopted at the *European Summit of Women in Power* in 1992, parity democracy stands on 5 basic arguments (equality, democracy, good use of human resources, needs and interests of women and quality of policy-making) which are recalled and updated with a view to provide stakeholders, including democrats standing for gender equality and feminist movements, with useful ammunition to inform and convince EU citizens (women and men) to vote and to vote for women defending equality. This policy paper is, therefore, part of broader Gender Five Plus’ efforts to inform EU citizens and influence stakeholders for greater gender balance in the EU.

The analysis in this policy paper is based on desk research, literature review and includes diverse forms of experience in EU policy-making. It is divided into four different parts and a list of recommendations. Part I tries to answer the question of why parity democracy is important to the EU; Part II focuses on why the EU and parity democracy are important to women; Part III analyses gender balance in the EU decision-making (focusing in the EP); Part IV examines the possible challenges and opportunities for fostering parity democracy in the current EU context and the conclusion provides space for a reflection on the EU that we want and need to build. Finally, derived from the analysis of the whole policy paper, a non-comprehensive list of recommendations is provided.

Part I - Why is parity democracy important to the EU?

To understand the value of parity democracy and gender balance in the EP to the EU this part explores the main reasons to support and take actions to move the EU towards a system of parity democracy.

1. Stand with EU’s values

The EU has stood for gender equality since its initial stages in 1957 with the Treaty of Rome. Although motivated by the fear of unfair competitiveness among members states, rather than by gender equality, article 119 called out for equal pay for equal work, which spurred action on gender equality in the labour market for years. In fact, most national legislation on equality between women and men in employment comes from the European

⁴ Vogel Polsky, Eliane, « Les impasses de l’égalité ou pourquoi les outils juridiques visant à l’égalité doivent être repensés en termes de parité », Parité Infos Hors-série, 1994.

level⁵. The European Court of Justice (ECJ) in a ruling of 1976⁶ **explicitly recognized the principle of gender equality in its economic and social dimension to be a "founding principle" of the now EU**, which opened the way to spillovers beyond the workplace⁷. From then on, the treatment of gender equality in the EU has evolved from a limited and mostly employment related issue (which is still a core in the EU's concerns) to a broader question of justice⁸. The Treaty of Amsterdam included more gender equality references, and finally, the Treaty of Lisbon, established gender equality more extensively as a fundamental value of the EU, in Article 2. Gender equality is also part of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU. As a result, gender equality is a principle and value in which the EU is based, and forms part of its political identity.

“Gender equality is a founding principle and an official goal of the EU”

At the same time, the realization of equality between women and men is an official goal of the EU⁹. Arising from this goal, the EU has adopted legislation, created bodies, developed tools and supported measures to advance gender equality. EU's action has been relevant to improve women's rights, as Part II explains.

In this sense, parity democracy is important for the EU to stand with its values, as well as to be in line with the advancement of women's rights and tools for its implementation available. As Hubert states, **“Having declared gender equality a fundamental principle of the EU, the EU not only has a legitimate right to fight it, it also has a moral responsibility to do so”**¹⁰. A transformation to a system of parity democracy, which would result in an equal representation of women and men in the EP, emerges as inevitable to stay in line with EU's own values and pursued goals, and build the European project from that common identity and shared principles.

2. Strengthen EU's democracy

a. Address the democratic deficit

The role and powers of the EP have been progressively strengthened since the Treaty of Maastricht¹¹. Through this strengthening process, the EU has tried to respond to the criticisms of its lack of strong democratic institutions and decision-making processes and has

⁵ European Women's Lobby (EWL), *Lobbying Kit for Parity Democracy*, 2008.

⁶ Defrenne v. Societe Anonyme Beige de Navigation Aeriene, 1976, C-43/75 [ECR 455].

⁷ Rubio-Marin, Ruth, “A New European Parity-Democracy Sex Equality model and why it won't fly in the United States”, *The American Journal of Comparative Law*, 2012, Vol. 60, No. 1, p.104.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.105.

⁹ EWL, *loc.cit.*

¹⁰ Hubert, Agnes, “Building citizenship in a diverse Europe”, speech at the *European Community Studies Association's (Canada) biannual conference*, 9 May 2018.

¹¹ EUR-Lex, *loc.cit.*

evolved from being a consultative assembly to a co-legislator¹², slowly improving its democratic legitimacy. Yet, the democratic deficit of the EU has not only stemmed from its insufficiently democratic processes, but also from its systematic unequal representation of women in decision-making. Indeed, **if more than half of the population is persistently under-represented, the legitimacy and functioning of the democratic system are put under question**¹³.

The Athens Declaration pointed at the democratic deficit in the EU, stemmed by the “profound inequality in all public and political decision-making authorities”¹⁴. Even different institutions of the EU have acknowledged that **the imbalanced gender representation in political decision-making implies a democratic deficit**¹⁵. Concurring with Rubio-Marin’s thesis, “the move towards parity democracy needs to be understood as a structural prerequisite of the democratic state”¹⁶. The EU needs a model of democracy based on gender parity that completes the transition from a liberal state to a democratic state (a transition that began when universal suffrage was established), but which has not been finished because **the universal suffrage has not been translated into equal representation of men and women in political decision-making** and substantive gender equality¹⁷. By improving gender balance in political decision-making, a big aspect of the democratic deficit of the EU will be addressed. Parity and democracy need to go together.

“The move towards parity democracy needs to be understood as a structural prerequisite of the democratic state”

b. Increase diversity among women

A system of parity democracy which would also mean the normalization of gender balance is not only a question of citizen’s rights and justice, but also of representation of EU’s diversity. Due to women’s particular collective experience, and diverse economic and social situation, they are aware of their own needs and therefore better able to promote these¹⁸. However, as for men, **different groups of women have different experiences which must be accounted for.**

¹² *Ibid.*, p.1.

¹³ EWL, *loc.cit.*

¹⁴ Declaration of Athens, “European Summit of Women in Power”, 1992.

¹⁵ European Commission (EC), Employment and Social Affairs, *Electoral systems in Europe: a gender-impact assessment*, 1999, p. 51.

¹⁶ Rubio-Marin, *loc. cit.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.102.

¹⁸ EC, *loc.cit.*, 1999.

Intersectionality needs to be taken into account, the interests of groups of women that are more marginalised than men in the same situation, such as women of colour, religious minorities, lesbian and transwomen, migrant women, as well as women with disabilities are to be rightfully represented¹⁹.

In the political realm, women also operate on partisan logic²⁰. **Parity democracy does not aim to treat women as a minority group within the dominant framework²¹, but to**

“Parity democracy aims at transforming democracy by including all women in their diversity”

create a more inclusive framework. It aims at transforming democracy by including all women in their diversity, and not only a group of selected women that have managed to adapt to the male constructed parameters of politics. **Moving towards parity democracy in the EU means greater diversity, and thus, it means a better reflection and representation**

of the real Europe.

c. Challenge populism

Another argument for the need of parity democracy in the EU is connected to the increased populism and rise of the radical right that we are witnessing for some years. The **rise of populism is considered a “threat to democracy”²²**. Research shows that many populist parties advocate for deeply illiberal policies that use public support to undermine the rule of law and violate women’s and minority rights²³. The reasons for the increased presence of populist forces are complex and can differ from one context to other. Some political analysts connect the rise of populism with the economic crisis of 2008²⁴ and rising inequalities, and others with the crisis of the advanced representative democracies²⁵.

In this vein, **gender equality and parity democracy are important to keep the European democracies safe.** As the EU needs to face waves of populism and other waves, (such as terrorism and increased inequalities) that threaten the acquired peace and prosperity; shared values, such as democracy and gender equality are more necessary than

¹⁹ EC, *Conclusions of the 2017 Annual Colloquium on Fundamental Rights: Women’s rights in turbulent times*, 2017.

²⁰ Rubio-Marin, Ruth and Blanca Rodriguez Ruiz, “The gender of representation: On democracy, equality, and parity”, *Icon-international Journal of Constitutional Law*. 2008, N. 6, p. 287-316.

²¹ EWL, *loc.cit.*

²² Eiermann, Martin; Yascha Mounk and Limor Gultchin, “European Populism: Trends, Threats and Future Prospects”, *Tony Blair Institute for Global Change*, 2017.

²³ Sandford, Alasdair, “Rise of populism in Europe, a “real threat to democracy””, *Euronews*, 2017. Consulted at: <http://www.euronews.com/2017/12/29/rise-of-populism-in-europe-a-real-threat-to-democracy->

²⁴ Balfour, Rosa, “The (Resistable) Rise of Populism in Europe and its Impact on European and International Cooperation”, *Challenges ahead for the European Union, IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook* 2017.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 56.

ever²⁶. To challenge populism, a system of parity democracy which reinforces shared values and improves the democratic system and the representation of all EU citizens is necessary.

3. Strategic gains of parity democracy

Parity democracy is not only the right thing to do, but it is also important for the rather “strategical” benefits that it provides to the EU and its citizens, particularly women, as well as to political parties.

As women represent half of the population, they also represent half of the talent, knowledge, skills, creativity, ideas... and thus, not having an equal presence of men and women in political decision-making means that the EU is not effectively using all its talents²⁷. Facing new and old challenges require innovative solutions: women’s contribution is essential to provide the best solutions, and therefore, not sufficiently using women’s talents constitutes a loss for the whole society.

“Not having an equal presence of men and women in political decision-making means that the EU is not effectively using all its talents”

It has also been said that women as a group have needs and interests related to their own experiences (for example reproductive rights) that do not concern men to the same extent²⁸. Following Hanna Pitkin’s contributions on political representation, more women are necessary in a Parliament to represent “women’s interests”²⁹. **Women’s equal political participation in the EP may also lead to the introduction of neglected or new issues to the European political agenda**³⁰. The

European Women’s Lobby (EWL) gives a good example of this: because women have been the ones most affected by issues of reconciliation of work and private life, and have not been present enough in decision-making, reconciliation has long been seen as a private issue rather than a problem to be tackled by the society³¹. With the progressive access of women to political decision-making, this is currently changing. In the same line, by adding women’s perspective to the policy debates and policy-making, half of the population’s issues and experiences will be taken into account, and therefore, **more effective and better policies will be adopted**. What’s more, to have an equal representation of women in the Parliament (and in political decision-making in general), assures a baseline connection between the

²⁶ Hubert, *loc.cit.*

²⁷ European Network of Experts “Women in decision-making”, *Facts and figures on women in political and public decision making in Europe*, 1996.

²⁸ EWL, *loc.cit.*

²⁹ According to Hanna Pitkin’s typology of political representation, women’s sufficient presence in politics is a precondition for their substantive representation, that is to say, to be able to address women’s concerns.

³⁰ EWL, *loc.cit.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.20.

representatives and all their constituencies³², and in particular, decisions about the allocation of public resources better fit the needs of a diverse citizenry, heightening, in turn, public satisfaction with policy delivery³³. Also, including women into the field of politics should allow a **transformation of the current political culture, which has been male-defined and dominated**³⁴.

Other actors, such as political parties, would benefit from parity democracy and from having more elected women MEPs (Members of the European Parliament). Political parties will gain from including more women into their organisation and electoral lists for the just explained same reasons (use of talents, new issues and better policies). But in addition to these, by having different candidate profiles in their electoral lists, which includes

women and other non-conventional profiles, political parties can attract new various groups of voters³⁵, and therefore **increase their electoral benefits**. Indeed, women can generate new support bases for the party³⁶. According to Kürschner, the acquisition of new support bases can be attributed to “many women’s roots in civil society and professions that were previously neglected by political organisations”³⁷. These links may also reflect positively on the party for which the woman is campaigning in terms of establishing relations with grassroots and constituencies: the message sent is that constituency’s interests are being addressed³⁸.

“Many political parties in Europe have already understood the strategic benefits of having more women on board”

Many political parties in Europe have already understood the strategic benefits of having more women on board, and thus, they have implemented their own internal measures to assure women’s participation³⁹. In fact, when quotas have been adopted by political parties, there has also been a “snowball” effect on other political parties in that member state, as **they realised that the selection or appointment of more women (either with or without quotas) is a way to broaden their electoral appeal**⁴⁰. This means that moving to a system of parity democracy is a positive strategic move for political parties as well.

³² Rubio-Marin et al., *loc.cit.*

³³ EWL, *loc.cit.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.18.

³⁵ EC, *loc.cit.*, 1999.

³⁶ Kürschner, Isabelle, “Political Parties: Door-keeper or Door-opener for Women’s Pathways into Politics?”, *Workshop on Actions for Gender Balance in the EP - EP Elections 2014*, 2013, p.36.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.36.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.36.

³⁹ European Parliament (EP), *Electoral gender quota systems and their implementations in Europe*, 2013, p.18.

⁴⁰ EP, Directorate-General for Research, *Differential impact of the electoral systems on female political representation*, 1997.

In conclusion, Part I has tried to answer why parity democracy is important and necessary to the EU. In light of all these reasons, this paper argues that the EU and all the relevant stakeholders, including voters in the last instance, need to seize the upcoming elections to the EP to improve gender balance and effectively move towards a system of parity democracy. The EU and parity democracy are also important for women, as the following part explains.

Part II – Why are the EU and parity democracy important for women?

Although many aspects of the EU can (and should) be criticised, such as its slow motion, and the prevalence of the economy over the social, among many other, we need to acknowledge that the EU is an ambitious project of solidarity between nations against violence and war. Women have benefited from the European project, and can still, benefit much more with the development of a system of parity democracy in the EU.

1. What has the EU done for gender equality?

As said, gender equality is one of EU's values and official goals, and it is also **a policy that the EU has pursued for more than 50 years**. EU's gender equality policy is accompanied by jurisprudence, with more than 200 judgments; 13 main transposed directives into the national legislation of member states; about 20 Recommendations, Resolutions and Decisions of the Council, 6 Action Programmes and an important institutional anchoring (specific groups focusing on gender equality within the EC, EP (i.e. the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM Committee)), Council and member states, and since 2007 the specialised agency of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)). The policy on gender equality has also been integrated into the external action of the EU⁴¹, thus spreading the goal to achieve gender equality beyond the borders of the EU.

Some concrete examples of the EU fostering gender equality are the legislative measures that required minimum requirements to protect pregnant women, that established the right to paid parental leave and recognized the need to provide opportunities to fathers to take care of their children. Some examples of Directives adopted are on Equal pay, Equal treatment at work; Equal treatment in regimes of social security ...

“EU's gender equality policy is accompanied by jurisprudence, legal instruments, action plans, and an important institutional anchoring”

⁴¹ See for instance, the *EU Gender Action Plan in external relations (2016-2020)*.

And more recent examples are the EU's signature of the Istanbul Convention, the EC's proposed package of policy and legal measures to improve the Work-life balance for working parents and carers, the Action Plan to tackle the gender pay gap 2017-2019...

Moreover, following the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, the heads of state and governments agreed in the Treaty of Amsterdam that the EU should promote gender equality and eliminate discrimination between women and men in all its policies. **The principle of gender mainstreaming was born as a new strategy to achieve equality between women and men in line with the concept of parity democracy**, which aims to adapt the rules to fit women and men in all policies and all sectors. Gender mainstreaming has been defined as “the (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making”⁴². In other words, gender mainstreaming is an approach to policy-making that takes into account both women's and men's interests and concerns, aimed at designing better policies. The difficulties to implement this principle are addressed later.

It can be envisaged that moving towards a system of parity democracy would not only assure the acquired rights, but it would enable the achievement of substantive gender equality, as the whole political system would be transformed into a model that provides the equal status of men and women in society.

“The EU is shaping women's rights and adopting measures that can deeply affect their lives”

From this, we see that **it is important that women are encouraged to participate in EU politics: the EU is shaping their rights and adopting measures that can deeply affect their lives**. With their increased participation, more demands can be done to improve gender inequalities in the EU. In the current context, creating awareness of EU's benefits and mobilising women to take part in the EP's elections in May 2019 is relevant to move towards parity democracy and advance gender equality.

2. Taking action at EU level

a. What would have happened in the absence of EU action?

The combined effect of feminist movements, the progress on contraception and on the tertiarization of the economy would have made evolved the situation of women across members states in the absence of EU action. This was the case in the field of civil rights,

⁴² Council of Europe, *Gender Mainstreaming; Conceptual framework, methodology and presentation of good practices*, 2004, p. 12.

which was not a competence of the EU in the sixties. Also, we could expect that the economic development and the integration of women into the formal labour market experienced in the eighties would have encouraged companies and governments to act on family and work balance measures. That said, we could expect that **the gap between EU member states performing better on gender equality and the others would have widened without the leverage effect of EU politics**. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine the strong and mutually reinforcing progress done on gender equality without EU action. What would have happened if the ECJ had failed to establish equality between men and women as a fundamental right of the EU (and enforceable before national courts), in the *Defrenne* judgment in 1976? EU legislation has advanced women's rights as examples above showed.

Stakeholders at national governments and public administrations have acknowledged the key role played by the EU in influencing national politics in gender equality⁴³. For instance, it is likely that some member states would not have implemented measures on women's employment without the influence of the EU.

“It is of paramount importance to inform EU citizens about EU's actions for women's rights to increase interest and participation in EU politics”

It is of paramount importance to inform EU citizens, and especially women and feminists, about the advancements on women's rights fostered by the EU to increase their interest and participation in EU politics and elections. This way, they should be able to shape the EU, demand substantive gender equality and steps to move towards a system where women and men enjoy their equal status and complementarity.

b. Advantages of EU action

Advancing equality between men and women requires to change mentalities and to develop a different vision of the world which fully values the actions done by women. Public action should encourage these changes.

The EU provides a physical and symbolic place of dialogue and exchange of visions, opinions and practices, which is of immeasurable value. The practices of more progressive states, such some Scandinavian countries establishing parity in corporate boards, have been

⁴³ See for instance the work of Emmanuela Lombardo on the “Europeanization” of Spanish gender policies. Lombardo, Emmanuela “La europeización de la política española de igualdad de género”, *Revista Española de Ciencia Política*, n.9, Octubre 2003, p. 65-82.

shared through, and mirrored by the EU, resulting in greater gender equality across the rest of members states⁴⁴.

Moreover, European Directives establish minimal common standards, which do not prevent member states to apply higher or more protective standards for their citizens. This is a great advantage of the action at EU level with regards to gender equality because it establishes minimums (that are already an improvement of the legislation of many members states) but at the same time do not prevent more progressist member states to keep or adopt higher standards.

“EU Directives set minimum standards in gender equality, but member states are entitled to improve them”

Some in northern European member states were concerned after the ECJ's judgment in the *Kalanke* case in 1995⁴⁵, which questioned the validity of positive actions⁴⁶. Given that EU's competence in the field of equality is not exclusive, the **EU's gender equality policy is set on a basis of complementarity** between the different levels of governance (local authorities, regional and national governments) and between various actors (social partners, associations, governments, actors in the field). Thus, there are no disadvantages from taking action at the EU level compared with that at other levels: the EU sets minimum standards in gender equality, but member states are entitled to improve them. On the contrary, national courts have frequently invoked the protective measures established in EU's legislation to effectively protect its citizens⁴⁷.

“Given the advantages of action at EU level, it is necessary to make the most out of it to combat persistent gender inequalities”

Other advantages include EU's encouragement to gather gendered data and the multinational projects that promote gender equality financed by the structural funds, among other ⁴⁸. In the last 10 years, EIGE has systematically provided comparative data⁴⁹ and practical tools to advance gender equality in national policies.

In conclusion, **acting at the EU level in gender equality results in different advantages for all member states**. Given all these advantages, the EU needs to make the most of its competence and tools to effectively

⁴⁴ See for example EC's proposal on *Gender Balance on Corporate Boards* of 2012.

⁴⁵ *Kalanke v Freie Hansestadt Bremen* (1995) C-450/93.

⁴⁶ Molinari, Laura, “The Effect of the Kalanke Decision on the European Union: A Decision With Teeth, but Little Bite”, *St. John's Law Review*, vol. 71, issue 3, Article 3, p.591-634. Available at: <http://scholarship.law.stjohns.edu/lawreview/vol71/iss3/3>

⁴⁷ Burri, Susanne and Sacha Prechal, “EU Gender Equality Law” for the EC's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, 2008, p.1-27.

⁴⁸ See more about EU's structural funds at http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/funding/

⁴⁹ The European Gender Equality Index, data base for women in decision making, etc...

promote gender equality and improve the existent gender inequalities in Europe. The upcoming EP's elections in May 2019 provide opportunities to speak out for women's rights, ask political parties to put forward and support more women candidates, and urge to commit to gender proofed programmes and specific actions that will improve the situation of women in Europe.

3. What could have the EU done better?

It has been explained how the EU has fostered women's rights and why action at EU level has been important to improve gender equality in Europe. Providing this information is key to move towards a system of parity democracy. However, it is also relevant to highlight that the EU has a lot of room for improvement in the field of gender equality. While it would be difficult to address all the aspects that the EU could improve on this matter, this part provides two examples of areas in which the EU could have done better for gender equality: on gender mainstreaming and on the economic crisis of 2008.

a. Gender mainstreaming

As mentioned, the principle of gender mainstreaming was incorporated into the EU already in the nineties as an innovative policy tool with the aim to improve gender equality. However, **its implementation in EU policies has been problematic and ineffective** due to multiple reasons: individual and institutional resistance, lack of resources, such as gender knowledge and skills, time, financial resources, and power⁵⁰. Moreover, following the EU enlargement of 2004, serious budgetary restrictions and administrative reforms had a strong impact on gender equality policies; and gender institutions were weakened at both EU and national levels leading to the failure to consider gender equality during the economic crisis⁵¹. Furthermore, gender mainstreaming has been misunderstood and misused in favour of other policy interests: it deviated from its original course when attempts were made to use it as a policy strategy "countering positive (affirmative) action" during the first decade of its existence⁵².

"The implementation of gender mainstreaming has been problematic and ineffective. But the concept remains valid due to its transformative potential"

⁵⁰ Mergaert, Lut and Emanuela Lombardo, "Resistance to implementing gender mainstreaming in EU research policy", in: Weiner, Elaine and Heather MacRae (eds): "The persistent invisibility of gender in EU policy" *European Integration online Papers* (EIoP), Special issue 1, Vol. 18, Article 5, 2014.

⁵¹ Hubert, Agnes and Maria Stratigaki, "Twenty Years of EU Gender Mainstreaming: Rebirth out of the Ashes?", *Femina Politica* 2, 2016, p.30.

⁵² *Ibid*, p.22.

Despite this deviation, gender equality policies remained visible on the policy agenda. But gender mainstreaming has somehow been instrumentalised to justify the dilution of gender equality policy as a priority for the EU⁵³.

Nonetheless, **the misuse of gender mainstreaming has not made the concept obsolete due to its great transformative potential⁵⁴**. In the EU there is a strong legal and policy framework for gender equality and gender mainstreaming and there is still expertise and institutions that can help its correct implementation. In particular, **the EU has the capacity to provide a gender-analysis of all policies, supported by gender impact assessments and gender budgeting** to help shape effective national policies in this field⁵⁵.

b. Response to the 2008 economic crisis

In 2000, the building of a social Europe, and particularly questions connected to gender equality, were relatively high on the list of European policy priorities in the Lisbon Strategy and its European social agenda⁵⁶. However, after the financial crisis that raged Europe in 2008, social concerns seemed much more marginal in the Europe 2020 strategy⁵⁷. In response to the crisis, austerity measures were imposed, and while reforms in the financial sector were expected (to counter the economic cycles and restore competitiveness), little financial reform has actually taken place⁵⁸. **In a context of budgetary cuts and austerity, EU gender equality policy has seen its institutional, interactional, financial, and normative autonomy strongly constrained⁵⁹**. A report by the EC modestly noted that “it cannot be ruled out that disparities in gender equality within Europe may widen back as an unintended consequence of fiscal consolidation”⁶⁰.

While all EU citizens have been affected by the crisis, **women have been disproportionately affected in some areas**. For instance, the housing crisis seriously affected the lives of the most vulnerable households, including single mothers and low-income households (among whom women are over-represented)⁶¹. Also, the rights of pregnant women to maternity leave and benefit have been curtailed and cases

“Austerity measures have disproportionately affected women in some areas”

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.23.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Jacquot, Sophie, “European Union gender equality policies since 1957”, *Encyclopédie pour une histoire nouvelle de l’Europe*, 2016, p.3. Consulted at: <http://ehne.fr/en/node/1125>

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.3.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.1.

⁵⁹ Jacquot, *loc.cit.*, p.3.

⁶⁰ EC, Directorate-General for Justice, “The impact of the economic crisis on the situation of women and men and on gender equality policies”, 2013, p.13.

⁶¹ EC, *loc.cit.*, 2013, p. 13.

of discrimination against pregnant women have been documented in some member states (report by the EC).

Moreover, in the vast majority of EU member states gender mainstreaming has not been implemented in policy design and policy implementation over the crisis, and neither recovery nor consolidation measures have been assessed from a gender perspective⁶². **The EU could have urged member states to assess the gender impact of the applied measures but failed to do so.**

In conclusion, the examples of the inefficient application of gender mainstreaming, as well as the response that was given to the economic crisis, show that the participation of women in EU politics and in the elections to the EP, is urgent: **their voices need to be heard to avoid similar responses in the future and assure progression in gender equality.** Transforming the current EU to a system of parity democracy, which not only embeds parity in all decision-making bodies and processes but which also transforms the political culture and system of democracy, would ensure a more representative, inclusive and different responses to new crisis and challenges that might emerge. This part has tried to answer why the EU and parity democracy are important for women.

With the view to seizing the May 2019 elections to the EP to foster parity democracy, the following part provides an analysis of the current state of gender balance in decision making in Europe and in the EP. Where do we stand now? How far has the EU and EP improved its gender balance and what are the specific actions to take in view of the 2019 elections, to move towards parity democracy?

Part III – Why is gender balance important in the EP and in EU decision-making?

- 1. Under-representation of women in decision-making**
 - a. Persistent gender inequalities in decision-making**

The rights of women to vote and stand for election, among many other formal rights, have been progressively achieved within the European continent since the last century. Women have now guaranteed access to many fields that were once prohibited to them, such as access to education and formal labour market. **All these advancements indicate that great progress has been achieved in Europe, upheld by EU programmes, financing and legislation.** However, substantive gender equality has not yet been reached and a number of

“Great progress has been achieved in Europe, but substantive gender equality has not yet been reached”

⁶² EC, *loc.cit.*, 2013, p. 14.

observers, including the EP⁶³, are even depicting a backlash⁶⁴. The truth is that even if 51% of the EU's population is female, **women are still grossly under-represented in most of the power and decision-making positions and current progression is questionable.**

The EC has since 2003 collected and disseminated data on women and men in decision-making. This data is now managed by EIGE⁶⁵, which also publishes data per countries in its regularly updated Gender Equality Index. Regarding the 28 EU member states, women represent only 20% of Constitutional Courts presidents, 22% of National Academies of Science presidents and members and 21% of Central Bank Governors deputy/vice-governors and members.

In the field of political decision-making, in the EP, 37% of MEPs are women. At the level of national Parliaments, the percentage of women MPs is lower: on average, only 30% of MPs are women, and its progression has been slower (22% in 2005)⁶⁶. Yet there are large disparities among member states. For example, while 46% of MPs are women in Sweden and 42% in Spain, they are only 18% in Greece and 13% in Hungary⁶⁷. The same trends apply to women Ministers, the share of women ministers is overall slowly increasing but there are big disparities between member states: Sweden has 52% of women ministers, France 50%, Check Republic 29%, Greece 24%, Belgium 21%, Portugal 17% and Hungary 7%⁶⁸.

Data shows large national disparities and the systemic, persistent and troubling under-representation of women in power positions. It also shows that the current gender imbalance in the EP, goes together with the under-representation of women in decision-making in general, and the lack of progress towards gender equality.

The low percentages of women in decision-making seem paradoxical when put alongside education statistics. According to Eurostat, 54% of all tertiary students (those who received education provided by universities and other higher institutions) in the EU are women⁶⁹. Women also represent up to 57% of Master's

“Having more highly educated women is not being translated into more access to high-level positions”

⁶³ EP, *Backlash against Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Rights*, June 2018.

⁶⁴ EC, Conclusions of the 2017 Annual Colloquium on Fundamental Rights: Women's rights in turbulent times, *loc.cit.*

⁶⁵ EIGE's Gender Statistics Database: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dqs>

⁶⁶ EIGE, gender statistics database. https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dqs/indicator/wmidm_pol_parl_wmid_natpar/datatable

⁶⁷ EIGE, gender statistics database (2018-Q3). https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dqs/indicator/wmidm_pol_parl_wmid_natpar/datatable

⁶⁸ EIGE, gender statistics database (2018-Q3). https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dqs/indicator/wmidm_pol_gov_wmid_natgov_minis/datatable

⁶⁹ Eurostat statistics explained, Education and training in the EU - facts and figures. Consulted at: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Education_and_training_in_the_EU_-_facts_and_figures

and 48% of Ph.D.'s students⁷⁰. Having more highly educated women is not being translated into more access to high-level positions in the labour market and in politics. **In fact, the progress in gender equality is very slow and not linear.** According to the 2017 European Gender Equality Index, half of EU member states have reduced their score on one or more gender equality indicators in the last 10 years⁷¹, which raises concerns with regards to the advancement of gender equality.

b. Under-representation of women in EU decision-making

In line with the previous part, what we can observe is **that gender imbalance in the EP cannot be dissociated from the systemic under-representation that women face in the whole political decision-making apparatus of the EU.** The EC has set an internal goal to have 40% of women middle and senior managers by 2019, an initiative that should be welcomed. However, only 32% of EU's president and commissioners are women and only 32% of EU's senior administrators are women too⁷². **We trust that strong demands for parity democracy in the EP will spill over on decisions for other high-level posts for EU institutions** (Commissioners but also President of the Commission -spitzenkandidat-, president of the Council, European Bank, and other institutions) coming up for a change of their highest-level officials.

“We trust that strong demands for parity democracy in the EP will spill over on decisions for other high-level posts for EU institutions”

A system of parity democracy is not limited to a fair representation of both genders in the representative institutions (i.e. Parliament), **it entails building parity in the whole governing system**, in the rest of the institutions and bodies. The under-representation of women in decision-making positions demonstrates the lack of substantive equality in Europe, which leads us to **demand an EU democratic system which stands for parity.** The elections to the EP in May 2019 constitute an opportunity

to move in this direction.

2. The state of play: women in the EU

a. Women MEPs

Since the first elections to the EP, the number of women MEPs has been increasing. From 16% of women MEPs in the first EP's elections in 1979, we have moved up to 37%,

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.1.

⁷¹ EIGE, *Gender Equality Index 2017 in brief: A snail's pace towards gender equality*, 2017. According to EIGE's Gender Equality Index, women's power is the gender equality indicator which has improved most in the last decade; however, it has one of lowest scores as indicators, only achieving 48.5 points.

⁷² EIGE, gender statistics database, (2018-Q3). https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs/indicator/wmidm_adm_eur_wmid_euadmin_eurins/datatable

showing a continuous progress. However, the EC notes that **“the level of female representation has largely stagnated since the 1999 EP’s elections”**⁷³, for instance, the percentage of women in the EP only increased by 2% from the 2009 to the 2014 EP elections. Also, the EP noted that its composition with regards to gender balance “falls short of the values and objectives of gender equality championed in the Charter”⁷⁴.

The **percentage of women MEPs elected by each country varies considerably**. For example, Malta had the highest proportion of women MEPs (67%) in 2014, albeit with only 6 seats⁷⁵. By contrast, Lithuania elected only 9% of women MEPs (out of 11 seats)⁷⁶. Member states with larger numbers of seats, such as Germany, France, the United Kingdom (UK), Italy and Spain, had percentages between 35% to 43% of elected women MEPs⁷⁷. Greece for instance had 24% of women MEPs (out of 21 seats)⁷⁸. Major divergences are also noticeable by the fact that 10 of the member states have a level lower than 33% of women MEPs⁷⁹.

Also, **there is a lack of ethnic diversity amongst women (and men) MEPs**. An analysis done by the EWL showed that in 2013, women from ethnic minorities or diverse backgrounds represented less than 2% of the MEPs⁸⁰. To truly represent EU’s citizens **women (and men) in all their diversity should be fairly represented in the EP**. The fact that gender intersects with other personal attributes or identities resulting in greater discrimination⁸¹, has an impact on the equal representation of women from diverse or marginalised groups (such as women from different ethnicities or religious minorities, with women disabilities, lesbian and transwomen, and migrant women, among others) in the EP.

b. The role of women in the EP

Many of these **women MEPs have made a prominent contribution to the effective functioning of the EU and its democracy**. There are two recent examples: the work of MEP Judith Sargentini, who faced heavy controversy to speak up against Hungary’s undemocratic developments, by leading the report on

“FEMM Committee has introduced topics such as violence against women to the EU ‘s political agenda”

⁷³ EC, *Women in European politics -time for action*, 2009.

⁷⁴ EP, Resolution of 11 November 2015 on the reform of the electoral law of the European Union (2015/2035(INL)).

⁷⁵ EP, Directorate General for Internal Policies, “Analysis of political parties’ and independent candidates’ policies for gender balance in the European Parliament after the elections of 2014”, 2015, p.18.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ EP, Results of the 2014 European elections, Men and women distribution. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/gender-balance.html>

⁷⁹ EP, Resolution of 11 November 2015, *op.cit.*

⁸⁰ EWL, *Lobbying Kit ahead of the EP elections in May 2014*, 2013.

⁸¹ EIGE, definition of intersectionality. Consulted at <http://eige.europa.eu/rdc/thesaurus/terms/1263>

activating Article 7⁸²; and the efforts of MEPs Danuta Hubner and Sylvie Guillaume to increase transparency of MEPs' actions⁸³. **The EP, and especially the FEMM Committee, have also been key on working for greater gender balance and equality.** The Committee has introduced many new issues like violence against women, the conditionality to respect gender equality in trade agreements, the need to assist women spouses in agriculture... to the political agenda since 1980⁸⁴.

Finally, apart from women MEPs, many other women work in the EP, whose contribution is essential to the effective functioning of the institution. For 2017's International Women's Day the EP released a report⁸⁵ with the gender composition of different bodies within the EP and its personnel: **women make up to almost 60% of the EP Secretariat staff, but that gender composition is not reflected among the management positions,** meaning that the glass ceiling within the EP staff is considerable⁸⁶.

“Women are the majority in the EP secretariat staff, but that composition is not reflected in management positions”

For instance, only 17% of the Deputy Secretary-General and Directors-General are women and 34% of the Heads of Unit. In 2016, 89% of the senior management appointments were men⁸⁷. These numbers show that **besides increasing the number of women MEPs, there is an urgent need to truly embrace parity democracy and transform the EP's whole structure into one that represents the society and reflects gender equality.**

3. How can we achieve gender balance?

Feminist theory has already explained the multiple causes of gender inequality, including in decision-making; namely the historic discrimination against women, gender roles and stereotypes, and prevailing sexist attitudes. It is necessary to acknowledge the complexity and multidimensionality of the factors contributing to gender inequalities. **The recognition of equality between women and men as a fundamental principle of the political system through parity democracy would have the effect to radically change the current landscape.** While the EU treaties' provisions would allow such a change, as noted in Part I, the current political context is paradoxically not likely to allow for such a bold

⁸² EP, Report on a proposal calling on the Council to determine, pursuant to Article 7(1) of the Treaty on European Union, the existence of a clear risk of a serious breach by Hungary of the values on which the Union is founded (2017/2131(INL)), 2017.

⁸³ EP Press Release, “New package of transparency tools for MEPs”, 27 June, 2018. Consulted at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20180627IPR06705/new-package-of-transparency-tools-for-meps>

⁸⁴ See FEMM Committee's activities at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/femm/home.html>

⁸⁵ EP, *Women in the European Parliament*, European Parliament, Equality and Diversity Unit, 2017.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.8.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.7.

move in the near future. We will then concentrate here on **the small steps which are proven to impact on the resulting composition of the EP and variation of men and women MEPs elected by country.**

a. Gender quotas

The positive effect that gender quotas have had on increasing gender balance has been largely acknowledged. **Gender quotas in political decision-making and zipped lists have proved to be highly effective tools** in addressing discrimination and gender power imbalances and improving democratic representation of political decision-making bodies⁸⁸.

“For the last elections to the EP, only 8 member states had gender requirements for the electoral lists”

There are two main quota categories: quotas created by political parties (self-imposed), and quotas created by national legislation⁸⁹. With regards to legislative quotas, for the last EP’s elections, only 8 member states had gender requirements for their electoral lists⁹⁰. **All the quotas were gender-neutral. This means that they aim to avoid the under-representation of both women and men**, and thus gender proportions are applied to both⁹¹.

Only Belgium and France require 50-50 parity lists. In Slovenia and Spain, each gender must be represented by at least 40% of the candidates in the list, in Portugal by at least 33% and in Poland by at least 35%. In Romania, the rules establish that no all-women neither all-men lists are possible⁹². It has been proven that quotas that require a higher percentage of women on party ballots lead to the election of more women⁹³.

“Placement rules and non-compliance sanctions are essential to the effectiveness of quotas”

Besides the percentage per gender, two other factors are essential to the effectiveness of gender quotas: the placement on the list (positions higher up the ballot mean higher chances of being elected) **and sanctions for non-compliance** (if there are no sanctions, implementation is not likely to occur)⁹⁴. Some member states use the “zipping” system, where candidates of different genders are alternated on the list. France has the

⁸⁸ EP, Resolution of 11 November 2015, *loc.cit.*

⁸⁹ EP, Differential impact of the electoral systems on female political representation European Parliament, Directorate-General for Research, *loc.cit.*

⁹⁰ Belgium, France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Slovenia, Romania and Poland.

⁹¹ European Parliamentary Research Service, *At a glance-women in Parliaments*, 2014.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p.2.

⁹³ Gwiazda, Anna, 2018, “Gender quotas – can they enhance women’s parliamentary representation?”, *Political Studies Association Specialist Group on Parliaments*, consulted at

<https://parliamentsandlegislatures.wordpress.com/2017/09/27/gender-quotas-poland/>

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.1.

“zipping” system for the whole list, while Belgium only for the top positions. Portugal prohibits more than two consecutive candidates of the same gender and in Spain, the 40-60% ratio must be kept within each five-candidate cluster on the list⁹⁵. With regards to the sanctions for non-compliance, in Spain, Slovenia and Romania, electoral lists are invalid when they do not meet the gender quota requirements. In Portugal, lists are admitted to elections even if they do not comply with the gender quota, but the party or coalition is then punished with a fine and/or a cut in electoral campaign subsidies⁹⁶.

The EU has encouraged member states to adopt gender quotas and recommended the “zipping system”. However, it has done so through soft law, using non-binding instruments such as Recommendations. **The EU has not issued any binding provision to introduce quotas or other positive measures to ensure gender balance**⁹⁷. Due to their proven positive effects, the EU should adopt stronger documents and measures to include quotas.

b. Electoral system

States with a majoritarian system tend to have lower levels of female representation than countries using a proportional system⁹⁸. The number of representatives elected per constituency is also relevant. When there are high chances that the political party will win more than one seat, political parties might be willing to support both men and women candidates⁹⁹. In this light, the EU could encourage more proportional systems among its member states, and more than one seat per constituency, when possible. At the same time, member states with majoritarian systems should make conscious efforts to ensure that both genders are equally represented.

c. The role of political parties and their values

The role of political parties is crucial in determining the gender balance of the Parliament because they are the “gatekeepers” to political office in democratic political systems¹⁰⁰. The criteria and process to select candidates are the main factors to consider. Some specific factors contribute to choosing more men than women candidates: the bias towards “masculine” characteristics in the profile of the ideal

“It is not sufficient for political parties to recruit candidates exclusively from among their own members”

⁹⁵ European Parliamentary Research Service, *loc.cit.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁹⁷ EP, 2015, *loc.cit.*

⁹⁸ EC, 1999, *loc.cit.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* p.6

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* p.3.

candidate, male-dominated selection committees, the transparency of the selection process, the requirement of previous political experience within the party and the long-standing membership to the party¹⁰¹. As there are lower rates of female party membership, it means **that it is not sufficient for political parties to recruit candidates exclusively from among their own members**¹⁰².

In addition, parties' right or left ideology plays a role in placing a greater or lower number of women candidates in their election's lists. **Left parties are more likely to support intervention and therefore, more open to adopting self-imposed measures that assure gender parity**¹⁰³. This is confirmed when looking at the percentage of men and women MEPs by each European political group. Left-leaning groups elected the highest proportions of women MEPs¹⁰⁴. Particularly, the Confederal Group of the European United Left elected the highest percentage of women MEPs (51%), followed closely by the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (46%). The European Conservatives and Reformist Group elected the lowest percentage of women MEPs (21%) of all political groups in the EP¹⁰⁵. No matter what the ideology is, all European political parties defend EU values, and thus, assuring gender balance should be a priority for all.

d. Increase the number of women aspirants

One of the main issues is that there are fewer women aspirants than men. The rationale behind this reality is complex. In addition to all the mentioned reasons, some note that women aspirants have fewer resources (time and money), political interest and confidence. In fact, a study found that when considering running for office, a big barrier for women is their self-perceived confidence and capacity to run¹⁰⁶.

“It is important to encourage women to stand for elections and to set the conditions within political parties that would help this aim”

Men are more likely to consider running for office than women, (59% versus 43%) and more men than women who consider running actually end up doing so (20% versus 15%)¹⁰⁷. Financial resources, external confirmation and endorsement are needed when self-perception is not strong enough. However, women receive less encouragement from family, colleagues, and party officials than men do¹⁰⁸. This consolidates the status quo

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* p.3-16.

¹⁰² EC, 1999, *loc.cit.*

¹⁰³ EP, 1997, *loc.cit.*

¹⁰⁴ EP, 2015, *loc.cit.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.2.

¹⁰⁶ Kürschner, *loc.cit.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.27.

and the vicious cycle which prevents more women running for office¹⁰⁹. In this light, **it is important to encourage women to stand for elections and to set all the conditions within the political parties that would help this aim.**

e. Fair Media representation

Some studies have researched the role of media and its impact on the political participation and success of women. Media is disproportionately critical of women candidates and politicians and focuses more on the personal characteristics and appearance of women, than men¹¹⁰. When looking at media coverage, in 2012, the European Observatory on

“There is little and stereotyped media attention to women candidates and politicians”

Gender Representation, a media monitoring initiative, observed that **only 16% of the politicians covered in the media were women**¹¹¹. As a result, the stereotyped and wrongful coverage of women candidates and politicians in the media, not only impacts on women’s political success but also has a negative effect on women’s inclination to run¹¹².

In conclusion, the EU and all political stakeholders should act upon the mentioned factors (gender quotas, electoral system, role of political parties, number of women aspirants and fair media representation), as these are the proven tools for greater gender balance and for progressively establishing a system of parity democracy.

4. Participation in the EP’s Elections

Political participation is wider than putting a bulletin into an urn, it takes many forms. Women in the EU are politically active in many ways (but most often not visible) and it is difficult, if not impossible, to keep track of all the informal and formal political engagement that women have. This policy paper cannot address all the different ways in which women have been politically active with regards to the EU, but pragmatically it concentrates on women’s political engagement in the EP’s elections.

A prominent example of women’s successful political participation was the dedicated campaign organised by the *European Network of Women in Decision Making* ahead of the 1994 EP elections, where the proportion of women in the new legislature starting in 1994 jumped to 25%, from 19% in the previous legislature. Later, the network was discontinued, and it was not until 2004 that the EWL, with little resources, started its first 50/50 campaign to achieve equal representation between women and men in the

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p.27.

¹¹⁰ EP, 2015, *loc.cit.*

¹¹¹ Oleksy, Elzbieta H., “More women in political decision-making: the role of the media”, *Workshop on Actions for Gender Balance in the European Parliament - EP Elections 2014*, 2013.

¹¹² EP, 2015, *loc.cit.*

EP¹¹³. Acknowledging the important political participation of women in the EU, this part specifically focuses on women's electoral participation in the EP and their views towards the EU.

a. Gender differences in electoral participation

The total turnout for women and men at the last EP's elections in 2014 was of 42.6%¹¹⁴. This percentage is the lowest that the EP has ever had. In fact, voter's turnout to the EP's elections has continuously decreased since the first elections were held.

“The turnout to the EP's elections has continuously decreased since first elections”

When analysing the turnout through gender lens, we can observe that **consistently, more men voted than women**. At the last EP's elections in 2014: voter turnout was 45% among men, as against 40.7% among women¹¹⁵ with large differences by country. For instance, in Sweden, more women than men voted (59% against 42%). However, in the majority of member states, women's turnout was lower: among the 28 member states, only in 9 countries, more women than men voted. For example, in Greece, women's turnout was of 23%, against 28% of men's and in Germany, women's turnout was of 45%, against 52% of men's¹¹⁶. Moreover, **the gap between male and female turnout has widened**: from 2 points in 2009 to 4 points in 2014¹¹⁷.

Fostering participation and turnout in the next elections is one of the EC's goals¹¹⁸ and thus, it is on its interest to encourage women's turnout and further explore the reasons behind the lower percentage of their turnout. Feminist theory has already explained how women have historically been discouraged from engaging in the public sphere, notably in the field of politics. However, the EU needs, probably now more than ever, to encourage women's electoral participation in the EP.

As this policy paper has tried to show in Part I, parity democracy is not only necessary for substantive gender equality but is fundamental to EU's own democratic system and future. **A system of parity democracy would mean a closer representation of EU's citizens and would increase participation and turnout, resulting in a stronger democracy.**

But what are the prospects for the EP's election in 2019? Next part explores that question.

¹¹³ To know more about EWL's campaigns for parity democracy in the EU consult: <https://www.womenlobby.org/European-Parliament-50-50-Campaign-?lang=en>

¹¹⁴ EP, Results of the 2014 European elections, Turnout. Consulted at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/turnout.html>

¹¹⁵ EP, *European and National elections figured out*, Special edition 2014 European elections, 2014.

¹¹⁶ EP, *European and National elections figured out*, *op.cit.*, p.42.

¹¹⁷ EP, *European and National elections figured out*, *op.cit.*, p.3

¹¹⁸ EC, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social committee and the Committee of the regions, Report on the 2014 European Parliament elections*, 8 of May of 2015.

b. Women, less interested in the EU than men

The results of the “One year to elections” Eurobarometer’s survey were published in May 2018. Results revealed EU citizen’s intentions and views with regards to their support to the EU, its democracy and other related issues. **In line with women and men’s turnout in the last EP’s elections, women have also shown less interest in the EU than men.** These results are not new, women have traditionally shown less interest in politics and in the EU than men, as previous EU surveys revealed¹¹⁹. Why women seem to be, persistently, less interested in the EU than men? Considering that women make up to half of the EU’s population, the “EU-interest gender gap” should raise concerns.

“Considering that women make up to half of the EU’s population, the “EU-interest gender gap” should raise concerns”

In the May 2018 Eurobarometer, when asked about their interest in “European affairs”, 60% of men declared being interested, compared to 49% of women, and 50% of women declared to be “not interested”, in comparison to 40% of men. In the same line, **when asked “How interested or not are you on these [EP] elections?”**, women seemed to be less interested than men. In total, 52% of women declared not being interested in the upcoming EP elections, in contrast to 45% of men, and in the same line, 46% of women declared being “interested”, in comparison to 54% of men.

Also, both the majority of women and men believed that their country’s membership to the EU had been a good thing (60%) and that their country had benefited from being a member of the EU (67%). However, **women seemed to be less convinced of the benefits of the EU than men**: 58% of women believed it had been a good thing, compared to 61% of men; and 65% women believed that it had been beneficial, compared to 69% of men.

“The May 2018 Eurobarometer shows that women are less interested in and less satisfied with the EU than men”

Other reasons for the unequal gender-balanced parliaments are the lack of female role models and women’s confidence in their ability in a male-dominated political culture¹²⁰. As the world of politics has been for so long (and still are as data shows) male-dominated, more women in politics and more attention for what they care for would enhance their interest on EU politics. The example of Sweden is interesting: in 2014,

¹¹⁹ European Network Women in Decision Making, *Statistical data concerning the participation of women in political and public decision making*, 1992.

¹²⁰ EP, 2015, *loc.cit.*

Sweden elected 55% of women MEPs in the 2014 EP's elections, and women's turnout to those elections was of 59%.

These results show the need to rethink and reshape EU's democratic system with a gender perspective. **If half of its population seems to be less interested in and satisfied with the EU, it means that the EU is failing to address the needs of a big part of its citizens.** Moving towards a parity democracy which embraces women in their diversity is necessary to increase the political participation of women and ultimately represent EU's citizenry. The analysed results predict a lower participation of women in the EP elections than men. Against this, **conscious efforts are to be made by the EU institutions and other stakeholders, such as women's organisations, to address the gender inequalities in political participation in the EU, and particularly, the "EU-interest gender gap"**.

Part IV - Challenges and opportunities in view of the 2019 EP's elections and beyond

This part examines the possible challenges and opportunities within the current EU context, for achieving gender balance in 2019 and transforming the EU towards a system of parity democracy.

1. Challenges

a. Rise of populism and far right

The support of far right and populist political parties has progressively increased in Europe and the world in the last years. The populist far right has increased its electoral scores in Eastern Europe, Austria, Italy and Scandinavia: these parties are members of five governments in the EU¹²¹. They have also gained force in other member states (Denmark and France) and the UK. **Support for these parties is higher than it's been at any time over the past 30 years**, according to an analysis of election results across 22 European countries¹²². While these parties' nationalist ideology is antagonising the EU, they also challenge democratic values and first and foremost gender equality. Research shows that men have bigger preference for populist far right parties than women¹²³.

"Populist and far right political parties in Europe are characterised by their anti-gender and anti-EU ideology"

¹²¹ Tartar, Andre, "How the Populist Right Is Redrawing the Map of Europe", Bloomberg 2017. Consulted at <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2017-europe-populist-right/>

¹²² *Ibid.*, p.1.

¹²³ Spierings, Niels and Andrej Zaslove, "Gendering the vote for populist radical-right parties" *Patterns of Prejudice*, Volume 49, Issue 1-2: Gender and Populist Radical Right Politics, 2015, p.135-162.

For instance, in Sweden, 20% of men declared preference for the Swedish Democrats (SD) party, against only 10% of women¹²⁴.

Generally, their values and political identity have been characterised as anti-feminist. Some populists claim to be defenders of women's and gay rights, while others are more explicitly anti-feminist, with a **priority to reinstate traditional gender roles and family structures and to fight against what they call the "gender ideology"**¹²⁵. These parties in Europe are also characterised by their anti-EU or Eurosceptic identity. They criticise the EU for diverse economic, political and social issues, including the EU's promotion of gender equality. For example, **the EU is blamed for endorsing a so-called "gender agenda" to the detriment of traditional family life**¹²⁶. According to different analysts, the proclaimed support of the EU for gender equality would be seen as one of the wider colonisation programme elements, whereby, for many in Eastern countries, what was once Marxism is somehow now replaced by "gender politics"¹²⁷.

“Populist far right parties defend traditional gender roles and family structures”

While the rise of populism and far right challenges EU's values of democracy and gender equality, establishing a system of parity democracy would, on the contrary, reinforce those values and strengthen the European project. **With regards to the upcoming EP's elections, the support for populism and far right can only be seen as a challenge to the advancement of gender equality and parity in the EU.** As Part I has already shown, a system of parity democracy is key to the EU to challenge these undemocratic waves. In this vein, the EU should not miss any opportunity to foster gender balance and react against illiberal trends: seizing the opportunity of the 2019 May EP's elections is therefore fundamental. Moreover, it's not only important for institutions but also for EU citizens, particularly women, as shown by Part II.

b. Gender stereotypes and women in politics

In June 2017, the results of the “Special Eurobarometer on gender equality, stereotypes and women in politics” revealed the opinions of EU citizens *vis-à-vis* gender equality in the EU and related issues.

¹²⁴ The Sweden Democrats (SD) have a stronger support among men than among women, according to the 2017 party preference survey by the Statistiska Centralbyrån (SCB).

¹²⁵ Flemming, Matilda, Oriane Gilloz and Nima Hairy, “Getting to know you: mapping the anti-feminist face of right-wing populism in Europe” Open Democracy, 2017. Consulted at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/matilda-flemming/mapping-anti-feminist-face-of-right-wing-populism-in-europe>

¹²⁶ Mcrobbie, Angela, “Anti-feminism and anti-gender far right politics in Europe and beyond”, Open Democracy, 2018. Consulted at <https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/angela-mcrobbie/anti-feminism-and-anti-gender-far-right-politics-in-europe-and-be>

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.1.

Some survey results are rather positive. For instance, 91% of the respondents think that promoting gender equality is important to ensure a fair and democratic society, and **86% that a female political representative can represent their interests**¹²⁸. When asked about legal measures to ensure parity between men and women in politics, seven in ten respondents (70%) are in favour of legal measures, with 30% strongly in favour. 8% are strongly against and 23% overall against. There is diversity between the opinions of women and men, **women are more likely to be in favour of legal measures than men** (73% vs. 66%) and in particular to be strongly in favour (33% vs. 27%)¹²⁹.

However, other results are rather concerning. When asked if gender equality has been achieved in politics, 57% of men respondents say that it has been achieved (15% say it definitely has), in contrast to 45% of women (9% say it definitely has)¹³⁰.

“The majority of respondents think gender equality has already been achieved in politics”

These percentages show a difference between the opinions of women and men, as well as a **lack of knowledge of the actual gender balance in politics**. In the same line, when asked if there should be more women in political decision-making positions, women are much more likely to say there should be more women (62%)¹³¹. When looking at the majority of respondents without dividing the opinions by gender, **a narrow majority of respondents (54%) think there should be more women in political decision-making positions**.

When asked about decision-making, **almost 7 in 10 respondents think women are more likely than men to make decisions based on their emotions (69%), with 25% in total agreement with the statement**. This is true for the majority of member states, in fact, in all countries but Sweden, the majority of respondents believe that women are more likely than men to make decisions based on their emotions¹³².

When asked about the role of women and men, **44% believe the most important role of a woman is to take care of her home and family, with 17% in total agreement**; and 43% believe the most important role of a man is to earn money, with 16% totally agreeing to this statement¹³³.

¹²⁸ EC, *Special Eurobarometer 465- Gender Equality 2017- Gender Equality, Stereotypes, and Women in Politics*, June 2017, p.15.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.17.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.2.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.*, p.5.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

Yet, there are wide **opinion disparities between respondents in different member states**: the majority of respondents in Hungary (87%), the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Latvia (all 83%) agree with the statement, compared to 47% in Sweden, 53% in Spain and 57% in France¹³⁴.

“Almost 7 in 10 respondents think women are more likely than men to make decisions based on their emotions”

These results show that gender stereotypes still prevail in the mind of EU citizens. Gender stereotypes are considered a root cause of the discrimination against women, and thus, much more should be done to combat these views and educate EU citizens on equality values. Eliminating gender stereotypes is necessary to achieve gender equality. Moving towards parity would mean more women on power and a transformation of the rules of the

game which will change current stereotyped views of women and men.

2. Opportunities

a. Commitments by the EU

Part I has explained how gender equality is a fundamental value of the EU established in its treaties. To turn that value into reality, several legislative and political measures have been adopted, and some of these instruments have focused on gender parity in decision-making.

The **EU’s specific concern to better include women in political decision-making started in the 90s**¹³⁵. Major EU documents focusing on gender equality were the “Third Action Programme (AP) on Equal Opportunities 1991-1995”¹³⁶, which enabled the creation of the *European Network of Women in Decision Making*¹³⁷, the European Council’s Resolution on the balanced participation of women and men in decision-making of 1995¹³⁸ and the Council Recommendation of 1996¹³⁹. The latter acknowledged that “women are still under-represented in decision-making bodies, in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres;” and that “**balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making**

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.6.

¹³⁵ Olander, Louise, “Women in power: to what extent has EU action to improve equal participation of women in political decision-making been successful? What (if anything) should be done to improve the status quo?” *College of Europe*, 2017-2018.

¹³⁶ Council Resolution of 21 May 1991 on the third medium-term Community action programme on equal opportunities for women and men (1991-1995).

¹³⁷ This group organised the 1st European Conference on “Women in Power”, where the Athens Declaration was adopted. Its main aim was work on improving the gender representation gap in the EU.

¹³⁸ Council Resolution of 27 March 1995 on the balanced participation of women and men in decision-making.

¹³⁹ Council Recommendation of 2 December 1996 on the balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process (96/694/EC).

process is a requirement for democracy". It recommended member states to take positive actions to improve gender-balanced representation.

More recently, in 2015, the European Council adopted the Council "Conclusions on Equality between women and men in the field of decision-making"¹⁴⁰. The inclusion of women in decision-making is also part of the Council's European Pact for Gender Equality 2011-2020¹⁴¹.

"EU's specific concern to better include women in political decision-making started in the 90s"

Both the EP and the EC have taken actions with regards to gender balance in political decision-making.

On one hand, the EP's most relevant recent document in this regard is its Resolution on women in political decision-making of 2012¹⁴², where it urged member states and the EC to do more for parity in the EP elections, by for instance, introducing gender quotas for EP's electoral lists. Now the process to amend the Electoral Act of 1976¹⁴³ is ongoing, and thus the EP proposed to include gender equality requirements to the lists of candidates for election to the EP. EP's proposed provision noted that "the list of candidates for election to the EP shall ensure gender equality". However, the European Council has disregarded it in its draft Decision, meaning that **it has left out the provision that ensured gender-balanced electoral lists**. This constitutes a lost opportunity to foster a system of parity democracy.

On the other hand, the EC acknowledged that the 1996 Council Resolution had been badly implemented, and this led to the creation of a database to tackle the lack of comparative data on women and men in decision-making at EU-level in 2004¹⁴⁴. Improving the representation of women in decision-making is one of the EC's focus area on gender equality, reflected on its "Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019" document.

As explained, the EC has set goals for increasing gender balance within its institution. Various presidents of the EC, including current President Jean-Claude Juncker, have also **encouraged member states to suggest more women candidates for Commissioners**

¹⁴⁰ European Council, *Council Conclusions on Equality between women and men in the field of decision-making*, (14325/15), 2 December 2015.

¹⁴¹ European Council, *Council's European Pact for Gender Equality 2011-2020*, (2011/C 155/02).

¹⁴² EP, *Resolution of 13 March 2012 on Women in Political Decision-Making: Quality and Equality (2011/2295(INI))*, P7TA(2012)0070, 2012.

¹⁴³ Act concerning the election of the members of the EP by direct universal suffrage, annexed to Council Decision 76/787/ECSC, EEC, Euratom of 20 September 1976.

¹⁴⁴ Olander, *loc. cit.*

“The EU needs to adopt stronger legislative measures to ensure gender balance in politics”

and their cabinets ¹⁴⁵. After the EP elections, the president of the Commission will be elected by the EP - through the Spitzenkandidat process- and appointed by the Council, so will the president of the Council. The College of Commissioners will also be renewed, appointed by each member state and approved by the EP.

While there are no provisions that oblige member states to present candidates of both genders, **political pressure from a newly elected parity Parliament should be strong to ask to respect gender balance in these high-level political posts.**

All these instruments by different EU institutions show **EU’s commitment to act upon the current gender imbalance in decision-making**. However, the EU can and should do much more to make real that commitment and truly embrace parity. The EU needs to move from a “equality rhetoric” and “equality promotion”, to hard “equality guarantees or positive discrimination”¹⁴⁶.

In line with Olander’s thesis, the EU should keep using “soft” instruments, such as gathering data, raising awareness and supporting civil society and NGOs¹⁴⁷, but also implement other “harder” instruments, which would include to: 1) **Use stronger legislative measures, such as a new Council Recommendation** following up on the one from 1996 and reiterating the recommendation of 2015 to member states to adopt zipper-system quotas for elections. Ideally, it should also mention intersectionality to improve the current underrepresentation of minority women¹⁴⁸; 2) **Become a role model** and set the improvement of gender balance in EU institutions as a priority. **The EU should urge member states to nominate one woman and one man Commission candidate in 2019** (following the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men’s¹⁴⁹ suggestion). To enforce that, the EP can play an important role by using its power of approval to sanction those member states that do not heed this suggestion¹⁵⁰; 3) **Encourage the appointment of women to top positions**. For instance, by creating a strong mentoring and networking infrastructure¹⁵¹; 4) Considering the harms and prevalence of gender stereotypes, it is necessary to **implement a holistic EU gender policy**, which addresses gender stereotypes, education, violence against women and other issues, in addition to parity democracy¹⁵². As

¹⁴⁵ For example, the Commission’s President Prodi. Olander, *op.cit.*, p. 8.

¹⁴⁶ Olander, *op.cit.*, p.13.

¹⁴⁷ Olander, *op.cit.*, p.8.

¹⁴⁸ Olander, *op.cit.*, p.14.

¹⁴⁹ This Advisory Committee “assists the EC in formulating and implementing the activities aimed at promoting equal opportunities for women and men”. EIGE, consulted at: <https://eige.europa.eu/men-and-gender-equality/methods-and-tools/european-union/activity-advisory-committee-equal-opportunities-women-and-men>

¹⁵⁰ Olander, *op.cit.*, p.14.

¹⁵¹ Olander, *loc.cit.*

¹⁵² Olander, *op.cit.*,

Olander points out, the current Strategic Engagement is a step down from the previous Action Programme – both mentioned above-, since it is a non-binding, internal EC document which contains no enforcement measures¹⁵³. The EU should take gender policy seriously and **return to a robust policy-making** on this matter; and finally, 5) Create a **specific gender budget line**.

In line with the opportunities that the commitments done by the EU, and the upcoming elections offer, these suggestions aim to help the EU moving towards parity democracy and improving gender equality.

b. New gender quotas

Two member states have included new or modified gender quotas that will be enforceable at the EP's elections in May 2019: Croatia and Italy.

The application of the new gender quota in Croatia¹⁵⁴ resulted in the significant increase of the percentage of women candidates, from 28% in the 2013 local elections to 42% in 2017 (despite 14% of electoral lists not complying with the gender quota¹⁵⁵). Croatia achieved its highest percentage of women at local and regional level. However, still the actual share is far from being gender-balanced, as elected women only make up to 27% and 25% in county assemblies and city and municipal councils, respectively. **Croatia's case clearly shows that the formal compliance with the gender quota does not automatically result in actual gender-balanced representation, due to the lack of rules regarding the placement in the electoral list**¹⁵⁶. The establishment and entry in force of the Croatian gender quota for the upcoming EP's elections is to be welcomed. However, its effectiveness is undermined by the non-provision of gender placement rules, because "in practice, the chances for women to actually be elected depend more on their hierarchical positioning on the electoral lists, than on the formal compliance with the gender quota"¹⁵⁷.

In 2014, Italy introduced a new measure¹⁵⁸ whereby third preference votes were not counted if the voter had not voted for at least one candidate of each gender¹⁵⁹. For 2019, Italy will apply a major change: it will introduce parity lists (1/2 of each gender instead of 1/3)

¹⁵³ Olander, *op.cit.*, p.15.

¹⁵⁴ Croatia introduced the requirement of gender-balanced lists in its Gender Equality Act in 2008. Due to the gradual process of inclusion of legislated candidate quotas, the gender quota (of 40% for any gender) requirement for the EP's elections will be legally enforceable only next year, in 2019. When gender quota was first established ten years ago, it had no ranking or placement rules, neither sanctions for the non-compliance. The left-centre coalition improved these positive measures by amending the Electoral Law in 2014, enacting 40% legislated candidate quotas without ranking rules but with strong sanctions (invalid lists for non-compliance). However, the Constitutional Court overturned the sanctions. (Source: EP, *Gender Equality Policies in Croatia-Update*, 2017.)

¹⁵⁵ EP, *Gender Equality Policies in Croatia-Update*, 2017.

¹⁵⁶ EP, 2017, *loc.cit.*

¹⁵⁷ EP, 2017, *loc.cit.*

¹⁵⁸ Italy already had gender-balanced lists requirements (1/3 for each gender) for the 2004 and 2009 EP's elections. (Source: EP, *At a glance-women in Parliaments*, 2017.)

¹⁵⁹ EP, 2017, *loc.cit.*

and in addition, voters will be required to choose candidates of both genders to have their preferential votes counted in full¹⁶⁰. The latter means that the rules have been tightened up to better assure gender balance¹⁶¹. **These legislative measures in Croatia and Italy might positively impact on the number of women MEPs elected** by each of these countries, but the results are yet to be seen.

c. Civil society movements

Ultimately, change will not happen if it is not backed up by a strong women's movement. **Civil society movements inspired by the #MeToo movement all over the world, create today a major opportunity to fostering parity democracy in the EU.** Indeed, against the backlash on gender equality and women's rights that several observers depict, a wave of protest and women's movements have emerged. Protests against anti-abortion laws in Poland and the feminist strike of the 8 of March in Spain are only some

“European society is demanding more gender equality and EU institutions need to respond to these increased needs”

examples of a **renewed social mobilisation demanding gender equality in the EU and its member states.** Both the EU and member states' institutions, political parties and other stakeholders need to act upon these urgent and increasing social demands. Embracing parity democracy is a way to answer these society needs, progress and advance substantive gender equality in the EU.

Analysing the possible challenges and opportunities that the EU is facing to move towards parity democracy in the 2019 EP's elections, is fundamental to identify in which areas and how we should act for greater gender equality in the EU. Finally, it is even more relevant to reflect on what kind of EU we want to build, and what future we envisage with regards to the union.

¹⁶⁰ EP, 2017, *loc.cit.*

¹⁶¹ Dona, Alessia, Workshop on “Legal Struggles and Political Mobilization around Gender Quotas in Europe”, Florence, September 2014.

WHAT FUTURE FOR EUROPE?

Through this analysis, we have reconsidered the concept of parity democracy in the current context of the EU. The analysis has explored why parity democracy is important for the EU, and also, why the EU and parity democracy are important for women and gender equality too. After analysing the current state, and challenges and opportunities, for gender balance in the EU and the EP in 2019, the paper provides some hints and recommendations to advance parity.

Europe needs to face old and new challenges (i.e. waves of populism and increased inequalities, rupture of its unity, the disenchantment of democracy, questioning of its legitimacy...) and respond to EU citizens' demands for more gender equality. **Progressively building a system of parity democracy would enable the EU to give new solutions, answer societal needs and better represent its citizens.** Moving towards a parity democracy system which embeds the principle of equality between women and men as a first necessity, **entails a transformation of the way we think and practice democracy in the EU and the member states.** In the end, no real democracy is possible if the question of

“Parity democracy entails a transformation of the way we think and practice democracy in the EU”

equality between men and women is not posed as a political precondition falling under the founding principles of the political regime, just like the principles of universal suffrage or the division of powers¹⁶². Following the ideas of Eliane Vogel-Polsky, parity democracy would mean building a new social contract; a contract which holds the right to the same status, value and responsibility in society of women and men¹⁶³.

The elections to the EP in May 2019 are an important political momentum which we need to seize to make the right moves towards a system of parity democracy. Both the EU and its citizens will benefit from advancing gender balance in the EP and in the whole EU's government system. As Simone Veil stated, “Europe's destiny and the future of the free world is in our hands”¹⁶⁴.

Indeed, **the future of Europe is in our hands**, and it is to us to build it. What EU do you envisage? Where would you like the EU to be in 5, 10, 50 years? **And where do women stand in that future European context?** The EU is a political space that citizens can shape, where they can and should participate to achieve better policies and a better life, after all.

¹⁶² Sledziewski, É., in Gubin, Eliane “Eliane Vogel-Polsky, une femme de conviction”, Institut pour l'égalité des femmes et des hommes, 2007, p.123.

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, p.124.

¹⁶⁴ Simone Veil's quote in a speech in 1982.

SOME RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the analysis provided in this policy paper, the following list gathers some recommendations to move towards parity democracy in the EU and seize the opportunity of the EP's elections in May 2019.

1. Practical Recommendations

These recommendations aim at improving the current gender balance of the EP and avoiding the stagnation of women MEPs observed (and acknowledged by the EU itself) since the EP's elections of 1999.

- Use stronger legislative measures, such as a new Council Recommendation following up on the one from 1996 and reiterating the recommendation of 2015 to member states to adopt gender quotas and specially zipper-system quotas for elections. Quotas should also provide emplacement rules and strong non-compliance sanctions to assure their effectiveness. Also include intersectionality to improve the current underrepresentation of minority women.
- Ensure that the strong demands for parity democracy in the EP spill over on the decisions for appointments of other high-level positions of the EU institutions, such as the President of the Commission and the Council, the High Representative, European Central Bank, and other; to achieve gender balance in the whole EU decision-making, including management and senior positions. In particular, urge member states to nominate one woman and one man Commission candidate in 2019 (following the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men's suggestion). To enforce that, the EP can use its power of approval to sanction those member states that do not heed this suggestion.
- Address the major divergences on the percentage of women MEPs elected by each member state. Prioritise measures in the 10 member states that have a level lower than 33% of women MEPs: currently, Lithuania, Cyprus, Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, Greece, Belgium, Bulgaria, Slovakia and Romania.
- Support the establishment of more proportional electoral systems and more seats per constituency, when possible. In majoritarian electoral systems ensure that additional conscious efforts are made to have both genders equally represented.
- Political parties can adopt self-imposed quotas and establish measures to assure the presence of women in electoral lists and their positions high up in the lists, search for women candidates outside traditional political structures, review the candidate selection criteria and process to avoid any bias and ensure gender equal committees and equal resources for both men and women's candidates' campaigns.

- Encourage the defense of gender equality (and gender balance in particular) among all the actors in the political spectrum. No matter what the political ideology of each actor is, recall that gender equality is a principle and shared value of the EU, and that therefore, measures need to be taken to foster it. In the same line, National and European political parties should include the aim to promote gender equality in their political programme or manifesto and give it priority when setting the issues to put forward in their agendas.
- Increase the support, encouragement and endorsement, and provide greater external confirmation, to women candidates to run for office. Some measures to encourage women to stand for the EP elections include empowering, sponsoring, mentoring, and helping the creation of robust networking which promotes women candidates.
- Provide a fair coverage of women candidates and politicians in the media, both in terms of time and content (which does not disproportionately focus on personal characteristics and appearance of women). Address the stereotyped coverage of women candidates and politicians in the media, by monitoring and imposing sanctions to sexist media coverage of women candidates and politicians; and promote a positive image of these women to encourage more women aspirants and change stereotyped views of women in politics.
- Inform EU citizens and raise awareness about the current under-representation of women in the EP and members states' national assemblies.

2. Broader Recommendations

- Implement a holistic and robust EU gender policy, which addresses gender stereotypes, education, violence against women, horizontal and vertical segregation in the labour market, the valuing and sharing of caring activities and other issues, in addition to parity democracy. In particular, upgrade the current *Strategic Engagement on Gender Equality* and adopt a binding, and accountable instrument to advance gender equality.
- Keep gathering data on gender differences and the state of women in diverse fields, strengthen the already existent European bodies working for gender equality such as EIGE, and increase their support and funds to diverse European and national agents working for gender equality.
- Challenge and speak out against agents promoting illiberal anti-democratic, and anti-feminists values and actions within the EU to safeguard the EU's shared values, foundational principles and democracies.
- Spread the strategic benefits of increasing the number of women in political decision-making so that other actors engage in promoting a system of parity democracy.

- Adopt legal measures to avoid the under-representation of women in power and decision-making positions in all fields, such as finance, science, corporate, political, and judicial, among other. The EC's *Proposal for a directive on gender balance among non-executive directors of companies listed on stock exchanges* is a positive example of the efforts that the EU can and should more effectively take to assure gender balance and advance gender equality in key power bodies.
- Promote policies that tackle issues of particular relevance to women to increase their interest in the EU and women's turnout in the EP elections, such as childcare, sexual and reproductive health, trade and other agreements conditional to the respect of gender equality, consent-based model in sexual assault legislation, non-stereotyped education in school and other institutions ...
- Re-establish a specific gender budget line, proper institutional bodies in the European Commission: a commissioner for Gender equality, a group of commissioners to overview mainstreaming.
- Create binding instruments to mainstreaming gender equality into all EU policies, including budget (gender budgeting) and economic policies.
- Member States should officially adopt mainstreaming of gender equality also into their national policies.

