

## **Elections to European Parliament from the point of view of gender – gender differentiated view on political party ballots and voter participation**

Petra Rakušanová

The question of equal opportunities for men and women has not been a political issue in the Czech Republic for a long time. The situation has changed significantly, however, since our government pledged to deal with unequal position of men and women in many spheres within the process of deepening European integration. Yet we still have to note that the issue of equal opportunities has only marginal place in Czech politics. In 2002 parliamentary elections, for example, ČSSD (Czechoslovak Social Democrats) was the only party to deal with this issue. It is the only parliamentary political party that accepted quota for participation of women in party authorities and ballots (1/5).

Present situation in the Czech Republic to a certain extent copies the western European trend. Czech left wing parties, similarly to western European left-wing parties, are more involved in active eliminating of inequalities between men and women in political sphere. Unlike in Western Europe, however, Czech political parties express their support for equality of sexes mainly verbally. This report will try to point out that reality in the parties often noticeably differs from their rhetoric of equal opportunity.

This report offers gender-differentiated view on elections to European Parliament, namely in two different aspects. First we will compare political party ballots in elections to Czech parliament and in European Parliament elections. We will focus mainly on increasing/decreasing trend of percentage of women on ballots and among elected candidates, on comparing effects of different election systems and finally on comparing selected socio-demographic characteristics of elected deputies. The second part of the report will be based on combining public research data with results of the actual elections. It will focus on the possibility of gender-diversified analysis of voter participation in European parliament elections and elections in general.

### *Comparison of political party ballots in parliamentary elections and elections to European Parliament*

Whereas in the 2002 elections to the Chamber of deputies of the Czech Parliament there were 1590 women (26.16 %) and 4489 men (73.84 %) out of 6079 candidates, in this year's elections to European Parliament there were 205 women (25.3%) and 604 men (74.7%) out of 809 candidates. Let us first compare the increase or decrease of percentage of women on ballots of the main parliamentary political parties. In comparison with the 2002 elections to the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, percentage of women on ballots in European elections decreased in three political parties and increased in two political parties (table 1).

This year's elections, unlike the 2002 elections, did not confirm the argument that left-wing political parties continually eliminate barriers between men and women within the party. Number of women on ballots decreased both in ČSSD and KSČM (Czech and Moravian Communist Party). Whereas in KSČM there was only a slight decrease – by 0.44%, percentage of women ČSSD ballots decreased by 5.69%. In centre and right-wing parties there is no uniform trend to be found. Whereas in ODS (Civic Democratic Party) there was a decrease by 4.4%, in KDU-ČSL (Christian Democrats) and US-DEU (Freedom Union) there was an identical increase by 9.8%.

Table 1 – Comparison of percentage of women candidates in elections to the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic and to European Parliament according to political parties between the years 1996–2004 (in %)

Party/year of elections	Ballots	Change
ČSSD 1996	14.9	
ČSSD 1998	17.2	+2.3
ČSSD 2002	24.49	+7.29
<b>ČSSD EP 2004</b>	<b>18.8</b>	<b>-5.69</b>
KSČM 1998	20.1	
KSČM 2002	19.24	-0.86
<b>KSČM EP 2004</b>	<b>18.8</b>	<b>-0.44</b>
KDU-ČSL 1998	14.4	
US 1998	18.2	
KDU-ČSL a US-DEU 2002	15.2	+0.8/-3
<b>KDU-ČSL EP 2004</b>	<b>25.0</b>	<b>+9.8</b>
<b>US-DEU EP 2004</b>	<b>25.0</b>	<b>+9.8</b>
ODS 1996	15.1	
ODS 1998	17.8	+2.7
ODS 2002	16.9	-0.9
<b>ODS EP 2004</b>	<b>12.5</b>	<b>-4.4</b>
Republicans 1998	15.3	

*Source: Parliamentary DICe*

When we look at political parties in Czech parliament, we notice some significant differences among them. At first we will have a look at the development in time (see Table 1). Altogether it can be said that whereas in years 1996–2002 the share of women increased both among candidates to the lower chamber of Czech Parliament (by 6 % on the whole) and among elected legislators (by 2.5 %), proportion of women candidates and elected women in elections to the Chamber of deputies of Czech Parliament decreased steadily (by 6%). (Rakušanová in: Linek et al. 2003). This fact can be explained in several ways. First of all, the proportional electoral system is generally regarded as more penetrable than majority electoral system [Sartori 2001]. In this context, Pippa Norris also refers to the fact that participation of women in politics is higher, when there are less electoral districts with more mandates. This way, the share of elected women in one district increases and at the same time, women have a higher chance to reach elective posts [Norris 1985, 2004].

From the point of view of voting system, European Parliament elections should be more penetrable for women: the whole Czech Republic formed one electoral district in European elections and altogether 24 future delegates of EP were elected. The argument of Pippa Norris was therefore confirmed in two aspects. Percentage of elected women in EP elections increased by 3,8%, as compared to the 2002 elections to the Chamber of deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic. The share of women candidates and elected women significantly increased as well – by 17% (the increase can be also observed in the share of total number of ballots and elected women delegates). This means that women place themselves more frequently on elective posts of successful political party ballots.

Table 2. Percentage of women candidates and elected women deputies in elections to the Chamber of deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic and to European Parliament in years 1996-2004 (in %)

Country/year of elections	Candidates	Elected	Proportion of women candidates and elected women	Change in proportion of women candidates and elected women in time
PS PČR 1996	20.2	14.5	72%	
PS PČR 1998	21.1	15	71%	-1%
PS PČR 2002	26.1	17	65%	-6%
EP 2004	25.3	20.8	82%	+17%

Source: *Parliamentary DICE*

Success of women in both aspects cannot be attributed only to parliamentary political parties. As we have already shown, in some parliamentary party ballots, number of women rather decreased. On the contrary, with the exception of KDU-ČSL with one elected woman out of two elected candidates, women were more successful on ballots of non-parliamentary political parties – both Nezávislí (Independents) (50% of women) and Sdružení nezávislých a Evropských demokratů (Association of Independent and European Democrats) (33.3%).

Table 3. Number of elected deputies according to gender

Political party	Total number of the elected	Women	Men
ODS	9	1 11.2%	8 88.8%
KSČM	6	1 16.7%	5 83.4%
SNK	3	1 33.3%	2 66.7%
KDU-ČSL	2	1 50%	1 50%
ČSSD	2	0 0	2 100%
Nezávislí	2	1 50%	1 50%

Source: *Parliamentary DICE*

This trend is also confirmed when we look at preferential voting. The independent candidate, former journalist Jana Bobošíková, gained the highest number of preferential votes both in absolute and proportional comparison (99 368 votes, 52.01%). KDU-ČSL candidate, senator Zuzana Roithová (52 166, 23.35%) and candidate of Sdružení nezávislých a evropských demokratů, former diplomat Jana Hybášková (59 282, 23.04%) both gained more than 20 percent of preferential votes within their parties.

Educational structure of EP candidates is considerably heterogeneous. It can be said, however, that among most common professions are businessmen, tradesmen, managers, teachers (on all levels, with predominance of high school and university level), members of parliament, technicians, mayors and other deputies and doctors. When we look at the education of

successful candidates, we can say that candidates with university education absolutely prevail. With the exception of one KSČM candidate, the 23 future EP deputies for the Czech Republic all have university education. Whereas educational structure of future deputies is homogenous from the gender point of view, we can find some differences between former professions of men and women – successful EP candidates. Whereas women have very diverse professional background (diplomat, university lecturer, journalist, instructor and senator), among male deputies prevail professional politicians – on the whole there are 8 members of the Chamber of Deputies, 3 senators and 4 local politicians – one deputy, one governor and two mayors.

As the age structure of candidates is concerned, we don't find any significant differences. Majority of candidates are in middle or older age, in age cohorts from 40 years. Some differences can be found only in the youngest age cohort from 21-29 years. In this group there are almost twice more women than men (22.0% of women and 11.9% of men). Slight differences can be found in the candidates' region of origin. In majority of regions, proportional distribution of candidates is analogous. Following three regions are the only exceptions: South Moravia (14.4% of men and 7.8% of women), Moravia and Silesia (11.3% of men and 9.3% of women) and Prague (22.2% of men and 27.8% of women). Men from the first two regions therefore have a higher probability than women to become EP candidates – in case of Southern Moravian region their chance is almost two times higher. On the contrary, women from Prague have a higher chance than men to become EP candidates.

On the basis of ballot analysis in European Parliament elections and comparison of selected long-term trends we can summarize the first part of the report by saying that in the EP elections, number of elected female deputies slightly decreased and proportion of candidates and the elected increased significantly. One of the possible explanations is positive effect of electoral system. We also observe continuous trend of opening up of smaller political parties to women. Smaller parties, including KDU-ČSL and US-DEU, nominated women on better posts on their ballots than larger political parties (ODS, KSČM, ČSSD).

It is also interesting that women candidates are able to gain very large number of preferential votes, both proportionally and in absolute numbers. This should serve as an argument or rather as a challenge for political parties to give more opportunities to women-candidates. Whereas the educational and age structure of women and men is consistent, we find differences in professional structure and, to a lesser degree, also in their possibility to assert themselves in individual regions of the Czech Republic.

#### *Gender-diversified participation in European Parliament elections: myth and reality*

In the second part of this text we will focus on gender-diversified participation in European Parliament elections. It is very topical to ask whether we should investigate participation of women in elections and why we should do so. This issue is connected with two relatively old arguments against granting women the right to vote (it dates back to 19<sup>th</sup> century). The first argument is the argument of homogeneity, according to which behaviour of women and men is the same and women will therefore vote (if they are granted the right to vote) like their male counterparts. The logic of this argument aims at a clear target. If women are to vote in the same way as men, there is no need for them to have their own vote. Even though this argument was not confirmed – on the contrary, it appeared that women were more conservative and more frequently vote for centre or right-wing political authorities, even though it was mostly left-wing (socially-democratic) parties who fought for women's right to vote – it still hasn't vanished completely.

The second argument is also an argument of homogeneity, but this time not among women and men, but among women themselves – women are going to vote en bloc, and therefore they are going to produce a change in political spectre. Even this argument, however, was not confirmed. Not only that women didn't vote unanimously, but in the course of the second half of the twentieth century their voting behaviour changed significantly – whereas from 50s to 80s larger percentage of women voted for conservative right-wing parties, in 90s there was a shift towards left in many European countries, which was more significant with women than with men [Lovenduski, Norris 1993, Inglehart, Norris 2004]. According to Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, politics changes continually and representation of women plays very important role in this change [Inglehart, Norris 2004].

There is no better way of fighting with these types of arguments than to disprove them with relevant evidence. This, however, seems to be difficult to do in the Czech Republic, because unlike in other countries in Western Europe (for example Germany), it is not possible to get independent details about voter participation of women and men. Experts dealing with this issue are therefore forced to draw from research data and not directly from voting room data. The reason (or pretext) of the Czech statistical office is the personal data protection law. In the following text we will try to document the differences between men and women in voter participation on the example of European Parliament elections, based on public opinion research data and on information from voting rooms.

In a regular survey carried out in June, Centre for Public Opinion Research (CVVM) was investigating what were the most important recent events according to citizens (the research was carried out between 18 and 28 June 2004). European Parliament elections placed first (52% of respondents), access of the Czech Republic to EU, referendum about the Czech Republic's access to EU (33%) and demission of government (14%) placed second. We notice some interesting differences between men and women: men regarded the accession of the Czech Republic to European Union (22.1%) as the most important recent event, followed by sport (20.2%) and EP elections (19.4%). Women regarded EP elections as the most important event (24.9%), followed by accession of the Czech Republic to EU (17.8%) and cultural and social events (5.2%).

We can therefore conclude that citizens regarded EP elections as relatively important. CVVM research focused also on other aspects of participation/non-participation in EP elections. When asked whether they would participate in EP elections, 50.5% of respondents, out of which 51.5% were men and 49.5% women, answered affirmatively. When asked control projective question, whether they would participate in EP elections that would take place the next day, 50.6% of respondents answered affirmatively and differences between men and women were negligible – they oscillated in tenths of percents, that is, within statistical mistake. If we take into consideration the actual voter participation, which was 28.32%, it is a significant deviation.

Respondents were also asked what participation in EP elections they expected. Exactly 80% of respondents – 83.1% men and 77.1% women - expected low attendance. In Western Europe, European Parliament elections are regarded as protest elections, mainly because of their timing – they often take place in between national elections. In European elections citizens often express their dissatisfaction with domestic politics. This hypothesis was confirmed in the Czech Republic as well. The most commonly stated reason for not attending the EP elections was dissatisfaction with politics and mistrust of politicians (14.4%). Because these were the first EP elections, another explanation of possible low participation of voters

may be their ignorance – this hypothesis can be confirmed as well on the basis of data analysis – 14.2% of respondents justified themselves by lack of information and by “not knowing who to vote for”. 12.3% of respondents mentioned holidays, work leaves and being away from home as a reason for not participating in elections. Among the first five reasons for not participating in EP elections we can also find an alarming opinion that the elector’s vote won’t decide anything (11.6%), as well as lack of interest in politics in general (10.2%). This group of citizens, who find themselves in state of anomy or who are heading towards it, seems alarming in the context of continuous decrease of EP voter participation.

Both in arguments for not participating in EP elections and in evaluating significance of individual events there are differences between men and women. Whereas women stated their disappointment in politics and their distrust of politicians as the main argument for not participating in EP elections (15.9%), followed by lack of information about who to vote for (13.2%) and by feeling that their voice has no importance (12.3%), men stated lack of information and not knowing who to vote for as the main reason for not participating at EP elections (15.3%), followed by being away from home, work leave (13.3%) and disappointment by politicians and distrust in politicians (12.8%).

On the basis of the data analysis from the questionnaire survey we can say that the archaic argument about similar attitudes of women and men in elections cannot be verified. An objection could be raised that research only deals with projections that are considerably diverging from reality (this is confirmed for example by the declared and the actual participation at elections). The detected differences are therefore differences in attitudes and they don’t have any impact on real behaviour. We can rebut this argument by comparing the actual participation of women and men at elections. We have managed to collect such information during the European Parliament elections that took place in June this year. Electoral districts, that we will mark A and B, allowed us to add up men and women, who have a voting right for these electoral district and add up those, who really participated in the elections.

Our results not only confirm the differences in voter participation between men and women, but they also underline their urgency. Total voter participation in European Parliament elections in June 2004 in district A was 31.85% and 31.82% in district B. Since they are both town districts, we can conclude that it was an average participation. Participation of women was higher in both districts – in district A it was 47.18% and in district B 46.94%.

We can therefore observe that even though women on all levels of Czech politics are significantly under-represented, they constitute a significant group of voters. Women discuss politics less than men do in their free time. It doesn’t mean, however, that they don’t want to be actively involved in politics. It is evident that current communication channels don’t appeal fully to women. It is a question of flexibility of political parties, whether and in what way they will appeal to women voters.

Membership of women in parliamentary political parties, fluctuating from 26 to 52%, shows political activity of women on domestic level. With regard to the disappearing differences between women and men on international level, they talk of a so-called *closing of gender gap* in Germany. Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, on the other hand, talk of a change of gender gap and its differentiated character. Whereas *traditional* gender gap is still present in older age cohorts, in younger age cohort there appears *modern* gender gap, which is mostly ideological and which will increase in time [Inglehart, Norris 2004: 99].

Information from this report can be summarized in a following way:

- Due to the positive effect of electoral system and due to relative success of smaller political subjects in the EP elections, percentage of elected women deputies slightly increased and the share of women candidates and elected women increased significantly;
- We haven't found significant differences in age or educational structure of women and men candidates or among elected women and men;
- On the contrary, we identified professional differences among the elected;
- In several regions we discovered different chances for women and men to assert themselves on political party ballots;
- On the basis of preferential voting analysis we pointed out the fact that women candidates can be attractive for voters;
- We also pointed out the qualitatively different approach in attitude of women and men towards politics;
- We pointed out different rate of voter participation of women in selected electoral districts;
- And finally we tried to point out usefulness of gender-differentiated collecting of information about electoral participation and its classification.

#### Literature:

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