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## Mechanisms of enhancing female political participation in Scandinavian countries

**Abstract:** The article is an attempt to answer the question for factors that influenced the fact of such a great percentage of women taking part in public life. There were gradual changes happening during last tens of years, which led to a greater participation of women in decisive bodies in Nordic countries. Engagement and consequence of Scandinavian women led to active interest in equality by governing spheres.

**Key-words:** participation, women, sex, lists of candidates, the amount of money

Share of women in public sphere in Scandinavian countries is a broadly discussed issue in a context of Polish belonging to European Union. For those countries are a reference model of enhancing female participation in political structures. Participation, understood as an expression of political activity describing a process of taking decisions and the level of engagement in political life [Antoszewski, Herbut 2004]. The Nordic countries are in a top list of countries in the world while considering amount of women sitting in national parliaments. According to Women in Parliaments: World Classification they are among first fifteen countries in which the share of females is the greatest. Sweden which may be proud for fourth position has female representation at the level of 44,7%, Finland (7<sup>th</sup> place) – 42,5%, Island and Norway, although not in European Union, but the percentage of females sitting in a legislative body are respectively 39,7% and 39,6%. In Denmark, which is on the 14<sup>th</sup> place, women are 39,1% of all members of Parliament (Folketing).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> [www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm](http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm) from 31<sup>st</sup> of June 2012.

In Sweden since half of nineties have been obliged to take into account a perspective of equal rights of females and males in their actions [Wawrowski 2007]. In Finland a result of a reform conducted in 2001 there was creating three organs: the Gender Equality Unit, the Ombudsman for Equality and the Council for Gender Equality. The Council for Gender Equality was created in 1972. Similarly in Denmark, where creating special institutions for equal rights of men and women has its beginnings in 1975 and now the one responsible for imposing strategy of gender mainstreaming is Ministry for Gender Equality, whose government has been functioning since 1999 [Wawrowski 2007].

The article is an attempt to answer the question on which factors influenced the fact that in this part of Europe percentage of women engaged in public life is so large. Considering the fact that Poland opens fifty in the mentioned ranking, Nordic countries can be a model to be followed. They are perceived as world's sensation as far as equal treatment of genders is concerned and it is common to talk about so called "Scandinavian specificity" [Nowak 1995].

Sweden, which is for a while in world's top list of countries, owes its position to long-lasting efforts in striving for female participation. The beginnings of the process are rooted back in XIX and beginnings of XX century. Back then various female associations were created. In 1886 the Association of Frederika Bremer<sup>11</sup> [Paczeński 2006] which dealt with women's rights was created. In 90's of XIX century there were female trade unions and a few socialist female clubs. In 1903 there was the National Association for Female Voting Law started. Despite the fact that females have argued for their voting rights since 1884, parliament introduced appropriate legislative changes guaranting females voting law freshly after World War I, on a wave of social changes [Paczeński 2006]. There were many factors which influenced a gradual change of socio-legally-political status of Swedish women. They were economic, socio-legal and socio-cultural factors. In a group of economic ones the crucial changes were created for females by capitalism giving them new possibilities on labour market. Breaking up with traditional socio-professional status was a result of new challenges being a condition for advancement. The new possibilities on labour market, which were given by institutional model developing in Sweden or Norway, became an important element of emancipation [Nowak 1995]. Despite the fact that at the beginning of 60's only 36% of Swedish women having children in pre-school and younger were professionally active, in 1999 there were 74% of women aged 15-64 employed. At the beginning of XXI century only 2% of Swedish women stayed there at home [Alfredsson 2005]. In Sweden the issues of professional life and parental duties was analysed jointly, and a matter of mass entrance of females on labour market was analysed together with transmission of a part of home duties for males [Paczeński 2006]. Swedish

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<sup>11</sup> The association was called that way from the name of famous Swedish writer and feminist living between 1801 and 1865.

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system was build on an assumption that every human should be able to keep up independently [Alfredsson 2005]. On the basis of socio-legal, it is worth to pay attention to imposing individual taxation for marriages, which caused the fact that leaving a female at home became totally unprofitable. Karin Alfredsson, Swedish journalist and writer tackling mainly with issues of equal chances for females stresses up that sinve 70's females and males are treated equally in terms of taxation and social security rights. Each Swede pays taxes individually, but without any chance to gain reliefs guarantied in joint taxation of marriages. However an unemployed women, even if she is a wife for a millionaire, she gets unemployment benefits. So the country invites women to work outside their home with individual taxation system, developed system of kindergarten care and generous social security system for parents [Alfredsson 2005]. In 1974 the new legislature opened new possibilities for fathers, while implementing parental leaves. Parental social security consisted of a benefit paid by the country which is now 80% of average salary nad paid for 13 months. That way Sweden became world precursors of maternity leave for fathers. It is also worth noticing that since 1995 each unit of local government has been obliged to guarantee all children above one year, whose parents work or learn, a place in a nursery or in a kindergarten. Socio-cultural factors resulted with a growth of social awareness and the awareness of women. The changes caused that Swedish women came to conclusion that performing other roles and acting in a totally new life situations does not prevent them from being a women in a role prescribed by a nature. It is dependent only on the level of social acceptance and help from the whole society [Nowak 1995]. Social acceptance fostered objectification of women, on what the mentioned elements had submitted. In Sweden pro-equality solutions are promoted and propagated. What is worth stressing, all Ministries are obliged to pay special attention on equality aspect in the matters which are related to competences. Under the patronage of Ministry of Culture there operates a Department for Equality, which undertakes many actions supporting equality by international projects, which goal is to improve living conditions of women on the labour market. It was Sweden, where in 1979 the first Act directly related to the equality issues was imposed, and it was "The Act on Equality between Women and Men on Labour Market", amended in 1991. In accordance with new regulations, each entrepreneur employing more than 10 employees is obliged to prepare, each year, a yearly plan of supporting equality in a working place. Such a plan should cope with matters being linked to a process of upbringing children [Nowak 1995]. Swedish family now belongs to the most equal ones in the world. This all has caused a change of social customs, imaginations about male and female sphere of activity. 80% of Swedish men and women is certain that that spouses should devote the family similar amount of time, regardless gender, and this causes appearance of the highest level of egalitarianism's indicator in Europe. Such actions entail women to operate more actively

in political sphere. Regulations for enhancing female representation in legislative bodies came to a form of electoral parities and quotas. Political parties in Sweden started using rules describing share of women on their electoral lists<sup>12</sup> [Żukowski 2011]. Most of Swedish political parties do literally make electoral lists, guaranteeing gender equality on them. The decisions to enhance a share of women in politics were taken up in Sweden in 70's on the wave of discussion about equality in public life. It is worth noticing that in 1971 barely 17% of Swedish parliamentarians were women, and today it is more than 47% of them. Formally the quota regulations in inner political regulations were imposed by Green Party and Socio Democratic Party. Conservative Party did not implement quotas officially, but it consequently pays attention to guarantee high enough representation of women on their electoral lists [Grabau 2010]. Socio Democratic Party introduced on its lists a "Zip System"<sup>13</sup> in 1993, which contributed to enhancement of the amount of female parliamentarians from 41 to 48% between elections in 1991 and in 1994.<sup>14</sup> Since November 2004, there is the Department of Gender Equality responsible for issues of equality between genders, and it functions within Ministry of Industry, Employment and Communication. For familial issues the Ministry of Health and Social Matters is responsible [Wawrowski 2007]. All those actions, which are combined to a great system of care over children and supporting equal treatment of partners in familial issues, made Sweden one of the best countries as for female political participation. It is also worth noticing that the ideal balance in gender representation in public legislative bodies was time consuming and it lasted almost 70 years [Cieśla 2009].

For the first time in Europe, the quota system was introduced in Norway in 70's. As the first ones Liberal Party (Venstre) [Nowak 1995] and Socialist Left Party Sosialistisk Venstrepartii) introduced it in 1973 [Żukowski 2011]. According to the system, there cannot be less than 40% of women and not more than 60% of any gender, in any party, on any level [Nowak 1995]. The aim of that it was alignment of the amount of male and female representatives in politics. As Joanna Marszałek-Kawa noticed, till half of 80's there was no government in Norway in which there would be less than 40% of women [Marszałek-Kawa 2009]. Norwegian Socialist Left Party (Den Norske Arbeideparti) introduced a quota system to its Cabinet in 1986. Then 44%, which is 8 on 18 ministry positions were taken by women with Gro Harlem Brundtland – a female as a Prime Minister. After the elections in 1990 8 women took the Departments again. Last decade of XX century for Norwegian women was a period of an increased activ-

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<sup>12</sup> Swedish Social Democratic Party implemented 50% to both genders.

<sup>13</sup> A Zip System is based on putting male and female candidates on a list in an alternating way – Author's comment.

<sup>14</sup> Quotas considering gender in electoral systems in Europe. The Report of European Parliament, [www.kongreskobiet.pl/kontent/](http://www.kongreskobiet.pl/kontent/)

ity in political activity. At the local level, the share of women in 1991 was 31,2%. In parliament in 1994 there was 39,4% of women, and in national commissions and comities – 42%. Keeping up such a high tendency of female participation in politics proves a high influencing power of females in Norwegian political system. W. Nowak points out that it is a result of a fact of persistent and systematic actions by female organizations, women in political parties and public administration and conducted from the very beginning of 60's in XX century, political campaigns under the slogan "Equal Representation" [Nowak 1995].

Despite the fact that Iceland does not belong to European Union's countries, similarly as in Norway, by quota system in creating electoral lists by political parties, women are 39,7% of members of Iceland parliament. Such a huge growth became after imposing "female lists" to the Parliament. Earlier, a share of women in that body was lesser than 5% (in 1983). Since 2009 the Prime Minister in Iceland has been a female. Iceland has had also a female president – Vigdis Finnbogadóttir. In 1995, 10% of ministries were female, and in 2009 – they were 42%. Such actions influenced positively the system of equalizing chances of males and females in political system. It let Iceland to become a leader in the field of equality as far as politics, education, employment and health conditions are concerned. As for those – Poland took 53<sup>rd</sup> position in a ranking and it has lost with its neighbours from a former Eastern Block.<sup>15</sup>

A high percentage of women in national parliaments is not always a result of implementing quota system in elections and the best example for that is Finland. Despite the fact that the legislation did not work on the problem of amount of females on electoral lists, the representation of women in a parliament after elections in 2007 was at level of 42%, giving Finland the second place in Europe in that area.<sup>16</sup> Such a high representation of women stayed the course until 2012, when Finland was overtaken in the ranking only by two European countries: Sweden and Andorra. In Finland, similarly as in Sweden, the rule for equality between men and women has been an important factor of socio-political life for a long time. Female movements were very powerful that time, and they attracted many women. Finnish women as the first ones in Europe got electoral rights. The first female organization started operating there in 1884 (Finnish Women Association) [Paczeński 2006]. In the first Finnish parliament on 200 deputies there were 19 females. The first female minister was Miina Sillanpää, who in 1926 got the position of Ministry for Social Issues. After World War II female organizations per-

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<sup>15</sup> The report was prepared by Global Gender Gap and publicized during World Economic Forum. In first four there were Iceland, Finland, Norway and Sweden, and Denmark took 7<sup>th</sup> position, more: Iceland as "the least sexist country in the world" Poland in the middle of the rate, <http://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-ze-swiata>, 28.10.2012.

<sup>16</sup> Report from 2008 on the order of European Parliament, *Quotas related to Gender in an electoral system in Europe*.

formed an important role in recruiting women on the highest national positions and encouraged females to attend the elections. In 60's and 70's of XX century Finnish women led to feminization of a country, what it means – directing politics on the situation of women. In 90's women acting in politics led to introducing quotas in constructing decisive bodies in political parties. Finnish women are very active not only in parliamentary activity, but also more than 20% of them belong to some female organization. The amount of women being active members of associations concentrated in Federation of Finnish Women's Organizations for a Common Wealth exceeds 600 thousand. It is Finland where at the beginning of XXI century for the first time in a history of Europe as the head of the country there were two women – Tarja Halonen, who became president in 2000 as a representative of sociodemocratic party, and Anneli Jäätteenmäki – the leader of Centrum Party, who became Prime Minister in 2003 [Paczeński 2006]. As a result of the reform of institutional system from 2001, in Ministry of Social Issues and Health, which is in a strict relation with a Ministry of Finance, there operates the Unit for Gender Equality [Wawrowski 2007]. To the scope of its tasks there are included preparing and developing governmental politics for equalization in cooperation with all the ministries and conducting actions in accordance with a *gender mainstreaming* strategy. It is worth noticing that a dominant role of Finnish women is a result of social, legal, economical and political changes. A huge role was however performed by female organizations, which were aimed at improvement of socio-political position of women in society.

It was similarly in Denmark, where female associations had a great impact on the fight for equal rights and chances for women and men. On the contrary to Finnish associations, in Denmark there were no inner party traditions of female organizations. For a short period of time, sociodemocratic party had its female fraction, but it was neither independent, nor had its own programme and it was resolved in 1969 [Paczeński 2006]. Danish women were chosen to parliament for the first time in 1918 – four were elected to an upper chamber, and eight to a lower chamber. Currently, all commissions and committees in Denmark, in a public sector, have to consist of the same amount of women and men, and following the parities is an obligation of a Ministry for Equal Gender Matters, who accepts the composition of the mentioned bodies. [Dunin, Środa 2012]. The head of the country in Denmark is Queen Margaret II.<sup>17</sup> Not that long ago Denmark

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<sup>17</sup> Denmark is a constitutional monarchy with democratic parliament and parliamentary government system. The executive body is a single chamber parliament (Folketing), consisting of 179 deputies, elected for a 4-years cadence. For a parliament has got one chamber, the bodies joining government with parliament are crucially important, and they are central commune organizations – The Association of Counties Council (Amtsradsforeningen) and Association of Communes (Kommunernes Landsforening), more: Hanse-Parlament e. V. *Denmark in stretch*, Hamburg 2006, [www.baltic-cooperation.eu](http://www.baltic-cooperation.eu).



could be proud for having a female prime minister. But this has changed in 2011. Since 3<sup>rd</sup> of October Helle Thorning-Schmidt has been the Danish prime minister, from Sociodemocratic Party. Women at the local political level are about 27% in Denmark, and in the body of mayors – there are 10% of women [Jonsten 2012]. This shows on the one side a high performance of women in a national parliament, but on the other hand – women’s share in local politics is unsatisfactory. The data show that lack of regulations of quota system in common law may cause a great masculinisation of local authorities, deciding about crucial issues related to everyday life of citizens, and but still absent in such a strong way social awareness as national authorities. The example of Finland and Denmark,<sup>18</sup> where there were no regulations aimed at enhancing female political representation shows, that gender quotas are neither necessary, nor sufficient condition of high political representation of women.<sup>19</sup> In both countries there is a proportional electoral system, and as data from European Parliament’s Report show, most of countries with high percentage of females in parliament use that electoral system and it is a global tendency. Nevertheless, quotas are one of many factors aimed at enhancing political representation of women. Authors of the mentioned report stand on the position that political parties are the factor, which influences achieving balance on decisive level the most, because they control a “secret garden of nominations”.

Table 34. Representation of women in Nordic countries which belong to European Union or to The European Economic Area (EEA): level of representation, type of quota and electoral system (it covers lower chambers or single chamber parliaments)

Country	Representation of women (last elections)	Type of quota system	Electoral system
Above 40%			
Sweden	44, 7%	party quotas	Proportional
Finland	42,7%	no quotas	Proportional

<sup>18</sup> Socialist People’s Party in Denmark introduced quotas neutral in gender, so that those, which foresee creating some minimum and maximum amount of candidates for both genders, usually it is not more than 60% and not less than 40% places for each gender, more: *Quotas Concerning Gender in Electoral Systems in Europe*, European Parliament’s Report, 2008, [www.kongreskobiet.pl/Content/](http://www.kongreskobiet.pl/Content/).

<sup>19</sup> In Denmark regulations concerning quotas were resolved after a few years of using. Sociodemocratic Party used quotas only in elections to European Parliament and only in years 1988-1996. Socialist People’s Party used quotas in elections to parliament and to local bodies in years 1988-1990 and during elections to European Parliament in years 1983-1990. In both parties the regulations on quotas were resolved, because they were found unnecessary. Nevertheless a visible and constant growth of female representation in Denmark in last decade stopped both at national, and on regional or local level, F. Lenitna, D. Drude, S. Hege, *The Nordic Countries: An Incremental Model* [in:] D. Dahlerup (ed.), *Women, Quotas and Politics*, Routledge, New York, London 2006, pp. 55-82.



39-30%			
Norway	39,6%	party quotas	Proportional
Denmark	39,1%	no quotas	Proportional
Island	39,7%	party quotas	Proportional

Source: [www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm](http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm), [www.guoataproject.org](http://www.guoataproject.org)

The above presented analysis prove however that quotas are just one of the factors, because for a greater social participation of women in public sphere there are also a lot of cultural, social, economical and legal actions stretched in time. Scandinavian women work on exposed public and national positions. It was possible for a hard battle, engagement and consequence with which they gained independence.

Gradual changes appearing in last tens of years led to a greater participation of females in Nordic countries. The process of gender equalization, in the angle of changing place and role of a female did not and still does not belong to the easiest ones. The things which were however achieved by Scandinavian women is featured with smaller and greater success. Nevertheless their consequence, engagement, belief in their own power led to active interest of feminist problematic with governing sphere of Scandinavia. What is worth exposing, Scandinavian countries, apart from guarantying gender equality in fundamental law, the have separate legal acts which regulate those issues. Functioning of specialized bodies for gender equalization, ombudsmen for equalization proves governmental and social interest with the idea of equal chances of men and women in various spheres of social, political, legal, economical and cultural life. The process of female political participation started in those countries in seventies of a previous century, when the institutions devoted to equality politics started being created. Not without meaning is a huge engagement of female organizations, while talking about popularizing those changes. The example of Nordic countries shows that quotas themselves are not enough and they are not an only mechanism enhancing female political activity. Creating special entities acting for equal chances of men and women needs to have a long tradition to make promoting gender equality in various spheres of life a fact. Creating a great amount of entities which tackle with the equality issues happened with simultaneous strong interference of female issue in actions of all public authorities. Currently in Scandinavian countries there is observed a switch from strategies aimed at actions to gender mainstreaming strategies. A weaker gender became another important category and ideas of equality, read in a context of the gender difference, gained a new meaning.

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