

Gender Equality and Women's Political Representation in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

Women's status in political participation is one of the most visible signs to show gender equality level. A balanced representation of women in political decision-making and public management is an important condition for democracy and is of vital importance for the quality of public management. In this paper I will try to examine gender based features of political participation in Turkey and compare the situation at national and local levels referring some statistics and documents of women organizations and government. Equality between women and men is recognised as a human right, an important condition for social justice and at the same time an indispensable and fundamental precondition for equality, development and peace. Even though numerous achievements were made in Turkey in this respect during the Republican Period, it is currently observed that, in practice, gender equality has not been reflected in social and political life. Although governments officially accept that as an important condition for democracy it is still a long and difficult journey for women to have a *de facto* equality besides legal.

Keywords: Gender, Gender equality, political participation, political representation, Turkey

INTRODUCTION

The concept of gender is used to identify the social relations between men and women in a specific context. This means that the content of these concepts differs, depending on place and time. It refers to the relationship between men and women, boys and girls, and how this is socially constructed. Gender roles are dynamic and change over time. Gender relations contain an unequal power relationship with male domination and female subordination in most spheres of life. (Deutchman, 1993) Men and the tasks, functions and values attributed to them are valued in many aspects higher than women and what is associated with women. It is increasingly recognised that society is historically characterised by this male bias: the male norm is taken implicitly as the norm for society as a whole, which is commonly reflected in policies and structures. (Duke, 1993) So, policies and structures reproduce often unintended gender inequalities.

The strategy of 'gender mainstreaming' is a political and technical process which integrates the gender perspective in the management of everyday affairs and in the activities carried out by political decision-makers. It is characterised by an 'integrated approach to equality or a 'differentiated approach in relation to the sexes'. Gender mainstreaming takes the principle of equality between men and women into account at all stages and all levels of the policy process and implements it in every field of action. (Daly, 2005) In this way, it forms an integral part of the strategy development of the policy-making process. Going beyond the implicit assumption that people who are discriminated against as a group are disadvantaged and only need a small

push to rejoin the dominant mainstream, mainstreaming is the next stage in positive action undertaken to correct situations of inequality.

Explanations of the low percentage of women legislators are linked to the institutional context of the competitive space—the electoral system, the party system, the legislative competition—and to the party context, especially party ideology or party organisation (Rashkova and Zankina, 2013). A significant amount of work identifies gender quotas as the most effective tool addressing women's under-representation in national parliaments thus far.

In order to achieve the general objective of gender equality through integrated policies, decision-makers have to use a gender perspective when defining and implementing (government) policies. (Kantola, 2010) Gender mainstreaming is a process oriented and strategic approach. Content as well as how policies are conducted are important. Therefore, gender mainstreaming encourages policy makers in the field of gender equality to think thoroughly about their strategies.

The distinction between public and private spheres is one of the most important features of modern societies which perceives women as responsible for private and men as responsible for public. (Phillips, 1991) Because of this distinction, private issues are seen as duties of women and public ones are that of men. Political life has always been a clear example of that. However, modernization and democratization has also been the history of women struggling for their social, economical and political rights. Today, the level of women's participation in public sphere is the most significant indicator of modernization and democratization. So the governments in many countries are not only forced by women's struggles for equal rights, but also by that norm to realize gender equality politically and socio-economically. Gender equality is crucial for development and lies at the core of economic and national development, as is recognised more and more, also by international forums. Even though this understanding has been incorporated in international human rights instruments, international conventions and national laws, it can be noted that -regardless of the level of development of a country- equal opportunities and equal participation for women have not been secured in education, health, the labour force, politics and decision-making mechanisms. (Krook and Childs, 2010)

Women's status in political participation is one of the most visible signs to show gender equality level. A balanced representation of women in political decision-making and public management is an important condition for democracy and is of vital importance for the quality of public management. Many countries accept that objectives of development and modernity cannot be achieved without an active participation of women in all levels of decision-making and management since in those positions of power decisions are taken that affect the whole society. (Beckwith, 2010) More women in powerful positions means more effective solutions for the problems and needs of female citizens. Although governments officially accept that as an important condition for democracy it is still a long and difficult journey for women to have a *de facto* equality besides legal.

In this paper I will try to examine gender based features of political participation in Turkey and compare the situation at national and local levels referring some statistics and documents of women organizations and government. Equality between women and men is recognised as a human right, an important condition for social justice and at the same time an indispensable and fundamental precondition for equality, development and peace. Even though numerous achievements were made in Turkey in this respect during the Republican Period, it is currently observed that, in practice, gender equality has not been reflected in social and political life.

GENDER EQUALITY IN TURKEY

Turkey is ninety-five years old, a young republic. Its historical and sociological heritage coming from Ottoman Empire, has always made the Republican system an arena of contradictions between West and east, modern and traditional, secular and religious beliefs, rules, life styles. Predictably, women and women rights have been one of the most important issues located at the heart of those contradictions. In some public debates, it is like a mirror reflecting democracy as a gender issue in Turkey.

In early times of the Republic the political system was based on single party that all political organizations were prohibited except the party constituted the Republic. It was a period including reforms and restrictions together to realise modernization process. In the very early years of the Republic, although some social and legal reforms were held to achieve modernist objectives, the all women's organizations were closed like Turkish Women's Union and struggling to get women's rights decreased. Nevertheless, in 1930's women got full political rights including the right to elect and be elected locally (in 1930) and nationwide (in 1934). From 1950's which represents transition to multi party system to 1980's women's organizations were still too weak and oriented to social work not politics. From the second half of 1980's women's movement has developed rapidly as a subject of social and political demands to improve gender equality. (Tekeli, 1982)

The background of gender equality policies in Turkey is constituted by the Republican reforms. In the years following the foundation of the Republic in 1923, a modern state structure was formed on one hand and an extensive social transformation was realised on the other, with the reforms made in the faith that full equality between women and men should be established. The reforms that were realised in the first decade following the year of 1923 marking the foundation of the Republic led not only to the reconstruction of the Turkish society, but also to granting the right of citizenship rights to women. With the Law on the Unification of Education (1924), educational institutions were gathered together within one single system and women and men were provided with equal educational opportunities. With the Turkish Civil Code, adopted in 1926, the social life of women was regulated in a manner more appropriate to the times and women were granted fundamental rights.

Turkish women were granted the right to participate in politics long before women in most other countries. Having been entitled to elect and be elected in local authorities in 1930, Turkish women were granted in 1934 the right to elect and be elected as members of the Turkish Grand National Assembly. The rights women got during the Republic period have been very important, they form an example and should not be underestimated. The aim of these reforms was to enable women to have a share in the public sphere and to ensure their participation in the development process together with men. Despite the entitlements attained during the Republican period, a review of the present status of women in Turkish society clearly reveals the existence of gender inequalities. Even though a certain level of gender sensitivity has been reached as a result of the struggles in the post-1980 period specifically in such conventional policy fields as education, health and law, the desired level of sensitivity has not yet been reached. The incorporation of a gender equality perspective into the areas of employment, power and decision-making, research and budgetary and financial policies has also not been realised.

While the legal basis for equality between women and men was strengthened through the arrangements mentioned below, problems are still being encountered in the realisation of these rights in practice. In several areas there are still significant problems like schooling for

girls, women's access to health care services, equal participation in employment and power and decision-making processes.

The disadvantaged position of Turkish women is clearly reflected in socio-economic and political indicators. Sexist values and attitudes within the social structure create obstacles that prevent women from benefiting from the existing legal rights, both in their socio-economic life as in their daily life. Therefore, social attitudes and behaviour should be questioned, revised and adapted. Adopting the concept of gender equality is of the utmost importance for the elimination of inequalities that reflect to socio-economic and political indicators. (Unat, 1991)

Turkey guarantees the equality between women and men in its Constitution and other laws. Turkey has undertaken to further develop policies, to make legal arrangements and to put these laws into practice in accordance with international agreements such as the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the European Social Charter, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, conventions, decisions and recommendations of institutions such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Cairo Conference on World Population and Development Action Plan, the 4th World Conference on Women Action Plan and the Beijing Declaration, and the EU directives on equality between women and men.

All Turkish citizens have the right to "vote and to be elected" in local and parliamentary elections, to "form political parties", to "join and withdraw from political parties in accordance with the established procedure", to "take part in referenda" and to "enter public service" as stated in Articles 67, 68, and 70 of the Constitution. Article 67 of the Constitution states that "In conformity with the conditions set forth in the law, citizens have the right to vote, to be elected, and to engage in political activities independently or in a political party, and to take part in a referendum," and Article 68 that "Citizens have the right to form political parties and in accordance with the established procedure to join and withdraw from them. One must be over 18 years of age to become a member of a party". As it is seen Turkish citizens' right to participation is guaranteed by law, without discrimination between women and men.

While the legal basis for equality between women and men was strengthened through the above mentioned arrangements, problems are still being encountered in the realisation of these rights in practice. In several areas there are still significant problems like schooling for girls, women's access to health care services, equal participation in employment and power and decision-making processes. Violence against women continues to be one of the most problematic areas in Turkey as it is the case in many other countries around the world. The disadvantaged position of Turkish women is clearly reflected in socio-economic and political indicators. Sexist values and attitudes within the social structure create obstacles that prevent women from benefiting from the existing legal rights, both in their socio-economic life as in their daily life. Therefore, social attitudes and behaviour should be questioned, revised and adapted. Adopting the concept of gender equality is of the utmost importance for the elimination of inequalities that reflect to socio-economic and political indicators.

POLITICAL REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN TURKEY

Article 83 of the Political Parties Law, states that "political parties shall not pursue any aim in contradiction with the principle that everyone is equal without any discrimination before law, irrespective of language, race, colour, sex, political opinion, philosophical belief, religion and sect, or any such considerations." Even though no legal instrument includes provisions leading to gender discrimination in terms of political rights, it is still not possible to say that *de facto*

equality between women and men has been established in politics. Women participate far less in the political domain than men do. It can not be said that Turkish women, who obtained the right to vote and to be elected in local elections in 1930 and in parliamentary elections in 1934, have reached a high participation rate.

Although women in Turkey attained their political rights already in 1934 and reached a rate of representation of 9.1 per cent in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM) in the parliamentary election of 2007 which meant an increase of 100 per cent, women's representation in politics is far below of what it should actually be. Representation of women at the local level, constituting the first step of participation in political life, is even lower than at the national level. Women's participation in politics at the local level should be encouraged and increased. Women are also clearly underrepresented at decision-making positions outside the scope of political participation. After the parliamentary elections of 2007, there are 50 women out of 550 deputies in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. This is far below the desired one. (TSI, 2018)

As mentioned above, Turkish women acquired the right to vote and to be elected in 1934. The percentage of female members of the Parliament who took office following general elections of 1935 was 4,6%. This figure remained the highest percentage of female membership in Parliament until the general parliamentary elections of 2007. With the General Elections of 2007, the percentage of female members of the Parliament increased by 100% and is currently 9,1%. There are two female deputy chairs in the Parliament formed in 2007. (TSI, 2018) Although women in Turkey have the legal rights of both electing and be elected, the rate of participation in policy, representation and decision making mechanisms do remain in low figures over against men in Turkey.

In the last two decade, the issue of political presentation has constituted a main agenda item for the women's movement in Turkey. Non- governmental organizations which are making activities on development of special policies of political and legal decision-makers, including temporary special measures to accelerate the desired changes on the issue, increasing the number of women candidates and raising awareness of the society on the issue, have conducted activities in cooperation.

A national Campaign was initiated by an NGO, prior to 2007 elections. It was aimed to increase the ratio of women in the Parliament with the slogan "This Assembly Needs Women" by emphasizing the male-dominated nature of the existing Parliament. There are no legal and binding regulations either at Constitutional and /or Political Party Law level, on quotas and other special temporary measures, some political parties apply a women's quota on their intra-party boards and bodies and/or require reduced fee of application from female candidates applying for place on lists.

Compared to 2002 there is a clear increase in the relative number of women on the lists. However, the majority of the parties nominates still less than 20 per cent female candidates and these women often find themselves in low ranking positions on the lists and as a result, the majority of them are not elected into the parliament. When an evaluation is made of the number of seats held by the political parties after the election held in 2007 we find thirty female MPs from the AKP out of 340, nine from the CHP out of 98, two from the MHP out of 70, one from DSP out of 13, and eight from the DTP out of 20 are found. The majority of the female MPs (16) was elected in the district of Istanbul. (TSI, 2018)

Table 1: Percentage of Female Members of Parliament Elected between 1935 and 2018

Election Year	Total	Female	Male	Female %
1935	399	18	381	4.5
1939	424	16	408	3.8
1943	455	16	439	3.5
1946	465	9	456	1.9
1950	487	3	484	0.6
1954	541	4	537	0.7
1957	610	8	602	1.3
1961	450	3	447	0.7
1965	450	8	442	1.8
1969	450	5	445	1.1
1973	450	6	444	1.3
1977	450	4	446	0.9
1983	400	12	387	3.0
1987	450	6	444	1.3
1991	450	8	442	1.3
1995	450	13	437	2.9
1999	550	22	528	4.0
2002	550	24	526	4.4
2007	550	50	500	9.1
2011	550	79	471	14.3
2015	550	81	469	14.7
2018	600	104	496	17.1

Source: Turkish Statistical Institute, 2018

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Turkey elects its representatives by a system of proportional representation used in constituencies. Parties provide lists with candidates and the voters vote for a party and not for an individual candidate. So the election of women in the parliament depends entirely on the will of the party leadership to nominate women and rank them high on the lists.

Important reasons for the restriction of women's political roles and their participation mainly as voters are the general perception about politics in Turkey, the leader-dominated structure of political parties, the candidacy process, the functioning and organisation of political life, and the lack of women's branches within the political parties. (Tekeli, 2015)

The percentage of women participating in local authorities, on the other hand, is still around 2%. Results of local elections reflect a much more desperate picture in terms of women representation rate which detailed figures are given on cited table with respect to 2009 elections.

Table 2: Percentages of Women in Local Administrations

Women in Local Administrations			
2014	Women	Total	Women (%)
Mayor	39	1397	2.7
Municipal Council Member	2198	20.498	10.7
Provincial Council Member	60	1251	4.8
2009	Women	Total	Women (%)
Mayor	26	2903	0,90
Municipal Council Member	1471	32392	4.54
Provincial Council Member	115	3281	3.51
2004	Women	Total	Women (%)
Mayor	18	3225	0.56
Municipal Council Member	817	34477	2.3
Provincial Council Member	57	3208	1.8
1999			
Mayor	18	3215	0.6
Municipal Council Member	541	34084	1.6
Provincial Council Member	44	3122	1.4

Source: Ministry of Interior – General Directorate of Local Administrations, 2017

As it is known local administrations play a key role in the development of democracy. Female councillors can influence the decisions made at the local level and ensure that these decisions are more gender-sensitive. However, the representation of women in local administrations, which can be regarded as a first step for participation in political life, is very limited in Turkey. At the lowest level we find the position of headmanship (muhtar) and the council of elders. According to the information obtained from Ministry of Interior statistics, the total number of headmen in Turkey is 52,882. The number of women is 494, with the rate of 0,9 %.

Turkey is one of the countries in which women's political participation is the least at local level. Compared with the world numbers local representation of women shows a very low level. (Report of KADER, 2004) Although number of women mayors are still at a low level, women can find more positions in municipal councils in the world. It is just the opposite in Turkey. Women's representation in municipal councils is at very low level. The educational level of women, their economic situation and their domestic responsibilities and the social acceptance that politics is a male-dominant realm are, among others, explaining factors for the low participation of women in power and decision-making processes.

Strong male dominance in local authorities and mechanisms results in lack of women representation at local level. The dominant groups in local politics are usually some economical networks and communities engaged in trade, agriculture etc. and they are groups related to provide urban facilities like infrastructure. (Report of KADER, 2004) Usually those groups are very effective in political parties. The effect of local party networks on the differences between men and women's candidacies is demonstrated by many studies in some other countries too (Melody Crowder-Meyer, 2013). Because of those conditions local politics is generally is harder to access and participate for women. In addition to this it has not been much time that women organizations have focused on local representation. The main aim of raising women's movement in 1990's was primarily to increase women number in national parliament and provide the acceptance of de facto gender equality by state institutions.

Besides voting and being elected, participating in the formulation of government policy and the implementation at all levels of government would be a informative indicator. A closer look at the participation rates of women in bureaucratic decision-making mechanisms reveals low rates. Among the middle level and senior executives in the public sector, the ratio of women is 5.1% among Deputy General Directors or in higher echelons, 14.9% among Head of Departments. In academic administration 5,3% of University Presidents and 12.6% Faculty Deans are women. (Report of GDSW, 2014)

The number of women who can be found in the top positions in the public sector is also a significant point. A balanced participation of men and women in leadership positions in public administration is important for gender mainstreaming. Female leaders are more inclined to take women's needs into account. Knowing that skills and sensitivities of women are not reflected at managerial levels is a factor, which hinders reaching sustainable development in all areas of life. Compared to the National Action Plan prepared in 1996, the number of women in leadership positions in public administration has increased. However, in most levels women's representation remains still rather limited.

Upon a closer look at the ratio of women working as prosecutor which is considered as male-dominated profession in the society, it is observed that this ratio is 42% in the Council of State, which is one of the supreme judicial organs. The percentage of women in office in higher judicial bodies is 33%. This positive picture of higher judicial bodies cannot be observed when considering prosecutors working in Court Houses outside the scope of supreme judicial bodies. According to the current situation, the percentage of female judges is 28.19% as of 2007, whereas the percentage of female prosecutors reached 5.62% with an increase of 1.45% since the year of 2005. The total percentage of female judges and prosecutors is 20.7%

Table 5: Judges and Public Prosecutors in Office across Turkey as of September 2005 and October 2007

	2005			2007		
	Total Number	Number of Women	Percentage	Total Number	Number of Women	Percentage
Judge	5972	1690	28.29%	7076	1995	28.19%
Prosecutor	3211	134	4.17%	3822	215	5.62%
Total	9183	1824	19.86%	10898	2210	20.27%

Source: Ministry of Justice, General Directorate of European Union Affairs, 2007.

Moreover, there are 26 female civilian administration superintendents in Turkey. The percentage of women serving as lieutenant governors and district governors is 1.43%, with no female governors.

Although both men and women are provided with the right to represent Turkey abroad on equal terms, the development in this respect is rather slow. Turkey has 15 women ambassadors (9 %). When the distribution of foreign affairs personnel is examined, it is revealed that women are better represented in lower echelons of diplomatic service (27%). While this number is still a minority, it indicates a clear improvement. This situation is envisaged to find reflections in the higher echelons in the coming years.

No data are available for the representation of women in leadership positions in the private sector. Concerning women's opportunities to attain leadership positions in business, Turkey is

ranked internationally 57 out of 115, higher than many other European countries. Considering women's representation in trade unions we find that there are no female managers in the Board of Directors of three workers' confederations (DİSK, TÜRK İŞ and HAK-İŞ) and Kamu-Sen and Memur Sen. There are two female members only in the Board of Directors of KESK Headquarters. According to data from the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, only five of the chairs of 91 trade unions operating in 28 branches are women. Of 481 members of the Board of Directors, only 32 are women. Trade unions of public servants are in a relatively better situation. In this field, five of the chairpersons of 51 trade unions are women and 26 of the 325 centre managers are women. (Report of GDSW, 2014)

On the other hand, in terms of the representation of Turkish women in senior positions in international institutions, there are numerous Turkish women working in various committees and advisory boards under UN and the Council of Europe. The United Nations Human Rights Council the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women is also a Turkish woman.

Women delegates are also present in Turkish delegations that participate in regional and international meetings on different topics. Turkey has participated in the special session of the Beijing+10 General Assembly and regional meetings with a high-level delegation comprised of women representing both governmental and non-governmental organizations. Similarly, Turkey routinely attends United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and Council of Europe meetings with delegations of women which also include representatives from non-governmental organizations. (Report of GDSW, 2013)

Additionally, it is clearly stated in international conventions and decisions, to which Turkey has become a party, that governments have responsibilities for incorporating gender equality into main plans and programmes. As a matter of fact, that kind of international cooperations on gender equality resulted in implementation too. Established as a national mechanism in this field, the General Directorate on the Status of Women attaches importance to actions ensuring that the concept of gender equality is taken into consideration in the development of public policies. The National Action Plans on gender equality implemented jointly by the General Directorate on the Status of Women and international actors.

OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

According to the General Directorate on the Status of Women's national action plan for 2008-2013 the educational level of women, their economic situation and their domestic responsibilities and the social acceptance that politics is a male-dominant realm are, among others, explaining factors for the low participation of women in power and decision-making processes. In the same report, three objectives were stated to improve women's political participation through various strategies:

Objective 1: The level of information and awareness will be increased in order to increase the representation of women in power and decision-making processes.

The strategies to achieve that objective are informing women about their political rights and responsibilities among others through panels, seminars, conferences, books and brochures; Raising public awareness on the importance of women's participation in the parliament, local authorities authorities; carrying out activities to promote female role models of women taking part in decision-making mechanisms in both the private and public sector; collecting and publishing on a regular basis gender specific data at echelons of power and decision-making mechanisms in the public sector; creating discussion platforms in which all relevant stakeholders will participate, in order to enhance the representation of women in the parliament and local authorities; informing the public of the outcome of these discussion;

working at the local level with women's councils, which are platforms that bring women from different sections of society together to increase the awareness about the participation of females in politics.

Objective 2: Arrangements will be made contributing to the participation of women in political life and their involvement in power and decision-making processes.

Increasing the number of women's councils, which is currently about 40; - having the decisions of the women's councils more reflected in the decision making processes of the local authorities; increasing the effectiveness of the existing women's units in trade unions and confederations of workers- employers and in trade associations; establishing women's units in trade unions and confederations of workers-employers and in trade associations without these units; encouraging girls to assume positions such as class president and school representative in the course of education in order to prepare them for power and decision-making processes are the strategies for this objective.

Objective 3: Public policies will be formulated geared to achieving equality between women and men.

The strategies are adopting approaches that observe the equality between women and men in the assignation of medium-level and senior executives in public institutions; providing the required support to increase the number of women at executive positions in working life to achieve this objective.

CONCLUSION

Although there are many important strategies including increasing the number of women's councils, having the decisions of the women's councils more reflected in the decision making processes of the local authorities etc. are planned in this document, it doesn't address some concrete measures like quota. Of course quota privileges in political parties is one of the most important means to support women since they do have essential restrictions in financial spending, time limitations and they do not have *de facto* equality to men. However, there has still been no legal amendment on gender quota in Turkey.

It is a significant involvement that the amendment implemented in 2004 statement of "Women and Men have the equal rights and the government is responsible of bringing this matter into action" has been added to the 10th Article of the Constitution. Actually, Turkey was responsible to define gender equality as an obligation of the state in Constitution, since it has been a side of CEDAW. But no legal regulation has yet to be done in terms of ensuring gender equality. Additionally, there is no constitutional decree concerning with taken temporary special measures and not being contrary against non- discrimination principle as well as lack of legal framework in Turkey. (CEDAW, 2008) And Political Party and Election Laws in Turkey also do not regulate any gender equality adjudication by providing temporary special measures. If a revision in this context is not being executed, gender related "quota application" cannot be having legal grounding. In fact, quota application is the core responsibility of Turkey exposed by the international commitment since it is obligatory.

Along with the constitutional amendment, "Law of Political Parties" and "Law of Election" have to become in accordance with quota related measurements since current laws do remain protective of patriarchal order based on the content of delegate positioning. In political parties, there are serious disadvantages in terms of taking place in decision making mechanisms. To take and apply temporary special measures including quotas are also advises of CEDAW Committee's commentary on Turkey's country report in 2010

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