



WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE POLITICS OF POST-SOVIET GEORGIA

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 01 September 2023

Received in revised form

30 October 2023

Accepted 1 November 2023

Available online 8 November 2023

ABSTRACT

Human rights and liberty are one of the most essential values of democracy in modern society. The statement made at the international level that women possess half of the potential abilities and skills of humankind and their low involvement in the decision-making process is the loss of the entire society is well understood in the Georgian political reality and the evidence is represented by the political history of Georgia. In the Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918-1921) women had both passive and active election rights. The paper explores how women's participation in the political processes developed after redeclaring the independence of the Georgian Statehood in 1991. What rights and circumstances do Georgian women face while being involved in the politics of Georgia?

The research combines analysis of empirical data, scientific works, and official documents and bases on desk research, methods of historicism, and monitoring of the political events in Georgia.

In the last years, the government and NGOs actively raised the issue regarding women's involvement in politics in the political agenda of Georgia.

As the official data show, in Georgia on all levels of government women are represented less than in accordance with the commitments made by Georgia.

Key words:

Women in Georgia, Politics, Equality, Involvement

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1. INTRODUCTION

In Georgia, the equality of men and women was well understood centuries ago, meaning that gender should not be the determinant of rights, responsibilities and opportunities for a person.

Gender equality is one of the fundamental values in the democratization process of the Georgian state. The paper aims to analyze gender equality issues in modern Georgia. The research is based on academic literature studies and includes empirical, also various kinds of official documents, that concentrate on the political rights of women in Georgia. The scope of the issue concentrates on measures taken for the improvement of laws that give more opportunities to women for involvement in the politics of the country. The research discusses how the lawmaking progress created the foundation for joining the international regulations on the protection of women's rights last but not least, the research explores the influences of creating action plans (mostly suggested by international and nongovernmental organizations) and generating political parties' lists based on gender quotas to increase women's political involvement in the country. Accordingly, the study suggests findings on necessary measures that ensure women's higher political activity on every level of decision-making and governing processes.

The paper uses empirical research sources, such as primary and secondary sources. In consonance with the materials and monitoring of the political processes study defines the main research question: Does the real policy of the Georgian state reflect the international and national obligations taken by the country?

The gender equality issue, promoting women's involvement in the political processes in Georgia, is a long-term action and develops step by step very slowly.

2. WOMEN'S POLITICAL ACTIVITY IN GEORGIA: HISTORICAL RETROSPECTIVE

Women's movements worldwide became more active from the end of the 19th century. The change affected political processes, and the massive activity of women in different countries had its reflection in Georgia as well. Clear evidence of women's engagement in social-political activity is their intense participation in the "Society for Spreading Literacy among Georgians (SSLG, 1879-1927). The organization served the national interests of the Georgian state that was preserving the Georgian language, spreading the education and cultural development)" and some of them were even the honorable members of the SSLG. Their commitment to the newly formed educational system of Georgia, such as libraries, schools, and different institutions, left an indelible mark on the national cultural-educational systems, and also in the political arena. The Georgian women published articles in the Georgian press, and by that time printed mass media was one of the main sources for raising awareness among the citizens of the country. In 1917 and 1918 the "Women's League" was formed; the "Women's League" demanded rights for women and emphasized the civic, political, economic, cultural, and social rights of women (Mskhiladze, Khorbaladze,

Kintsurashvili 2014). The weekly newspaper “Khma Kartveli Kalisa” (“The Voice of a Georgian Woman”) covered political, literature, and scientific issues, it was a tool for willing women to create and protect women’s rights in Georgia (Melashvili 2017). All pieces of the newspaper contained a slogan: “Equality of the law for gender!” Examples given in the paper and other cases prove that gender equality issues were important in the social and political life of Georgia at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries.

The declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918-1921) was a meaningful stage of Georgian statehood. Despite the short period of existence of free Georgian state, the country developed its political and mental values, the political elites and citizens established a progressive, democratic, and free state system, so it is not surprising that women were granted passive and active electoral rights in the election of the legislative branch of the government (Constituent Assembly of Georgia) on 14-16 February 1919. It is worth mentioning that 6 electoral subjects out of 15 had women representatives on their parties’ lists (in total 26 females). The governing Social Democrat party had 130 candidates on the party list, among them 6 were women, and it is also considerable that one of the presented female candidates belonged to a different ethnic group than the Georgian (Sakartvelos Respublika 1919). The ruling party gained 109 seats in the Georgian parliament, with 5 women parliament members. Keeping in mind the period, the facts mentioned here make us think that gender equality and political culture issues were developed at their highest level in Georgia.

3. THE GEORGIAN GOVERNMENT POLICY FOR GENDER EQUALITY (IN THE POST-SOVIET PERIOD)

Most of the scholars in the field of political sciences including Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris mention that women’s involvement in politics is more common in post-industrial states than in developing or post-soviet countries (Inglehart & Norris 2003). So, it can be assumed that the increased participation of women in politics is one of the indicators for the democratization of the states. Discussing the Georgian case from this perspective, it should be mentioned that Georgia still needs to elaborate standards and approaches for gender equality. It can be simply identified if we look at the statistics, concretely, 52% of the Georgian population are women (Civil.ge 2023) and in the Parliament of Georgia only 20% of the parliament members are female.

Despite the sufficient historical data in the country (women were represented in the Parliament of Georgia as early as 1918-1921), after the restoration of state independence (9 April 1991) Georgia has implemented a number of activities for gender equality (since 1994). In this regard, first of all it is worth noting the 11th article of the Constitution of Georgia, the amendments approved by the Parliament of Georgia in 2017 (Parliament of the Republic of Georgia 1995) and the Law on Gender Equality (Parliament of Georgia 2010) stating that all people are equal before the law and that the state provides equal rights and opportunities for men and women, and receives special measures to eliminate inequality between them.

Today, gender equality is considered one of the important priorities of the state policy of Georgia, and its goal is to create convenient conditions for men's and women's equality.

The resolution adopted by the Parliament of Georgia on the "State Concept of Gender Equality of Georgia" that based on the international acts and documents to which Georgia has joined and today are an integral part of Georgian legislation: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms; Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; Program of Action of the Cairo Conference on Population and Development; UN Security Council Resolution 1325; Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals. The aim of the concept is to promote the equal and effective implementation of the rights and opportunities of women and men. The concept recognizes the principles of gender equality in all spheres of state and public life and defines appropriate measures for the prevention and elimination of all forms of discrimination based on gender, as well as for achieving gender equality (Parliament of Georgia, 2006).

According to the Statute of the Permanent Parliamentary Council for Gender Equality (18.06.2019 No. 1/223/19) approved by the order of the Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia dated 16.02.2017 No. 41/3, The Council contributes to the determination of the main directions of the state policy in the field of gender by the Parliament of Georgia, ensuring the creation and development of the legislative bias in the field of gender equality, reviewing and approving the relevant strategy, monitoring the activities of bodies accountable to the Parliament of Georgia on gender equality issues, raising awareness about gender equality and implementing measures supporting women's empowerment (Parliament of Georgia 2017).

Hereby, gender equality, which is an obligation for Georgia, both by national and international documents, one of the 12 main problem areas named at the 1995 Beijing conference, which the participating countries, including Georgia, should have taken into account in the national action plan, is the issue of women's participation in governing bodies and decision-making structures (UN 1995).

4. WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS IN POST-SOVIET GEORGIA

From the studied materials, it is clear that the rate of engagement of women participating in elections with a passive right in Georgia is low, despite the fact that the issue has been under active consideration for decades. Few positive changes, which to some extent reflect the attitude of politicians and society towards the issue of women's involvement in politics in the country, are insufficient. However, the issue gains more importance in almost every pre-election period, and the measures taken accordingly are at the center of attention.

Initially, in 2011, with the policy implemented based on the recommendation of the Venice Commission, in order to increase the participation of women in the political process, an encouraging norm was included in the organic law of Georgia. In particular, the financing

of the electoral entity would increase by 10% if the list represented a different gender by no less than 20%. According to the results of the 2012 elections, although the number of women in the parliament increased twice, but the female gender representation was still low.

In 2013, the incentive norm meant a 30% increase in party funding if a different gender was represented in every tenth of the electoral list (in 2014 local self-government representative and executive body elections were held, and women received the lowest percent votes).

Despite the implementation of a number of measures, the Committee of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in its recommendation to Georgia based on the documents studied in 2014 rightly noted that Georgia should ensure the full and equal participation of women in political and public life, enable them to take decision-making positions, including local legislative bodies. The Committee also urges the State to develop mandatory quota mechanisms for political parties to substantially increase women's representation in national and local legislatures (CEDAW/C/GEO/4-5, 2014).

In 2014-2015, the issue became more significant, as a result of which the slogan "more women in politics" appeared. Due to the importance of the issue, 2015 was declared as the year of women, which at the same time expressed the attitude regarding the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration, at this time, in relation to the anniversary date, a large part of humanity drew future plans for gender equality. However, despite the fact that the issue was actively on the agenda, in 2015 the Legal Affairs Committee of the Georgian Parliament did not support the amendment to the Organic Law of Georgia "Election Code of Georgia" stating that every 3rd candidate must belong to a different gender, that would support increasing gender balance and in the case of approving the draft of the law there would have been 25% women in the legislative body of Georgia.

In the parliamentary elections of Georgia in 2016, 24 women (16%) won the membership of the Georgian parliament.

To enhance gender equality in Georgia in 2016 the law was amended, according to which gender councils were established in each municipal council of the country.

It should also be noted that the 2017-2020 agenda for Georgia's association with the European Union obliges Georgia to increase women's engagement in the decision-making process in order to ensure women's representation.

According to official data, the dynamics of women's representation in the Parliament of Georgia over the years (see Table 1) shows that there is a change/improvement in terms of women's involvement in politics in Georgia, but that is not enough (Darchashvili 2020).

Year	1992	1995	1999	2004	2008	2012	2016	2020
Women in the Parliament of Georgia (%)	6.22	6.64	7.17	9.33	6.00	12.00	16.00	20.67

Table 1. The dynamics of women's representation in the Parliament of Georgia over the years

Despite the improvement of women's representation, the number of female politicians in Georgia remains low. It is important that the issue of quotas, which has become the subject of widespread judgment in recent years and has been actively debated for decades, has already reached a certain result, in 2020 the gender quotas were adopted as a temporary measure and it has been accepted for the next three parliament convocations in Georgia.

As the ombudsman of Georgia states (2021) the discussion on the implementation of the gender quota mechanism has been renewed with the approach of the 2020 parliamentary elections, although the mentioned issue has been the subject of active discussion in the legislative body of Georgia. The issue submitted to the Parliament of the country aimed at taking temporary measures and provided for the observance of the principle of gender equality in the proportional electoral list by political parties in the parliamentary and local elections, as well as the nomination of every second candidate of a different gender. This ensured the protection of a 50% gender balance, which in the case of the Parliament of Georgia, considering the mixed electoral system, meant the presence of only 38 female PMs out of 150 deputies, although the Parliament did not support this initiative (Public Defender of Georgia 2021).

On July 2, 2020, the Parliament of Georgia approved a package of amendments to the Election Code, including mandatory gender quotas, which aims to gradually increase the representation of women in the Parliament of Georgia. In particular, the amendment obliges political entities to indicate a representative of a different gender as at least every fourth candidate in the party list submitted to the Central Election Commission in the parliamentary elections held until 2028, and in the parliamentary elections held from 2028 to 2032 – a representative of a different gender should be indicated in the party list and at least every 3rd candidate must have different gender (Chipashvili 2020).

5. CONCLUSION

The governments in post-soviet Georgia (throughout this period) tried to fulfill their commitment to ensure the effective implementation of equal rights and opportunities for women and men in the political, economic, and social spheres. The facts prove that a state policy based on the principles of gender equality has been developed and implemented for this purpose, the main directions of which are determined in accordance with international commitments on gender equality issues, national legislation, as well as administrative and other regulatory documents.

It should be mentioned that the measures taken by the state for the implementation of gender equality strategies/policies are characterized by significant progress, the state has taken important measures for the effective implementation of the gender equality policies in the state's national legislation, action plans, and strategies.

However, it should be said that there are still many gaps in the implementation process of gender equality policy, keeping in mind the fact that the state has not fully understood the

reform of the regulatory framework ensuring gender equality in specific areas and issues, which is due to a superficial understanding of gender equality.

Despite the recognized obligations, the Georgian state does not show enough political will to achieve the essential equality of women in all spheres of life and to eliminate all the gaps that create a significant barrier to achieving gender priorities in Georgia. Despite the progress like development/creation of action plans, there are still substantial challenges in the sphere of gender equality in the state.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

For the faster transition from a male-dominated society to a gender-balanced country top-down change gives opportunity to those females that are willing to be more active citizens and be more actively involved in the different directions of the politics of the state.

As for the long-term perspective, all forces involved in the political life of the country such as political parties, media, civil society, and international organizations operating in Georgia should actively participate in raising the public awareness in regard to the importance of protecting gender equality, in order to increase the participation of women in elective positions and in the political life of the country.

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