

Istanbul Bilgi University

Jean Monnet Chair of European Politics of
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Department of International Relations
European Institute

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Hena Kadic
İstanbul Bilgi University



**Jean
Monnet
Chair**



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Political Participation of Women in Turkey and the European Union perspective

Hena Kadic

Istanbul Bilgi University

Jean Monnet Chair of European Politics of Interculturalism

Prof. Dr. Ayhan Kaya

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1. Introduction

According to the report issued by the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, it is mentioned that: “Women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making

process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace”.

Two of the fundamental principles of democratic societies are pluralism and gender equality. However, women are still under-represented in societies, especially when it comes to political spheres. Today, they constitute only 20.4 per cent of the members of world’s national parliament. Because of this problem, in the last two decades gender equality solutions are discussed all over the world. Therefore, in the European Union – as a union of democracies, many debates took a place with the objective to ensure equal treatment for women and men. In order to achieve this goal, some European Union countries have developed different kinds of tools and strategies. One of the strategies is mainstreaming which involves gender equality issue into all practices, policies and programs. Electoral gender quotas proved to be the best mechanism in this process. Quotas involve a specific percentage of places to be occupied by women, which more than 100 countries have adopted since 1990s. However, Turkey is not among these countries even the gender gap in elected seats is lower than the world average. There is no clear national legislative quota or law which would require political parties to follow quota. So, in my paper I will try to answer to the question: Why Turkey does not fit to the European Union standards regarding women’s political participation?

Turkey is considered as a traditional society where women have lower political and economical status. According to Stefan Füle, the European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighborhood policy, “Turkey needs to make sustained efforts to increase women's political representation. Compared with the European Union average and international standards, Turkey lags behind in terms of women’s representation in political decision making at national, local and municipal levels. In the 2011 elections, women's participation in parliament increased approximately from 9% to 14% of its membership. This is still about a half of the European Union average”. So I will argue that, in order to increase a number of

women participating in politics, Turkey should make more efforts and commit to achieve a set of targets that EU member states agreed on. There is the Europe 2020 Strategy which includes gender-specific national targets for education, employment, combating poverty, climate change, and research. If this strategy would serve to Turkey as an inspiration to make its efforts more advanced and consolidated, it would be a one step closer to the democratic and the EU standards.

2. 80 years of Turkish women deprivation of equal rights

"If a society does not wage a common struggle to attain a common goal with its women and men, scientifically there is no way for it to get civilized or developed", said Mustafa Kemal Atatürk while making an effort to modernize and secularize Turkish society. Atatürk was a military officer who has led a movement that took place in Turkey in the period after the World War I, when the Ottoman Empire collapsed. He was committed in decision to westernize Turkey, as confirms his adoption of Italian criminal law, Swiss civil law, and German business law. One of the most significant Atatürk's efforts was to adopt equal rights for men and women. Therefore, in 1934, for the first time women in Turkey enjoyed election and voting rights. This was long before in most of the European countries where "French women had to wait for ten years, Belgian women for fourteen, Greek women for eighteen, and Canadian women for twenty-six more years to gain unrestricted access to electoral politics"¹. However, Turkey is a paradoxical country when comes to the gender equality - 80 years after introducing women rights, less than 20% of women are in the parliament which is far below the European standards. Today, lack of women rights is a very problematic issue in Turkey.

¹ Sayari, Sabri and Yılmaz R. Esmer. "*Politics, Parties, and Elections in Turkey*", USA: Reinner Publishers, 2002, p.1, 2002

Despite recent amendments to the country's Constitution and the establishment of a Parliamentary Committee on Gender Equality in March 2009, Turkey has a long road ahead of it in narrowing its gender gap. In a recent international study, Turkey ranked an embarrassing 105th out of 115 countries, far behind the worst-ranking EU member. Political representation of women, at both national and regional levels, is very low: Turkey has the lowest number of women in Parliament. ²

The question arises: What kind of barriers made Turkish women's position as it is now?

Through the process of modernization, a belief that a woman politician would lose her traditional family role has lost its significance, but still not totally. In 2013, Sabancı University Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Professor Ersin Kalaycıoğlu and Koç University Professor made a research on "Family, Work and Gender in Turkey" as a part of the International Social Survey Program (ISSP). Research was conducted with 1555 respondents from 59 provinces, and shown interesting results: fifty-eight percent of respondents said that a child will be negatively affected if has a mother who works, while forty-eight percent disagree while saying that a working mother can have a close and confident relationship with her child. Also, sixty-one percent of respondents agreed that most women actually primarily want to be a housewife. According to Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu, results of the survey show that the mental culture in Turkish society perceives women's main role as a housewife. But, when comes to the financial needs of the family, women is expected to involve more. This kind of contradiction, that women should be a housewife and also contribute to the family income, shows a transitional period that Turkey is going through. Kalaycıoğlu said that "there is a conviction that it is difficult to survive with just one income in the city. But there is a discrepancy between the awareness about the requirements of the city and the mental change that is required to adapt to the city's realities".

² Bogdani, Mirela. "Turkey and the Dilemma of EU Accession: When Religion Meets Politics", London: I.B. Tauris&Co, 2011, p.30

Other kind of barrier that influence women's role in Turkish society, is the fact that women themselves often prefer other occupations rather than competing ones, like politics. "When a woman marries it might be understood that she, like man, chooses a profession, she makes a choice of the management of the household. Mill believed that even given the same education, economic opportunities, and civil liberties as men, women will still choose marriage and motherhood over other competing occupations."³ Also, being in politics requires high expenditures and women do not have enough of capital to be involved in usually because "women do not benefit completely from educational opportunities which is a factor hindering their participation in an elitist democracy"⁴.

However, the most significant barrier, according to Turkish sociologist Doğu Ergil, is a prevailing Islamic view that "views women's nature (fitrat) appropriate to carry out familial roles while men deal with other issues"⁵. This view is still present nowadays in some regions of the country which do not identify with the modern and secular state. Nevertheless, in 2011, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said that his party is "a conservative democratic party" and the family is important to them, and announced replacement of the Ministry of Women and Family Affairs by the new Ministry of Family and Social Policies. This announcement caused massive women organizations' protests which did not make any change in the end. Therefore, that is why it is important to discuss an issue of women's demands, rights, or simply participation in politics.

3. Today's women's political participation in Turkey

³ Caha, Ömer. "*Women and Civil Society in Turkey: Women's Movements in a Muslim Society*", Ashgate Publishing, 2013, p.33

⁴ Koray, Meryem. "*Türkiye'de Kadın*", Türkiye Sosyal Ekonomik Araştırmalar Vakfı, Yenyüzyıl Kitaplığı, 1995, p.71-74

⁵ Dogu, Ergil. "*Türk Toplumunda Kadın*," Ankara: ODTU, 1975, p.5

Political participation means taking an action and freedom to associate, speak out, and taking part in the public affairs. Snehalata Panda, in her book “Gender, Environment and Participation in Politics”, explained political participation as,

An activity it is associated with maintaining relationship in the community, fostering cooperation among individuals and groups and encouraging settlement of disputes through public communication. Such activities involve the identification of the interest of the individual with the community.⁶

However, there are different kinds of political activities where we can say that there are three “mediums that serve participation in democratic societies, those are - social movements, local governments, and political parties”⁷. In the next part of the paper each of the mediums for political participation of women in Turkey will be explained.

3.1.Social movements

At the end of Ottoman Empire in the late 19th century, women began organizing themselves for the first time. They fought for increasing women’s access to education, job, abolishing polygamy and Islamic headscarf. During this period, in 1908, the first women association named Ottoman Welfare Organization of Women was founded. Later, they involved in the Movement of Young Turks which was an important part in establishment of the Republic of Turkey.

Today, there are many feminist groups providing ways to construct women’s position in Turkish society. There are over 250 women’s groups which form different kinds of clubs, associations, lobby groups, blogs, and magazines. Socialist feminists, radical feminists, Kemalist, Kurdish, Armenian, Muslim feminists, and many other women’s movement groups

⁶ Panda, Snehalata. “*Gender, Environment and Participation in Politics*”, New Delhi: MD Publications, 1995, p.1

⁷ Powell, G. B. “*Contemporary Democracies: Participation, Stability, and Violence. Cambridge*”, Harvard University Press, 1982, p.43

form different identities. However, even there are many differences in ideologies of these groups; women come together to work on issues which are common for all of them, and to denounce important social issues for public. Nowadays they openly fight against patriarchal structure and traditional gender roles in every aspect of society, army, economy, family, and religion. Also, feminists criticize violence and sexual harassment, and rely on politicizing private sphere of life in order to put an intention to these issues. Here, a key starting move was a creation of The Purple Roof Women's Shelter Foundation in 1990s, which first started "consultations with women, fight against domestic violence and provide judicial, social and psychological support for women exposed to violence. The only international supporter of the foundation is the European Union delegation to Turkey."⁸ However, till this day, a new way of financing women's projects was made. Feminist organizations provide money on the international level that allows them to deal with the disseminated problems like unemployment, violence in family, and female illiteracy.

When it comes to the institutional level, issues of women discrimination and women's representation in political parties are main themes. For example, women evaluate Turkish legislation and state that legal gender equality is still not achieved. So, in 2002, due to the negotiation with the European Union and pressure from feminist associations, Turkish government reformed criminal and civil law.

For the first time, criminal law started dealing with the understanding of gender relations, modifying traditional patriarchy and bringing domestic law with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) principles. The former establishes the principle of equality between spouses by replacing the concept of the male head of the conjugal union with equal partnership in decision-making authority and representational powers in the

⁸ Özerdem, Alpaslan and Füsün Özerdem. *"Human Security in Turkey: Challenges for the 21st Century"*, New York: Routledge, 2013, p.94

management of the household...The most significant amendment under the Civil Code is the legal property regime, which stipulates that all property acquired during marriage shall be shared equally in the case of divorce, thereby recognizing the unpaid contributions of women to household sustenance.⁹

3.2. Local governments

In 2011, Gülden Türktan, a president of the İlkkaracan and Women Entrepreneurs Association of Turkey (KAGİDER), said that: “Turkey falls far behind international standards for representation of women in Parliament, and women's representation in parliaments all around the world averages 19 percent; 14 percent is not acceptable”. Just three years after, when 2014 elections were held, a positive move of women’s political participation took place in Turkey. The number of elected female majors increased thirty percent since last elections, and this is the first time that women will run metropolitan municipalities, precisely three – Aydın, Gaziantep and Diyarbakir. Till these elections, none of women were running metropolitan municipalities, and only five percent of all majors in a country were women. Also, other positive move is that two out of three elected women will be running southeastern cities which are known for traditional gender roles. Related to the issue of southeastern traditional attitudes, Ms. Ayse Cihan Sultanoğlu, Director of the Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (RBEC) with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), said that “still there is more to do in the southeast region where only three percent of women engage in paid labor. We can only hope that by giving the women and girls in this region a political role model, it will have a positive

⁹ Marx Ferree, Myra and Aili Mari Tripp. “*Global Feminism: Transnational Women's Activism, Organizing, and Human Rights*”, New York: New York University Press, 2006, p.100

impact on their futures. Allowing young girls in Turkey to pave their own futures and not fall into a forced cultural role is a road we could see in the making”¹⁰.

Also, KADER women's organization called last elections as a " victory for men, once again ", stating that “increasing the level of women's participation in politics is widely seen as an important step in addressing the still significant gender-based inequality, violence and discrimination in Turkey. Local politics is arguably the country's weakest link as such”¹¹.

Overall, a current women’s representation in local governments is hardly a reason for women to celebrate. However, the number of female mayors did rise by thirty percent from the last elections.

3.3.Political parties

Çiğdem Aydın, a chairwoman of KADER said,

We were hugely disappointed because political parties said this year’s elections they would encourage woman candidates. And this is why many more women put forward their candidacy compared to the past. Political parties did not take money from female candidates for instance; that was a huge incentive. The Justice and Development Party (AKP) said one of three candidates would definitely be a woman. The Republican People’s Party (CHP) has a 33 percent quota anyway. So we thought this time more women would be on the lists. Yet it seems everything was a lie.¹²

Political parties are one of the most important mediums for political participation. Women’s involvement in decision-making mechanisms is considered as a criterion of democratic society, therefore participation rates in Turkey’s leading political parties will be examined.

¹⁰ Turkish Philanthropy Funds, Interview with Ms. Sultanoglu. Available on: <http://www.tpfund.org/2013/10/interview-with-ms-sultanoglu/>

¹¹ Nigar, Diba. “*Turkey's elections and gender politics*”, Al Jazeera, 2014

¹² Yinanç, Barçın. “*Man uninterested in sharing power with women in Turkey*”, 2014. Available on: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/men-uninterested-in-sharing-power-with-women-in-turkey.aspx?pageID=238&nID=63364&NewsCatID=339>

Since there are two main leading political parties in Turkey, the center-right Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (the Justice and Development Party, the JDP) and the center-left Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (the Republican People's Party, the RPP), their approach to women participation will be explained. Also, the Pro-Kurdish Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi (the Peace and Democracy Party, the PDP) program will be used as an example of different and more effective approach to women's political representation.

The JDP, as a political party with traditional approach towards women is much more behind RPP when comes to the gender equality. In 1989, the RPP has set in its statute a gender quota of twenty-five percent, and later in 2012 they raised it to thirty-three percent. However, even though the JDP has so called "soft quotas", they reach similar results. Chairman Recep Tayyip Erdoğan supports women's participation in decision-making processes verbally and as well in practice¹³ Therefore, JDP's female members praise chairman's support, which closely resembles "of Mohammed VI in Morocco. Mohammed VI acceded to the throne in 1999 and, among other initiatives, adopted a 10 percent gender quotas for the national elections. Moroccan women reportedly responded by adopting the expression "Thanks to the young king". The JDP's practices carry a similarly paternalist tone, which does not exist in the RPP"¹⁴.

In the 2005 JDP's report on the development goals, it is stated that their aim is to have seventeen percent of female deputies till 2015¹⁵. However, just nine year later a significant contradictory thing happened. A female politician, Nurten Ertuğul from the JDP of the city in Bingöl has resigned from her post claiming that the mayor made discriminatory announcement. The mayor Barakazi, who is also from the JDP, declared that "he will not

¹³ Şebnem, Cansun. "Siyasette Cinsiyet Kotası: AKP ve CHP Örnekleri" (Gender quotas in politics: The JDP and the RPP examples), İstanbul Sabahattin Zaim University Journal of Social Sciences, 2012, p. 78-96.

¹⁴ Şebnem, Cansun. "Perceptions of women's political participation in Turkey: The examples of the JDP and the RPP", Paper presented at the 3rd European Conference on Politics and Gender, Barcelona 21-23 March 2013.

¹⁵ Aysun, Sayın. "Kota el kitabı, Geçici Özel Önlem Politikası, Kota" (The quota handbook, A temporary special measure, the quota policy), Ankara: Ka-Der, 2007, p.23

appoint women to positions such as deputy mayor or acting mayor, which led to Ertuğul's resignation in protest. Reportedly, the newly elected mayor from the JDP said that appointing women to such positions is incompatible with traditions and religion"¹⁶.

Maybe that is why it is not surprising that this year's local elections brought only six JDP female mayors out of thirty-seven in total. Although the RPP program supports women's political participation, and has introduced quotas, there is just one more female mayor from RPP than in the JDP – seven out of total. Also, in contrast to the JDP, they have a special Program on gender equality called Program of women's auxiliaries, which states that "women should be viewed not only as voters and should help curb the injustices they suffer by getting involved in politics."¹⁷. Also, it describes obstacles for women to be involved in politics, like low education, violence, bad economic conditions, as well as tradition and judgment that make women underrepresented.

Nonetheless, in reality there are 1395 mayors in Turkey and as it is mentioned, only thirty-seven are women, where much of this progress is due to the PDP (Peace and Democracy Party). They got only 4.2 percent of vote nationwide, but 23 (out of 37) female mayors in Turkey are PDP members. This success was achieved thanks to their commitment to provide equal opportunities for women and men for participating and being elected.

3.3.1. The Peace Democratic Party towards women's rights as a model for other parties in Turkey

According to the number of female candidates who were listed for mayoral positions, all parties except the PDP have failed to comply with their previous promises and quotas for

¹⁶ Today's Zaman. "Female AK Party politician resigns in protest of discrimination", 2014. Available on : http://en.cihan.com.tr/news/Female-AK-Party-politician-resigns-in-protest-of-discrimination_9094-CHMTM5OTA5NC8xMDA1

¹⁷ CHP, *Kadın Kolları Programı* (The program of women's auxiliaries), 2002,p. 5

women. One of the barriers for women that were mentioned in the beginning of an article - high expenditures and not enough of capital are the main reason for this problem. Women do not have enough finances to cover the nomination fee for candidanship. The JDP requires from women members to pay half of what men pay for fee, while the RPP asks for a nominal processing fee. Only the PDP, out of all parties, does not require women members to pay for fees.¹⁸

Also, the PDP is the only party (together with its sister party – People’s Democratic Party) to implement a “co-chairperson” system. This system allows a mayor position to be splitted between one male and one female member. Actually, when the PDP started with this practice, there were debates about it because there was no such a law in Turkey. So, the PDP’s contribution was not only putting “co-chairmanship” into their practice, but in politics as well. This praxis is now in law, which means one much more important achievement. Also, “thanks to such a system, southeast Turkey by far took the lead in the nomination and election of female candidates, despite prevalent problematic traditions in the region, such as child marriage and honor killings.”¹⁹

4. The European Union and gender equality

Women’s point of view should be integrated from the beginning, when the structure is laid down. It is much cheaper today, when we have to correct for women’s point of view afterwards. It is like building a house and forgetting plumbing, the kitchens, bathrooms, and therefore have to reconstruct the entire building.

¹⁸ Çiğdem, Aydın. “Parties fail to nominate enough women in local elections”, Sunday’s Zaman, 2014. Available on: <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-340836-parties-fail-to-nominate-enough-women-in-local-elections.html>

¹⁹ Sunday’s Zaman. “Southeast leads in female mayors thanks to quota”, 2014. Available on: <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-344365-southeast-leads-in-female-mayors-thanks-to-quota.html>

Danish Environmental Minister Lone Dybkjaer, at the First European Summit on 'Women in Power'

One of the European Union's founding values is gender equality, which goes back to the 1957 when the Treaty of Rome was founded. "A treaty provided that member states ensure and maintain the principle that women and men receive equal pay for equal work."²⁰

But, when it comes to the women's political participation, an important step took a place in 1995. This was the Fourth UN World Conference in Beijing where gender mainstreaming was established as "a major strategy for the promoting gender equality".²¹ This strategy includes gender equality issues in all activities, and one of the objectives to which priority is given in the European Union action programmes is an equitable distribution of women and men in the decision-making processes. ²² Therefore, in the center of the European Union gender equality programme is that women must have the same opportunities as men. Since these developments, the European Union has introduced different kind of measures in order to achieve goals. One of the measures is gender quota, either written in the constitution or voluntary. In most of the EU member countries voluntary quotas have been used by most of the political parties as a way to increase women's political participation.

4.1. Women in the EU national parliaments and governments

The share of women in the EU national parliaments is on average 27%²³. This percentage is violating EU's democratic principles of gender equality in political

²⁰ A. Naples, Nancy and Manisha Desai. *"Women's Activism and Globalisation: Linking Struggles and Global Politics"*, New York: Routledge, 2002, p. 303

²¹ United Nations Publications. *"Gender Mainstreaming: An Overview"*, 2002, pp.5

²² European Commission, Employment and Social Affairs. *"Equal opportunities for women and men in the European Union: Overview"*, 2003, p.13

²³ European Parliamentary Research Service. *"European and National Parliaments: % of women Members"*, 2014. Available on: http://epthinktank.eu/2014/02/28/women-in-politics-business-and-public-administration-in-the-eu/women_parliaments/

representation. Therefore, many member states have adopted gender quotas for national parliaments perceiving it as an effective way to prevent this violating.

Some countries have introduced legislated gender quotas, like Poland, Spain, Slovenia, Portugal, Greece, Belgium, and France, whereas in some countries political parties use quotas voluntary, like in Sweden, Germany and the United Kingdom.

The introduction of gender quotas has led to fast and significant increases in women's political representation but also to some disappointments. Quotas are no guarantee for gender balance in political representation because its effectiveness highly depends on the design of the rest of system and in particular the electoral system. The decisive factor is where the quotas are implemented, for instance at the level of the pool of candidates, at the electoral lists or at reserved seats.²⁴

This means that in the proportional electoral systems there is a zipper principle where in the list of candidates need to be female and male alternately and this is a good tool to ensure a balance. But, in some countries this system is not efficient because result can be more votes for men which mean more than on the candidate list basis of the gender composition. However, a majoritarian system (like in the United Kingdom) seems more effective instrument because of the "women only" lists.

Yet, quotas are not the only way for achieving better balance in women and men representation in national parliaments. For example, member countries like Sweden and Denmark have a high percentage of women in the parliament without the use of quota system. These results came from the efficient policies and pressure of women's movements. Nevertheless, in the EU member states, the average share of women in upper houses of parliament (where relevant) increased slightly and reached 25% (+1pp), mainly due to a significant increase in the number women in the Bundesrat in Germany (from 29% to 39%,

²⁴ European Commission's Network to Promote Women in Decision-making in Politics and the Economy. *"The quota-instrument: different approaches across Europe"*, 2011, pp.7

+10pp). Also, the share of women in national governments has increased slightly to 28% (+1pp) for senior ministers and to 26% (+2pp) for junior ministers. New government appointments and reshuffles have triggered positive changes in a number of Member States.²⁵ The highest percentage of women in parliament is holds Sweden with 44%, while the lowest percentage is in Hungary with 9%. When we compare these two countries with Turkey, we can see that Turkey is even under the level of the EU's deviant case, which will be explained more in details in the next part of the paper.

4.1.1. Comparison of Hungary as EU's deviant case and Turkey

Hungary is known as the EU's deviant case when comes to the women's representation in politics. There are only 9% of women in parliament, when comparing it with the Turkey's standing, is still higher. But, there are some similarities between these two countries that we can perceive them as one of the causes for low percentage of women's representation. Firstly, when we look at the history, women in Hungary were first granted the right to vote in 1918, which is 16 years before Turkish women. This similarity shows that these two countries were one of the first who gave rights to women. However, almost one century after this important development, women in Hungary and Turkey enjoy less right than most of the women in other parts of the world. The question arises: What is the cause? Many argue that both of the countries can be seen as "less democratic" because of the current leading Prime Ministers. Hungarian PM Viktor Orban "has a lot in common with Russia's Vladimir Putin and Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan. He has pushed through constitutional changes outlawing gay marriage and proclaiming Christianity's special role as a cornerstone of Hungarian statehood. He fans the flames of Hungarian nationalism, issuing Hungarian

²⁵ European Commission. "Women and Men in decision-making highlights: First quarter 2014", 2014. Available on: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/gender-decision-making/database/highlights/index_en.htm

passports to ethnic Hungarians living in neighboring countries and, in a recent speech, calling Serbian and Romanian towns by their Hungarian names”.²⁶ Also, Erdogan is known as more conservative leader who states that he thinks of religion not in politics, but rather politics as a safeguard of religious expression.²⁷ When comes to the constitution, both of the countries have no constitutional barriers to female political representation. On the other hand, Hungary and Turkey did not introduce quotas to increase women’s representation in politics mainly because of the insufficient social mobilization and the lack of political will.²⁸

However, no matter what are the similarities and causes for Hungary and Turkey’s low percentage of women’s political representation, it is the fact that Turkey has lower number of women in politics. This shows that although Hungary is perceived as EU’s deviant case, Turkey has to work on providing more rights for women and making this percentage higher.

4.2. Women at the European Union level

The European Union share of female members is 36% in the European Parliament.²⁹ If we look at the distribution of women by country, eight countries have even or almost surpassed parity which is 40% of women. Finland is at the top with the 62% female members of European Parliament. Other good ranking countries are Slovenia 50%, Estonia 50%, Denmark 47%, etc. however, in more than a half of the EU member countries parity in this

²⁶Bershidsky, Leonid, “*Is Hungary the EU’s only dictatorship?*”, 2013. Available on:

<http://www.bloombergview.com/articles/2014-04-07/is-hungary-the-eu-s-only-dictatorship>

²⁷ Rabasa, Angel. “*The Muslim World After 9/11*”. Great Britain: Rand Corporation, 2004, p. 188

²⁸ Varnagy, Reka. “Women’s (under)representation in Hungarian Parliament”. OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2013, p. 5

²⁹ European Parliamentary Research Service, “*European and National Parliaments: % of women Members*”, 2014. Available on: http://epthinktank.eu/2014/02/28/women-in-politics-business-and-public-administration-in-the-eu/women_parliaments/

respect is not achieved yet. Countries where the number of women in the European parliament is far under the average are Italy, Poland, Estonia and Czech Republic.³⁰

According to the report Factsheet – EEAS Mediation Support Project, in order to achieve better results,

There are several obstacles that have to be overcome before progress can be made. These include the pervasiveness of violence against women (which limits participation or desire for participation), the frequent use of slander against women politicians as a weapon to silence them, and the barriers that are sometimes associated with expectations and roles within their own families and communities that limit their ability to engage in drawn-out political processes. Barriers also come from persistent political exclusion. Yet with appropriate support, none of these factors are insurmountable or an excuse for inaction.³¹

5. The EU - Turkey

For Turkey, as the European Union candidate country, compliance with the gender equality principle is a pre-condition of membership.³² Therefore, women's political participation is one of the major areas of Turkey's accession process to the European Union. Štefan Füle, a Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy, came to Turkey last year and started his visit with meeting the Minister of Family and Social Policies Fatma Şahin. The topic of their discussion was the reform efforts for improvement women's

³⁰ 1. Ibid

³¹ European Union External Action. "Report: Factsheet – EEAS Mediation Support Project – Knowledge Product Women's Participation and Gender", 2012. Available on: http://eeas.europa.eu/cfsp/conflict_prevention/docs/2013_eeas_mediation_support_factsheet_women_participation-and-gender_en.pdf

³² Bozkurt, Emine. "Women's human rights: Turkey's way to Europe". Available on: http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi_turkey_tpq_id_84.pdf

rights. Also, they participated at the conference “Progress in women’s human rights”, where Füle mentioned women’s political representation in Turkey. He said,

First, Turkey needs to make sustained efforts to increase women's political representation. Compared with the European Union average and international standards, Turkey lags behind in terms of women’s representation in political decision making at national, local and municipal levels. In the 2011 elections, women's participation in parliament increased approximately from 9% to 14% of its membership. This is still about a half of the European Union average. Turkey needs to encourage the political representation of women, especially at the municipal level, where only 1% of Turkish municipalities have a female mayor. All parties need to place a sufficient number of female candidates in eligible positions. The government of Turkey has set moderately ambitious targets in this regard. In the upcoming municipal elections in March 2014, the Commission will be observing the efforts of the Turkish government to significantly raise the participation of eligible women candidates with deep interest.³³

Now, six months after his visit, local elections were held in Turkey and the ‘picture’ of women’s participation changed a bit. The results showed improvement of women’s participation in Turkey, which is a good example how effective cooperation and commitment between Turkey and the EU can go in positive direction. Although Turkey has not yet reached European standards regarding gender equality, it is on the right way. So, instead providing temporary solutions, more progressive regularities should be introduced into the practice of all mediums of political participation. Also, there is the Europe 2020 Strategy which includes gender-specific national targets for education, employment, combating poverty, climate change, and research. If this strategy would serve to Turkey as an inspiration

³³ European Commission. “*EU-Turkey: In Istanbul on women’s rights and gender equality*”, 2013. Available on: http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/fule/headlines/news/2013/11/20131107_en.htm

to make its efforts more advanced and consolidated, it would be a one step closer to the democratic and the EU standards.

6. Conclusion

Gender equality, as a fundamental principle of democracy, is an important issue for all the EU member and candidate countries. Therefore, for Turkey as a country with the candidate status, having equal opportunities for women to be politically represented is an important issue. However, Turkey is a paradoxical country when comes to the gender equality - 80 years after introducing women rights, less than 20% of women are in the parliament which is far below the European standards. Today, lack of women rights is a very problematic issue in Turkey. The main barriers causing this situation are traditional gender roles; women themselves often prefer other occupations rather than competing ones; and religious (Islamic) views. When comes to the mediums for political participation, there are over 250 women's groups whose one of the common aims is fighting against patriarchal structure and traditional gender roles in Turkey. Also, after the 2014 local elections, a positive move of women's political participation in local governments took place. The number of elected female majors increased thirty percent. Here, the Peace and Democracy Party contributed where according to the number of female candidates who were listed for mayoral positions, all parties except this one have failed to comply with their previous promises and quotas for women. Except gender quotas, the most effective tool that the PDP is using is a co-chairmanship. Therefore, these mechanisms could be a good example for other parties to introduce.

Therefore, the answer to my research question: Why Turkey does not fit to the European Union standards regarding women's political participation? – is provided

throughout all the paper where the important issues in Turkey are first explained, and later the EU's issues and its attitude towards the accession of Turkey in this regard. Therefore, although Turkey is on the right way, still numbers did not reach an average standard of the European Union. To understand this, we have to understand many differences between Turkey's and Western countries' traditions, culture and religion. But, as Füle said, the EU is,

... aware that progress on women's rights also depends on a change in mentality and perceptions on gender. Such change cannot take place overnight, neither in Turkey nor anywhere else. More work is needed to break down stereotypes and change perceptions of gender roles in all spheres. It is already a few years since the Commission concluded that Turkey already has the overall legal framework that guarantees women's rights and gender equality broadly in place and in line with European standards. Turkey now needs to make sustained efforts to turn legislation into social, economic and political reality, along with the necessary change in mentality. And Minister Şahin, I appreciate your commitment and your steer on these issues. The European Union will be a solid partner and, whenever possible, also a resource for Turkey on this road.³⁴

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³⁴ European Commission. *“EU-Turkey: In Istanbul on women's rights and gender equality”*, 2013. Available on: http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/fule/headlines/news/2013/11/20131107_en.htm

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