

Media and politicians

There are no serious contents in the media that affirm female politicians

Many years of efforts of civil society and some women politicians on the practical implementation of the recommendations of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women did not yield the expected results in political and public life in BiH. and that the opportunities for women's political participation and political influence in the public and media spheres are extremely limited

Author: Dragana Erjavec

Bosnia and Herzegovina's political culture is predominantly male and it takes a lot of time, effort and initiative to change such a concept. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, more than half of the electorate is women, who still do not participate in decision-making, at any level of government. Gender equality is not recognized in the BiH Constitution either, and in percentage terms, in the legislative and executive branches of government, after the last local elections in November 2020, women's participation is only 20 percent.

No matter how successful they are in politics, or other areas of professional engagement, women most often present themselves as 'mothers', 'wives', 'businesswomen', 'politicians', with family support, while men generally never present themselves in such a context. .

Despite years of efforts to implement the recommendations of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, especially in political and public life, at the legislative level in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the 2020 local election campaign has shown that women in BiH are still unequal with men, but also that the possibilities of women's political participation and their political influence in the public and media spheres are still extremely limited. The intensity of their media representation most often fits into the representation of the political parties they come from, and the public perception of women politicians is not even close to their role and importance in political life.

Electoral and legislative framework in BiH

Political decision-makers in Bosnia and Herzegovina are mostly men. The quotas introduced in 1997, that political parties must put at least 30% of women on the electoral lists, are only a small step. Today, that percentage has risen to 40% of women on electoral lists. There are several reasons why women are underrepresented on electoral lists, party bodies, state institutions and branches of

government. Patriarchal society, social situation, prejudices, different party and ethnic affiliation, education or even disinterest of the female population, are the main culprits for this situation.

On the other hand, BiH has done a lot in the legal framework. Numerous human rights conventions, standards and directives recommended by the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU) have been signed. The legislative framework governing gender equality in BiH includes constitutional and legal provisions guaranteeing equality. Thus, for example, in the BiH Constitution, Article 2 on human rights and fundamental freedoms explicitly prohibits discrimination in the enjoyment of these rights and freedoms on any grounds, including gender discrimination. The 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women is an integral part of the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, is directly applicable and takes precedence over domestic law. This Convention emphasizes the principles that states must guarantee in the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as in ensuring equal opportunities for women in all spheres of society. The entity constitution of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and the Republika Srpska (RS) also prohibits gender discrimination, as does the Statute of the Brcko District of BiH.

The Law on Gender Equality in BiH, adopted in 2003 and amended in 2009, is the basic document establishing gender equality in BiH. This law is in line with the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination and defines forms of gender discrimination, protection mechanisms, and the obligations of institutions in achieving gender equality. Furthermore, the law stipulates that everyone has the right to access the media, regardless of gender, but, in relation to gender, prohibits public display of any person in an offensive manner. Also, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, numerous institutional mechanisms for gender equality have been established in the competent government institutions (state agency and two entity gender centers), but also at the local level, ie municipalities and cities in BiH and cantons in the Federation of BiH.

Although a uniform approach has not been achieved so far in establishing these mechanisms, as well as in their competencies in accordance with the Law on Gender Equality in BiH, these mechanisms should be responsible for: implementing the Law on Gender Equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina at the level of government. , for the coordination and implementation of program objectives from the Gender Action Plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also for ensuring the implementation of international standards in the field of gender equality.

Thus, in July 2020, the BiH Agency for Gender Equality sent an open letter entitled "Nominate and promote candidates - it benefits everyone!", Inviting political entities, candidates (registered for the 2020 Local Elections), to and especially during the election campaign, public appearances and advertisements are not based on gender-based prejudices and stereotypes based on gender, marital and family status and sexual orientation of others, and do not use sexism, ie insulting and belittling people.

The election law in BiH is one of the most complex in the world

The Law on Gender Equality in BiH prescribed a quota of 40 percent for the underrepresented sex, and the BiH Election Law integrated this obligation that a minimum of 40 percent of the underrepresented sex, ie women, must be on the candidate lists.

BiH has one of the most complex constitutional systems, and thus one of the most complex election laws in the world. In response to the under-representation of women, gender quotas are a popular special measure, demonstrating their existence in one-third of countries globally. Before the quota was introduced in BiH, women's participation in electoral lists was minor. After the 1996 general elections, one woman was elected to the BiH Parliamentary Assembly (PSBiH) and one to the National Assembly of the Republika Srpska (NARS), and two women to the Federation of BiH Parliament (PFBiH).

After the introduction of the quota for the 1998 General Elections, there was a significant increase in women's participation to over 30% in the PABiH, 14.95% in the PFBiH and 22.9% in the NARS. From 1998 until today, the impact of the quota varies (from 7-26%), which leads to the conclusion that it is not in itself a sufficient instrument for achieving gender equality, but must be accompanied by other mechanisms.

The executive director of the United Women Foundation from Banja Luka, **Aleksandra Petrić**, says that gender equality must be legally protected in BiH, which is evidenced by the fact that the Election Law had to define that the percentage of women in power must be 40 percent. But even that is not respected.

"Where key decisions are made, where money and power are in the hands, there are very few women. The problem is that women politicians do not have the freedom to work outside party policies, so they are in some way conditioned by the misogynistic policies of political parties, not recognizing the rights concerning issues of importance to women, in terms of passing new laws," Petric said.

Men in positions of power

At all levels of government in BiH, there is a gender imbalance that is most pronounced at the highest levels of government, where BiH, for example, has never had a single woman member of the three-member Presidency with the post of head of state. Also, since the establishment of this position in 1994, only one woman has held the position of President of the Federation of BiH in the period from 2007 to 2011. No government in its full convocation has had more than two ministers, out of a total of 17 ministries, and so far only one entity, Republika Srpska, has elected a woman president.

Going to lower levels of government, men also dominated as prime ministers in all ten cantons in the FBiH, and among the 100 cantonal ministers there were only eight women, most often in the so-called classic women's portfolios dealing with housing, social and health care, work and

education. Of the 150 local communities, only 5 are run by women, and of the more than 120 political parties registered in BiH, only one is run by women. Men in BiH are the majority in diplomatic positions and in senior positions in public administration, and compared to the previous period, the percentage of women in the BiH Parliamentary Assembly is declining.

Within the division of power, women in BiH and FBiH are more represented in the judiciary than in any other branch. However, there is a disparity between the number of women working in the judiciary and the number of women in senior positions in the judiciary, or in higher jurisdictions. In places of power and decision-making, women continue to face the phenomenon of the "glass ceiling".

Edita Miftari, author of the study "Women's Political Participation in Bosnia and Herzegovina", points out that mostly other seats are reserved for women on the electoral lists, compared to men, and that a relatively small number of women hold party lists.

"The situation in BiH politics and the media during the election campaign confirms the worrying fact that we are still subject to stereotypes created by the patriarchal society in which we live, which does not know and recognize a politician in the same way as a politician and this is our biggest problem.", believes Miftari.

Figures show that women's participation in party lists for the state parliament most often varied between 40% and 43%, while for the federal parliament it was around 44%. The share of women on the party lists for the National Assembly of the Republika Srpska did not differ much from the share of women on the lists for the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH and the Federal Parliament and amounted to 41.45%.

"Gender equality in political life is the most important factor in achieving gender equality in society. It is also important to point out that greater representation of women in politics has the potential to lead to a higher level of education for girls and girls, to reduce their homework, but also to offer young women role models who can influence their desires and attitudes to become more involved decision-making processes in the society of which they are a part ", claims Miftari.

She also notes that the entry of more women into parliament changes the working climate and leads to more equal gender relations in the labor market, improving the position of women in the service sector, professional and managerial work, higher education, but also in very important trade union movements.

Local elections 2020 - a minor step forward

The 2020 local elections have been called for 64 municipal assemblies in the Federation of BiH, 56 municipal assemblies in the Republika Srpska, 120 mayoral positions in BiH, 14 city councils in the Federation, seven city assemblies in the Republika Srpska, and 22 mayoral seats in BiH. A total of 543 political entities participated in the same elections: 129 political parties, 262 independent candidates, 72 coalitions, nine lists of independent candidates and 71 independent

candidates belonging to national minorities. 30,809 candidates have been certified for the local elections. Out of 425 candidates for mayor or mayor. Only 29 women, or 6.82%, applied. The situation is somewhat better on the lists for municipal and city councils and the Brčko District Assembly, where out of 30,168 candidates, 12,753 are women, or 42.27%.

In the Local Elections for the City of Mostar, in the City Constituency which designates 13 council seats, none of the major parties had 50% or more women on the candidate lists, while only some lists with a small number of candidates for constituencies 22 council seats, including at least 50% women. In terms of gender equality, Bosnia and Herzegovina took a minor step forward in 2020: as many as one percent more women were elected than in previous local elections. Out of 140 mayoral positions, only five belonged to women (3.5%), and only 19.6% of women were elected to representative bodies.

The marginalization of women in leading positions in political life is reflected in their absence in higher positions of "power." Looking at the gender structure, for example, in the positions of ambassadors and consuls general in BiH diplomatic and consular missions or in managerial positions in public administration, it is clear that the vertical "passability" of women to higher positions in all spheres of management and decision-making is difficult. Men dominate in diplomatic and consular missions, as well as in decision-making positions in public administration (53% and more). We can rightly say that the participation of women in political and public life in BiH is a reflection of their position in all spheres of society and the attitude of society and citizens towards issues of gender equality.

The fact that only 29 women and 396 men ran for the leadership of municipalities and cities in last year's local elections in BiH, the current representative of Our Party in the BiH Parliament **Mirjana Marinković-Lepić**, considers confirmation that men obstruct women in political life in BiH.

"According to the data for candidates for mayors and mayors, in last year's local elections in BiH there was a strikingly small percentage of women, so that only confirms that we still live in a patriarchal society and the question is whether it will ever change ", says Marinković-Lepić.

Motherhood and family ahead of politics

The Law on Gender Equality in BiH, adopted in 2003 and amended in 2009, is a fundamental document establishing gender equality in BiH. Among other things, the law specifies that everyone has the right to access the media, regardless of gender, and prohibits the public portrayal of any person in an insulting, derogatory, or degrading manner. According to the Law, the media are obliged to develop awareness of gender equality through program concepts.

Speaking about her own experience of media representation, MP and member of the Commission for Gender Equality of the BiH Parliamentary Assembly Mirjana Marinković-Lepić points out that public services rarely invited her to be a guest in their programs, which is not surprising, because

"women in BiH are still they always fight for equality in the family, and only then in politics and in the media".

"As for the representation and respect of women in Our Party, of which I am a member, I think we can be satisfied in that segment. However, we do not have content in the media that would specifically affirm politicians and what they do, and that is something we all need to work on more in the future," said Marinković-Lepić.

Only 10 percent of women in politics are present in the media in BiH, according to data from the Analysis of Gender Representation and Representation of Women in the Media, conducted by the association "Novi Put" from Mostar in 2019. According to that analysis, the current President of the Republika Srpska, Zeljka Cvijanovic, the Speaker of the House of Representatives of the BiH Parliamentary Assembly, Borjana Krishto, and the Minister of Finance of the Federation of BiH, Jelka Milicevic, were the most present in the media.

"One of the biggest media problems is the portrayal of women primarily in the private sphere of life, household and family relations. No matter how successful they have been in their work, women generally still present themselves as 'mothers', 'wives', 'businesswomen', 'politicians', who have family support in what they do, while their male counterparts tend to be they never represent in such a context", points out the president of the association "Novi Put", **Abida Pehić**.

She adds that women are the least represented in topics related to politics and governance, and that significantly more men are cited as a source of information.

"Women are cited in only about 15 percent of cases. While men are predominantly represented in the news through their functions in stories, women are mostly represented by focusing on their sexual attributes, rather than on their ideas, activities and successes", says Pehić.

Dragana Miljković, a social worker of the United Women Foundation from Banja Luka, states that women in the media in BiH are much less represented in political topics, or topics of public interest that are of most interest to the general public.

"Men dominate as interlocutors in the media and are the main characters in newspaper articles. Women are most visible in shows about cooking, family, or light content shows. In order for awareness in society to change, it is necessary to promote women in all spheres of life and work with a focus on her social achievements. We have a large number of women who are in office, intelligent, successful and hard-working, but their story is not heard. The fact that in addition to a successful career, she is also successful in other fields is a benefit that no man can boast of. Therefore, the role of women in society should be glorified and placed at the top of the list, where they certainly deserve to belong", concludes Miljković.

Media attention mainly to leaders

Participating in the conference *"Women in Politics through Media Glasses"*, organized by the *Association of BH Journalists*, within the *Women's Press Forum* project, and with the support of

the US Embassy in BiH, **Zlatiborka Popov-Momčinović**, professor at the Faculty of Philosophy in East Sarajevo, said that in the "vicious triangle" are the parties - media - patriarchal society, for the marginalization of women politicians are still most responsible political parties.

"The focus of media attention is always on leaders. Even in the local election campaigns, "state-building" and not "communal" issues dominate, so it is difficult for women candidates to come to terms, because state-building topics are reserved for party leaders", Popov-Momcinovic said.

She added that "politics is a dirty business" stories are also common, which is why men try to "protect" women from that dirt, putting them aside.

"The problem is that women do not recognize this hoax. Instead of opposing this pattern, we, by agreeing to it, are investing in our oppression ", concluded Popov-Momčinović.

At the same conference that brought together politicians, editors and journalists with the aim of raising public awareness of the importance of women's visibility in media content, he pointed out that a special problem is that many media and journalists are still enslaved to stereotypes some politician looks, how she dresses, what she cooks.

Populism is more important than serious programs

Vildana Selimbegović, editor-in-chief of Sarajevo's *Oslobođenje*, recalled one such example.

"When Azra Hadžiahmetović, while she was the Minister of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations, together with two male colleagues, was a guest on the public service BHT, they were asked when we will be in the EU, what is the fate of the state... And Azra, who prepared 49 laws from the European agenda, was asked what she would cook for Eid ", stated Selimbegović.

She emphasized the importance of social networks, as a tool with the help of which women politicians can send a message and attract the attention of the mainstream media. As an example of good communication, she mentioned the "tweets" of Mirjana Marinković-Lepić, the representative of Our Party in the BiH Parliament.

This politician, however, points out that serious messages often lose the battle with populist pearls.

"When Dragan Mektić says that "we are discussing the impact of moisture on the cupboard", it is found in all media in BiH in a second, and when we are dealing with the budget or wasting money on the citizens of this country, few are interested," said Mirjana-Marinković Lepić.

While it is undeniable that the media presentation of women as having political power is extremely important for a democratic society, apart from reporting on women in politics, it is important to pay attention to how they are reported. For this reason, the media must not forget that the portrayal of women politicians can influence the way the public perceives them, and thus diminish their political power, or make it more difficult to win important political positions in government or the legislature.

Participation of women in politics - a priority of the authorities in BiH

Mentality, patriarchal society and prejudice determine where a woman's place is, and how far her decisions should be. (Un)education and social situation affect the ways women participate in politics, which does not only mean being on the list every two or four years, but much more. The media, which provide countless opportunities for women politicians to represent them, in some cases do not help a counter-effect when it comes to promoting successful women in politics and their ideas. However, women's participation in politics remains one of the priorities of the BiH authorities, as clearly stated in the current Gender Action Plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period 2018-2022 and the Action Plan for the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 "Women, Peace and security".

Despite this, women remain underrepresented in decision-making at all levels in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while visibility and presence of women politicians in public is particularly low in the pre-election months. This is a consequence of the technique of gender domination applied by political party elites, as well as the fact that the media re-emphasize dominant ideologies and gender stereotypes about women in politics, which inevitably has a negative impact on their election results. Women and men must have equal power to shape society and their own lives, which is not only a human right, but also a matter of democracy and justice. Therefore, identifying and removing structural and cultural barriers to women's participation in public and political life is a key step towards reducing and eliminating gender inequality.

In a traditional society such as BiH, optimism and trust that the electorate will not be guided by stereotypes about gender roles in the election of their representatives in power, in all likelihood, is a luxury that women and the entire BiH society cannot afford. On the other hand, the issue of gender equality is very important for BiH from the aspect of development of the entire society, because it is questionable how a society can function normally, if half of its population, in this case women, cannot participate equally in decision making.

Disclaimer: *This text was created within the project "Women's Press Forum" funded by the Embassy of the United States of America in BiH. The contents of this text are the sole responsibility of the authors and the Association of BH Journalists, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Embassy of the United States of America in BiH.*