

THE EUROPEANIZATION OF THE NATIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES THROUGH THE GENDER COMPONENT. CASE-STUDY: THE DEMOCRATIC LIBERAL PARTY IN ROMANIA'S 2014 EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyse if the national political parties experience an Europeanization process through the harmonization of their principles and practice with the ones of the European political groups they are part of. In this regard, I shall use the gender dimension as an Europeanization factor. I choose the Democratic Liberal Party as a case study because it is the biggest right party in Romania, because it is affiliated to the Group of the European People's Party (the biggest political group in the European Parliament) and because of the ideological premises that a right party would be reluctant to change and to the increase of women's political participation. An interesting aspect is also the merge of the DLP with the National Liberal Party just after the closing of the 2014 European elections. The analytical approach will be focused on if and how the Democratic Liberal Party's political behaviour regarding women's access to political participation changes when it interacts with the Group of the European People's Party. More precisely, I shall correlate the ideological position of the Democratic Liberal Party, its political behaviour when it comes to elections at the national level, on one hand, and European elections, on the other hand. The main elements of the case study will be the gender dimension of the selection process for the party's candidates for the elections and of the professionalization of the proposed candidates. The theoretical framework of the paper is represented by political representation theories and the ones regarding the Europeanization of political parties.

Keywords: *Europeanization, political parties, gender equality, political representation, women's political participation, elections*

1. Introduction

The research area of the proposed study is the political science one, so this will be the lens through which I will analyse the Europeanization level in political parties' electoral behaviour with respect to women's nomination as candidates for electoral processes.

The importance of the proposed study resides in the fact that it creates the possibility of measuring the Europeanization phenomenon upon Romanian political parties. This can only be made throughout the comparison of the results of the two analysis of the changes that the European political family induces in the electoral practice of the national political parties, especially since "the impact of Europeanization is typically incremental, irregular and uneven over time and between locations, national and subnational" and since there is no study that regards the DLP-EPP interaction, this paper comes to fill in the void of the analysis of the biggest Christian Democratic Party in Romania, making it possible to make a parallel to the analysis of the biggest Social-Democratic Party¹.

The objectives of this paper are to observe if the European political family of the Democratic-Liberal

Party (DLP), the European People's Party (EPP), produces effects upon its national component in terms of promoting gender equality.

The methodology I shall use in this purpose is based on comparing the political behaviour of the DLP in national and European elections, in order to see if the supranational influence is visible only in the supranational context or it becomes internalized even in the absence of supranational elements. I shall use the analysis structure in *The Europeanization of the national political parties through the gender component. Case-study: The Social Democratic Party in Romania's 2014 European elections* article because it is important to have the same parts in order to better highlight resemblances and differences between the Europeanization degree upon the highest scored left and right parties in Romania.

The theoretical framework I use in this paper is a mixture of studies in the fields of Europeanization, women's political representation and political science.

This analysis will be a novelty for the domain because on one side, the scientific literature deals with the topic of Europeanization of political parties leaving aside the gender perspective and on the other, because it takes into consideration mainly the situation from parties belonging to Western member states.

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¹ Ioana Antoaneta Dodi, *The Europeanization of the national political parties through the gender component. Case-study: The Social Democratic Party in Romania's 2014 European elections*, submitted for evaluation at the "Challenges of the Knowledge Society" 2015 Conference

2. Europeanization of national political parties. Case-study: DLP in Romania

Harmsen and Wilson give a wide set of definitions of Europeanization, outlining it as: 1) “the emergence of new forms of European governance”, 2) “adaptation of national institutional structures and policymaking processes in response to the development of European integration”, 3) “policy isomorphism (...) concerned with the degree of convergence in substantive policy areas”, 4) “problem and opportunity for domestic political management”, 5) “modernization, taken to imply a series of structural transformations intended to bring these countries back into the European mainstream, defined with reference to the economic and political models which prevail in the more prosperous and influential ‘core’ countries”, 6) “joining Europe (...) in the context of EU enlargement”, 7) “reconstruction of identities (...) in a manner which relativizes -without necessarily supplanting- national identities” and 8) “transnationalism and cultural integration” between citizens in everyday life². In this paper I shall operationalize the Europeanization concept through some of the mentioned perspectives, more accurately, the first, the second, the fourth, the fifth and the seventh, given that the process that is subject of this analysis is the compliance of the political parties to the European inputs that they receive in terms of gender balanced participation.

Europeanization is seen as “a conceptual tool and of gauging patterns of domestic change”³, as “a process of structural changes, variously affecting actors and institutions, ideas and interests”⁴. These dimensions of Europeanization set the framework for comparing the DLP’s political behaviour in national and European elections, thus distinguishing any change between the two contexts.

Europeanization is conceptualized “as a basis of separation for social, cultural and religious identities and interests within the broad geographical area”⁵, so the evolution of the gender component on the European party scene might lead to a shift of interests and identities from the national level to the European one, thus applying a pressure upon national parties to comply to the European practice in order to continue to attract the citizens’ votes.

Given the fact that “the term Europeanization has been employed to describe new patterns of behaviour and decision making among political actors and institutions resulting from the impact of European integration”⁶ and “the adjustment evident in the institutional setting - incorporating the norms, rules, identities and interests of actors within a structured set of relationships - at the level of member states, consequent on EU obligations”⁷, we can measure the grade of Europeanization regarding the political parties’ institution in Romania by analysing a) the way that the national political parties apply the same type of rules as their European political families in European level, but ignore them at the national level and b) if they act in accordance with their political ideology in the particular case of assuring an equitable gender representation among their candidates.

The European People’s Party is the biggest group in the European Parliament, having 221 members of the European Parliament (MEPs), representing 29,43% of the seats. It is positioned on the right side of the classical ideological axis. This also influences the party’s choice when nominating its candidates: Christian-democracy has a “limited emancipatory potential for women, due to strong preference for community values, patriarchal and traditional”⁸.

When searching for elements that refer to the gender component in the EPP manifesto, the results are as expected from the previous paragraph: women are by no means mentioned⁹. There is no reference to any element referring neither to enhancing women’s political participation nor to fighting physical, social and economic forms of violence against them.

In the EPP’s Action Programme, equality between women and men is mentioned among the general principles such as “the separation of powers, democracy and the rule of law” and traditional terms as “family”¹⁰. Other references are made mainly in economical contexts of unused labour resource: “We aim to increase the employment of women, not only to give practical expression to the value we place on promoting equality between women and men, but also to contribute to general economic and social development”, “we encourage the implementation of proactive measures that specifically target the full inclusion of young women into the labour market”¹¹.

² Robert Harmsen, Thomas M. Wilson, *Approaches to Europeanization* in Robert Harmsen, Thomas M. Wilson, *Europeanization: Institution, Identities and Citizenship*, (Netherlands: Rodopi, 2000), p. 14-18

³ Kevin Featherstone & George Kazamias *Introduction: Southern Europe and the Process of ‘Europeanization’*, *South European Society and Politics*, 5:2, 1-24, DOI: 10.1080/13608740508539600, (2000), p. 3

⁴ Kevin Featherstone, *Introduction: In the Name of ‘Europe’*, in Kevin Featherstone and Claudio Radaelli, *The Politics of Europeanization*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 3

⁵ Kevin Featherstone & George Kazamias *Introduction: Southern Europe and the Process of ‘Europeanization’*, *South European Society and Politics*, 5:2, 1-24, DOI: 10.1080/13608740508539600, (2000), p. 3-4

⁶ Thomas Poguntke; Nicholas Aylott; Robert Ladrech; Richard Kurt Luther, *The Europeanization of national party organizations. A conceptual analysis*, *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 46, (2007), p. 748

⁷ Kevin Featherstone & George Kazamias *Introduction: Southern Europe and the Process of ‘Europeanization’*, *South European Society and Politics*, 5:2, 1-24, DOI: 10.1080/13608740508539600, (2000), p. 6

⁸ Alice Iancu, *Crestin-democratia* in Mihaela Miroiu, *Ideologii politice actuale* (Iasi: Polirom, 2012), p. 144

⁹ European People’s Party, EPP Manifesto, <http://juncker.epp.eu/epp-manifesto?lang=en>

¹⁰ EPP Action programme, 2014, <http://www.epp.eu/epp-action-programme-2014-2019>, p. 3

¹¹ EPP Action programme, 2014, <http://www.epp.eu/epp-action-programme-2014-2019>, p. 9

Women's political participation remains a problem with no answers or instruments ment to solve it ("another important question that needs to be asked is how best to increase the number of women participating in the labour force and in decision-making positions") and gender violence is hardly present (in matters of human trafficking).

The EPP's internal organization includes EPP Women's official association that is dedicated to the "promotion of important women-related issues such as gender equality in the labour market and female entrepreneurship"¹². As we can see, the economic stimulus for seeking gender equality is still present. What is new is the assumption that women can be engaged in externalizing policies outside the European space ("our focus also goes to the role of women in promoting liberty, justice, human rights and democracy not only in Europe, but also in regions experiencing tremendous change, such as the Middle East and North Africa"), a problematic though non surprizing element taking into consideration that right and centre-right parties have the tendency of expanding their experience and practice towards what they consider as in need for them.

On the other hand, the EPP involves in the EU's policy making and the gender component is present, given the fact that the 4 priorities that the EPP group follows are "women as a motor of an inclusive European economy", "equal representation of women and men", "ending all violence against women" and "defending gender equality in the world"¹³.

The European elections in 2014 were a good moment for the parties to democratize their candidate selection process, given the fact that, for the first time in its history, the results of the European Parliament scrutiny would also influence the formation of the European Commission. The Lisbon Treaty provides that the European Parliament group that would win the European elections would also nominate the candidate for the presidency of the European Commission¹⁴. A very important aspect of this procedure is that the groups could announce their candidate for the Commission before the elections, thus using this element in their campaign. Hence, the candidates that each party would propose had to reflect as much as possible the party's vision and values in order to attract as many votes as possible, votes that indirectly would also back up the proposed President of the European Commission.

Thus, the DLP's candidate selection is very important for the analysis of the level of Europeanization of the political party practice. Hence, I shall compare it in the two defining situations: the national and the European elections. This way, we can observe if there is any change in the last one, when there is a pressure of the European group the DLP belongs to, the EPP or if the DLP has internalised gender balance aspects from the European level.

Romania's electoral law for the European Parliament is a list based model¹⁵, so it is also important the positions of the candidate on the party's proposal because even if it might comprise a balanced number of women and men, their hierarchy may favour or not a certain part for being elected given the fact that only the first part of the list will obtain seats after the percentage calculations.

In this respect, the DLP's approximate threshold can be obtained by analysing the data from the National Institute of Statistics and the Romanian Central Electoral Office concerning the DLP's scores in the last 4 elections:

Thereby, the DLP's scores are: 7,50% in 2000: 7,03% for the Chamber of Deputies and 7,57% for the Senate), 31,50% in 2004 (in the Justice and Truth Alliance, together with the National Liberal Party): 31,32% for the Chamber of Deputies and 31,77% for the Senate, 32,96% in 2008: 32,36% for the Chamber of Deputies and 33,57% for the Senate and 16,6% in 2012 (in The Just Romania Alliance, together with the National Peasant Christian-Democratic Party and the Civic Force): 16,50% for the Chamber of Deputies and 16,70% for the Senate. The average is thus 22,14%, allowing a significant part of its candidates to qualify for the membership.

The comparative analysis takes into consideration the European elections that have been organised in Romania since its accession to the European Union¹⁶ and the national elections¹⁷ respectively.

At the 2004 national elections, the DLP proposed 50 candidates, from whom 11 were women (22%) and 39 men (78%). The differences between the Chamber of Deputies¹⁸ (9 women and 26 men of a total of 35) and the Senate¹⁹ list (2 women and 10 men of a total of 15) were significant, but both low: 26% women in the first and 13% in the second.

In the same way, at the 2007 European elections²⁰, the DLP proposed 44 candidates, from whom 11 were women (25%) and 33 men (75%). As

¹² EPP Women Association, <http://www.epp-women.org/about-epp-women/about-epp-women/>

¹³ EPP group topic on Gender Equality, <http://www.eppgroup.eu/topic/Gender-equality>

¹⁴ Article 9A of the Lisbon Treaty, Official Journal of the European Union, C306/2007, p. 17

¹⁵ Permanent Electoral Authority, *Law no. 33 of 16 January 2007 Republished on the organization of European Parliament elections*

¹⁶ European elections held in 2007, 2009, 2014.

¹⁷ National elections held in 2004, 2008, 2012.

¹⁸ Candidate list of the DLP for the 2004 parliamentary elections for the Chamber of Deputies of Romania, <http://www4.pmb.ro/wwwt/wwwcs/electorale/DEPUTATI.htm>

¹⁹ Candidate list of the DLP for the 2004 parliamentary elections for the Senate of Romania, <http://www4.pmb.ro/wwwt/wwwcs/electorale/SENAT.htm>

²⁰ Candidates list for the European Elections, 2007, <http://www.alegeri.tv/europarlamentare-2007/partidul-democrat-pd>

said before, the configuration on the list is also important, resulting in favouring women in the national elections with 35% over the eligible threshold and also in the European elections with 40% women in 4 out of the 10 eligible positions. Therefore, the list is closer to a gender balanced one in the European context, but also in the national one.

At the 2008 national elections²¹, the DLP proposed 452 candidates, from whom 58 were women (13%) and 394 men (87%). The differences between the Chamber of Deputies (49 women and 266 men of a total of 315) and the Senate (9 women and 128 men of a total of 137) were not significant, given the fact that they were both very low: 16% women in the first and 7% in the second.

By contrast, at the 2009 European elections²², the DLP proposed 43 candidates, from whom 10 were women (23%) and 33 men (77%). As said before, the configuration on the list or in eligible constituencies is also important, favouring them in the European elections with 20% in the eligible positions. The gender balance is higher in the European elections, with a difference of about 5%, but low percentage for both situations.

At the 2012 national elections²³, the DLP proposed 452 candidates, from whom 47 were women (10%) and 405 men (90%). The differences between the Chamber of Deputies (42 women and 273 men of a total of 315) and the Senate (5 women and 132 men of a total of 137) were not significant: 13% women in the first and 4% in the second, both being situated extremely low.

By contrast, at the 2014 European elections²⁴, the DLP proposed 42 candidates, from whom 10 were women (23%) and 32 men (76%). As said before, the configuration on the list or in eligible constituencies is also important, not favouring them in the European elections with only one woman, so 0,11% in the 9 eligible positions.

Thereby, the closest the DLP got to a gender balanced candidate proposal was in the 2004 and 2007 national and European elections, with a 35% to 40% eligible candidates. The next elections show a decrease instead of a consolidation of this practice, but this may actually be the non-contested tradition, the 2004/2007 situation being in fact an exception determined by the fact that Romania was in the pre-accession period and the party had to construct a certain image for the European political family on one hand and for the voters that were enthusiastic with the idea of participating at the first elections after the accession. The 2014 European elections candidate selection process ranks as the worst for women, while

confirming though the practice observed at the 2012 national process.

Moreover, the DLP's affiliation is a Christian-Democratic one that is more reluctant to implementing affirmative measures which favourite women in the electoral process, so this element also works in that direction.

An important element for this analysis is the DLP's co-optation of the National Liberal Party (NLP) in the European People's Party immediately after the May 2014 elections. Afterwards, the DLP merged with the NLP, but it still brings together a core group of politicians that will probably exercise their influence within the leadership of the new NLP, thus continuing the political practice of the gone DLP.

3. Conclusions

This article meant to offer a new approach, blending electoral studies with ones regarding the Europeanization process and gender mainstreaming.

The results have shown that the influence of the European political family does not produce effects on the national party. Although Winn and Harris affirm that "changing policy choices, path-dependence, policy behaviours and national discourses have changed considerably with increased 'Europeanisation' since 1990"²⁵, this does not uniformly apply to all components, given the fact that there are other factors that maintain the resistance, as the ideology or the magnitude of the differences between the status quo and the ideal aim.

In conclusion, the DLP tended to comply with the European norm during the pre-accession period and at the European elections in the first year of membership. They still hold eligible women candidates under the threshold of 30% that women's political representation theories mark as necessary for coagulating a group that can overcome the patriarchal power relations in the legislative. Therefore, the gender component does not represent a benchmark of Europeanization for the Democratic-Liberal Party in Romania, all though it remains in a shared gap with the European People's Party and other political organizations that share the Christian-Democratic ideology.

The study's results can have an impact on the members of the political parties in Romania, which can take a decision regarding their future electoral strategies taking into consideration or not the European more or less targeted recommendations regarding women's participation in political activities.

²¹ Central Electoral Office, Candidates for the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate of the Parliament according to the political parties and gender, <http://www.becparlamentare2008.ro/status/Defalcarea%20candidatilor%20pe%20partide%20si%20sexe.pdf>

²² Candidates list for the European Elections, 2009, <http://www.alegeri.tv/alegeri-europarlamentare-2009/partidul-democrat-liberal-pdl>

²³ Central Electoral Office, Candidates for the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate of the Parliament <http://www.becparlamentare2012.ro/statistici%20rezultate%20finale.html>

²⁴ Candidates list for the European Elections, 2014, <http://www.europeanvoice.com/election-2014-candidates/>

²⁵ Neil Winn and Erika Harris, *Introduction: 'Europeanisation': conceptual and empirical considerations*, Perspectives on European Politics and Society, 4:1, 1-11, DOI: 10.1080/15705850308438850, 2003, p. 7

Future research can either relate to other elements of Europeanization or continue to focus on

the gender perspective of parties' way of doing politics at both national and European levels.

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