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WOMEN IN ROMANIAN POLITICS BETWEEN DESIDERATUM AND HISTORICAL REALITY

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Abstract: *The recognition of electoral rights and the participation of women in political life did not generate a fair representation of them in elected political positions. Beyond discussions or polemics, the need for women's involvement in politics cannot be ignored, and representation must manifest itself as the basic principle upon which any genuine democracy develops. Through this study, we propose an analysis of women's participation in political life from the perspective of the reality that Romanian society has faced since the first manifestations of emancipation and winning electoral rights for women until now, when they are still under-represented in elected political offices.*

Keywords: *women in politics; gender equality; representation; Romanian society; electoral rights.*

Women in politics represents one of the topics that are increasingly addressed in the specialized literature of recent years [Devroe, R., Wauters, B. 2018, pp. 788–800; Rodat, S. 2019, pp. 152–169; Johnson, C., Williams, B. 2020, pp. 943–950; Rovența-Frumușani, D. 2022, pp. 212–224], and it is among the concerns of many researches in the sociological, historical, and political fields [Băluță, O. 2017, pp. 12–21; Motoi, G. 2019, pp. 74–82; Vlase, I., Băluță, I. 2022]. The interest in such a subject becomes even greater as it is also on the European Union's work agenda as a priority and an important topic for the community states. The political representation of women is part of the wider area of gender equality – an increasingly visible area at the level of democratic economic, political, health, and social policies [Porumbescu, A., Pogan, L. D. 2021, pp. 68–79; Belova, G., Ivanova, A. 2023; Müller, H., Pansardi, P. 2023].

The recognition of electoral rights and the involvement of women in politics did not generate a fair representation of them in elected political positions. In the case of Romania, the situation is more complicated if we consider the existence of some non-negligible gaps in relation to the western states of the European Union, occupying the last places in the Gender Equality Index (GEI), and being rather close to some states without a robust democracy [Gabor, A. 2021, p. 1].

Through our research, we propose an incursion into the participation of Romanian women in political life from the perspective of the reality that Romanian society has faced in the past, but also in the present, both as a main condition for better governance, and from the perspective of gender equality and the representation of women in elected political positions.

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The study is based on qualitative research, which involves analysis of specialized literature and legislative documentation, specific to winning political rights for women in Romania, and on quantitative research, which provides statistical data on the representation of women in Romanian politics, as well as comparative graphs which form a clear picture of their underrepresentation in the Romanian political space.

A first direction of the research refers to the struggle for the emancipation of women in Romania, which finds its beginnings in the first decades of the 19th century when an impressive number of historical documents certifies the appearance of feminist manifestations approximately at the same time as manifestations in countries such as France, Great Britain, or the United States. The publishing activity of the time came in support of the emancipation of women through the numerous contributions materialized in articles, studies, scientific information, or literary fragments [Ghionea, G. 2022a, pp. 321–331; Ghionea, G. 2022b, pp. 73–84]. All these events had the purpose of preparing the public for understanding this social phenomenon.

The second direction of the research considers the period of Romanian democracy when, after the communist period in which the representation of women in politics was limited to quantity and not to quality at all, and with the specificity of a totalitarian regime, Romanian society faced a period of problematic transition in which gender representation was not on the agenda of societal concerns and the Romanian political scene was an exclusively male space. At the same time, the developments following the start of the accession negotiations to the community space and the attempt to adopt gender quotas, as well as the current percentage of women's representation in elected political positions, will also be highlighted.

In the 19th century, the concern about the status of women in Romania was fully justified, considering that there were no elementary schools; boarding schools for girls were very few in number and they were not accessible to the lower social classes. All these shortcomings were accompanied by discrimination in the school curriculum, but especially by the exclusion of women from political life provided for in the Laws of Calimachi (1817) and Caragea (1818). These remained in force until Cuza's reforms and categorically prohibited political activities for women, enshrined the subordination of married women to men, and provided for numerous other restrictions [Mihăilescu, Ș. 1986, pp. 60–62; Cercel, S. 2021, p. 113; Cercel, S. 2022, p. 22]. With all these legally imposed restrictions, to which the social and mental ones were added, Romanian women got involved in the life of the communities they were part of. Their need for culture and education was demonstrated by the appearance of numerous cultural, religious, charitable, or aid societies, organized according to the model of the first feminist society, which had been established in 1850 [Bărbieru, M. 2015, p. 131].

At the beginning of the 20th century, many feminist associations were established throughout Romania [Negru, A. M. 2022, p. 106]. The Romanian Teachers' Union Association (Asociația Unirea Educatoarelor Române), which was founded in 1908 in Iași and which supported the education of girls and fought for women's political rights, had an intense activity. This association asked the Constituent Assembly, convened in 1914, to review the Constitution and enfranchise female teachers, doctors, writers, graduates, women with at least four classes. Obviously, this request was met with the hostile attitude of the parliamentarians. In July 1918, the Association for the Civil and Political Emancipation of Romanian Women was established in Iași, whose programme set out objectives aimed at involving women in *political life* by granting full civil, citizenship and political rights, exercising liberal professions and holding any public office, in *social life* by regulating work, encouraging and coordinating social activities, workshops and warehouses for selling goods produced by women, etc., and in *cultural life* by combating illiteracy, guiding women to trades, establishing schools for adults and cultural institutions. Directors of the Association were Maria Baiulescu, Elena Meissner, and Ella Negruzzi. Among the founding members were Eleonora Stratilescu, Maria Buțoreanu, Calypso Botez, Tereza Castan, Ana Conta-Kernbach, Sofia Nădejde, Isabela Sadoveanu, Sanda Filitti, Maria Moruzzi, Olga Sturdza, etc. The work of the Association included, among other things, the transmission of feminist ideas in the era and reclamation actions. Although the political and public efforts had limited results, it

was recorded as a real success to obtain the right to practice law, which was the case with Ella Negruzzi who fought to be admitted to the Bar for seven years, between 1913–1920 [Mihăilescu, Ș. 2002].

In 1921, the National Council of Romanian Women (CNFR) was established in Bucharest with the aim of bringing together feminist organizations in a federative form. Together with other women's associations¹ in the period leading up to the 1923 Constitution, the CNFR carried out actions to equalize the civil and political rights of women. In this sense, numerous debates and conferences were organized; studies, analyses, and legislative proposals were published; demonstrations, protests and memorials took place through which the associations supported the inclusion of women's full rights in the Constitution. In one of her studies, Calypso Botez² wrote about their unfavourable position in Romanian society at that time: *We, Romanian women from the Old Kingdom... are ranked as Eliade Rădulescu decided in 1866; between children, minors, madmen and idiots. We cannot manage our property, we cannot do any act without the man's authorization, we cannot raise our children as we want, we cannot dispose of anything in our house, as we wish, because the law assumes that in the house where there is a man, everything it's his. In a word, the woman moves only according to the magic wand of marital authority* [Botez, C. 1923, pp. 76–87].

Even though the granting of political rights to women was postponed, the principle of their co-optation in the communal and county councils was written into the text of the 1923 Constitution. In the debate that preceded the adoption of the Constitution, Calypso Botez noted that *the exclusion of women from voting means a sum of individuals to whom the laws are imposed without being asked, it means that the right to vote remains a privilege of a few, a privilege of a sex which, like any privilege, it has no reason to be found except in despotic societies* [Bordeianu, D. 2010, p. 54].

In order to win the right to vote, in the first decades of the interwar period, the actions of feminist associations in Romania intensified, and even the bold idea of establishing a political party to represent their interests was launched. Thus, Alexandrina Cantacuzino opined in favour of a political association that would bring balance to public life, and not a formation that would put women in opposition to men or that would harm society. Evidently, her initiative attracted a lot of criticism, including from some members of the feminist movement. Among them, the strongest voices were Elena Meissner, who considered the establishment of such a political structure a waste of forces, given that there were women's organizations in the country that had already gained prestige following the efforts made after the war, and Calypso Botez, who believed that *politics is one and the same for both sexes, who can only be collaborators within the same political formation, complementing each other in public work with the specifics of culture, skills, political sense* [Mihăilescu, Ș. 2006, pp. 25–27]. Such a political formation did not come into being, but through sustained efforts and pressure on the political leaders of the time, certain political rights were obtained for women.

The Administrative Unification Law of 1925 provided for the co-optation of female councillors (Art. 10) in proportion to the number of inhabitants in the localities – a maximum of seven councillors for urban communes with 250,000 inhabitants, five for communes with 100,000 inhabitants, three for communes with 50,000 residents, and two for the others (Art. 17) [Law No. 95/1925]. The Administrative Organization Law of 1929 provided for their right to be elected in communal and county councils [Law No. 167/1929]. Unfortunately, the electoral law adopted in 1926 did not bring any news.

¹ The Union of Romanian Women, the Association for the Civil and Political Emancipation of Romanian Women, the League for Women's Rights and Duties, and the National Orthodox Society of Romanian Women.

² Calypso Botez (1879–1933) graduated in Philosophy and History. She was one of the most ardent supporters of women's rights in Romania. As President of the Red Cross in Galați and Philosophy teacher at Carmen Sylva High School in Bucharest, she founded, together with Maria Baiulescu, Ella Negruzzi and Elena Meissner, the Association for the Civil and Political Emancipation of Romanian Women (Asociația pentru Emanciparea Civilă și Politică a Femeilor Române, AECPIFR). She was elected the first President of the Executive Committee of the National Council of Romanian Women, founded in 1921. She was a member of the Romanian Social Institute, a municipal councillor in Bucharest, and she also had political activity as a member of the National Peasant Party, on whose behalf she ran on the electoral lists in the 1930 spring municipal, communal and county elections [Grigore, A. Accessible: January 2023].

It did not clarify women's right to vote [Ghițulescu, M. 2022, pp. 79–80], and it would deny them the right to be elected in Parliament. Belonging to the male sex as a condition for voting actually represented a serious violation of the 1923 Constitution, which provided in Art. 6 that *the civil rights of women will be established on the basis of the full equality of the two sexes* [**1923 Romanian Constitution, Art. 6**].

Although the 1929 law had many restrictions, it proved to be a first and important step in obtaining political rights for women in Romania. Female graduates of secondary, normal or vocational education, or the lower cycle, state, county or commune civil servants, war widows, women who had been decorated for their work during the war, and those who led cultural, philanthropic, or social assistance societies received the right to vote at the time of the entry into force of the law [**Art. 375 of Law No. 167/1929 for the Organization of Local Administration; Cosma, G.** 2002, pp. 52–53].

In the elections of 1930, a considerable part of women with the right to vote did not go to the polls, *fearing the scornful attitude and the ironies with which they were met by the male electorate* [Popescu, C. Historia]. Out of approximately 15,000 women with the right to vote, only 3,000 registered for the municipal elections. In the municipal, communal and county elections, the feminists Ella Negruzzi, Calypso Botez, Margareta Paximade-Ghelmeceanu and Ortansa Satmary ran for the PNT – a party that had a series of democratic reforms in its programme. Other feminists, such as Sarmiza Bilcescu-Alimăneștianu and Maria Pillat, ran on the PNL lists. The year 1930, however, presents us with its novelties – over 100 women became councillors throughout the country, two became mayors (in the communes of Cobia-Dâmbovița and Negrești), and in many localities they held the position of Deputy Mayor [Popescu, C. Historia].

A very important moment was the obtaining, according to the 1923 Constitution, of legal rights for women during the National Peasant Government (1928–1933). Because a series of difficulties were encountered, following a public meeting organized by several women's associations, on 28 February 1932 (in Bucharest), a delegation was formed to present the meeting's motion to the King and the Government. According to others, they demanded *the granting of civil rights on the basis of full equality according to Art. 6 of the Constitution and the introduction of the granting of political rights to Romanian women on the occasion of the presentation of the electoral reform project*, which was to be discussed in Parliament. On 13 April, the bill lifting the civil incapacity of married women was voted by a large majority in the Chamber of Deputies, and on 15 April in the Senate. The law was enacted on 21 April 1932 and marked a hugely important victory for the feminist movement in the interwar period [Mihăilescu, Ș. 2006, pp. 39–41].

The right to vote for women in Romania was realized for the first time through the Constitution of 1938, when it became a right stipulated in the Constitution – *The electoral law will fix the circumscriptions and will establish, according to the norms imposed above, the conditions required to be a voter, for men and women, incapacities, disqualifications, incompatibilities, the voting procedure and the guarantees of freedom of elections, as well as the number of deputies* [**Art. 61 of the Romanian Constitution**, published in the Official Gazette No. 48 of 27 February 1938]. Unfortunately, they were also not eligible for the Assembly of Deputies. The electoral law gave the right to vote only to the educated from the age of 30, which led to a limitation of the number of voters at the same time as affecting the number of women voters, because they were mostly illiterate. Practically, during the interwar period, Romanian women obtained electoral rights, but in reality, the number of those who could vote was limited. With all these limitations, the moment meant a great success in the fight for emancipation and winning electoral rights for women in Romania. Unfortunately, the success of 1938 coincided with the establishment of the Carlist dictatorship, which made it impossible to put the rights won into practice [Bordeianu, D. 2010, p. 55].

The communist regime, although marked by many limits specific to a totalitarian regime, established through the 1948 Constitution the basic principles on women's electoral rights and on equality of rights with men: *women have equal rights with men in all areas of state life, economic, social, cultural, political and private law fields* [**Art. 21 of the Constitution of the Romanian People's Republic 1948**]. Previously, Law No. 560 of 15 July 1946 for the election of the Assembly of Deputies

provided that women can vote from the age of 21 and can be elected from the age of 25 [Pantelimon, R. V. 2009, p. 116]. The 1948 Constitution stipulated that all citizens have the right to vote from the age of 18, and the right to be elected from the age of 23, guaranteeing the equality of Romanian citizens before the law, with broad political and social rights and without discrimination of any kind [Art. 18 of the Constitution of the Romanian People's Republic 1948]. Thus, women's political rights and gender equality were included. Subsequent fundamental laws made no further changes in this regard.

However, during the communist period, one cannot speak of a representation of women in Romanian politics, even if the regime wanted an egalitarian political ideology and the emancipation of women [Gabor, A. 2022]. On the other hand, there is no question of their non-involvement, considering that in the 1980s, they occupied a third of the parliamentary seats. What we know for sure, however, is that it was only a quantitative value, and that the percentage was inversely proportional to their importance in the party structures [Gârboni, E. S. 2014, p. 248]. Party politics promoted the image of a dynamic woman, with importance in all social segments, including the political one. Starting in 1976, it was ordered that all committees and executive bodies of the party be composed of 25% women, and from 1979, the general secretary of the PCR demanded that 30% of the members of the Party Congress be women and recommended the same quota for the Central Committee (CC) [Băluță, I. 2015, p. 175]. The positive effects were that the number of women in political structures increased and remained increased until the fall of the communist regime in Romania, but it was a totalitarian regime in which power was concentrated in the hands of the "supreme leader." The role of women in Romanian politics during the communist period was only decorative³, lacking participation in decisions as they were made by the men in the party leadership [Gârboni, E. S. 2014, p. 248] or only in the interest of the party if there happened to be a woman in a higher position. Moreover, the measures taken by the communist party for the emancipation of women had in mind their participation in the labour force ("heroic workers," as they were called) and in no way gender representation or emancipation. Nor should we forget the pro-natalist policies, which aimed to increase the population, implicitly the labour force. Women were basically just tools [Nimu, A. 2015, pp. 80–81], and feminist movements could not even be discussed under the conditions of the regime, as it was practically impossible to manifest anything other than state ideology.

However, there were a few women who managed to gain power during this period, but in no way can we consider this to be representative as long as it is about Elena Ceaușescu, the dictator's wife, or Ana Pauker, the first female Minister of Foreign Affairs in the world and a Soviet agent who remained in the collective mind as ruthless [Brodeală, E. 2015, p. 14].

With the fall of communism, Romanian society entered into a transformation and faced a new type of politics. The 1990s were marked by a difficult transition, with socio-economic tensions, where gender equality was a marginal segment from a political point of view, which faced a series of blockages, obstacles, and criticism [Radu, R. C., Avram, C. 2011; Băluță, O. 2020, p. 18]. The representation of women in politics was no representation at all. Gender equality began to gain some importance with the negotiations for Romania's accession to the community space. Under the new conditions, Law No. 429 on revising the Romanian Constitution stipulated that *public functions and dignities, civil or military, can be occupied, under the law, by persons who have Romanian citizenship and domicile in the country. The Romanian state guarantees equal opportunities between women and men for the occupation of these positions and dignities* [Law No. 429 of 23 October 2003 on revising the Romanian Constitution].

In detail, from 1990 until now, the representation of women in the Romanian political space has been in continuous growth, which started from very small percentages in the first decade. We understand the extremely negative experience of the 1990s through the prism of communism, which had not promoted equal opportunities in any of the fields of social life, and through the prism of the fact that politics in Romania was a space monopolized by men (like today in fact, but with quite a different

³ It is obvious that we cannot talk about Elena Ceaușescu in the same terms, as she exercised her power alongside the dictator, nor about several other women who were part of the presidential family or the very narrow circle of loyalists of the dictatorial couple.

weight). The lack of interest of women who were more oriented towards family and personal goals related to daily life cannot be excluded either [Bărbieru, M. 2021, pp. 258–259].

For a clearer outline of the representation of women in Romanian politics during the democratic period, we focus in our research on the portfolios assigned to women in the Romanian Parliament, with the mention that the analysis refers to the moment of investment; later, during the mandate, small differences may be recorded, which we consider insignificant for the overall picture due to the mobility of senators and deputies and to the replacement of a female parliamentarian by a male one or vice versa.

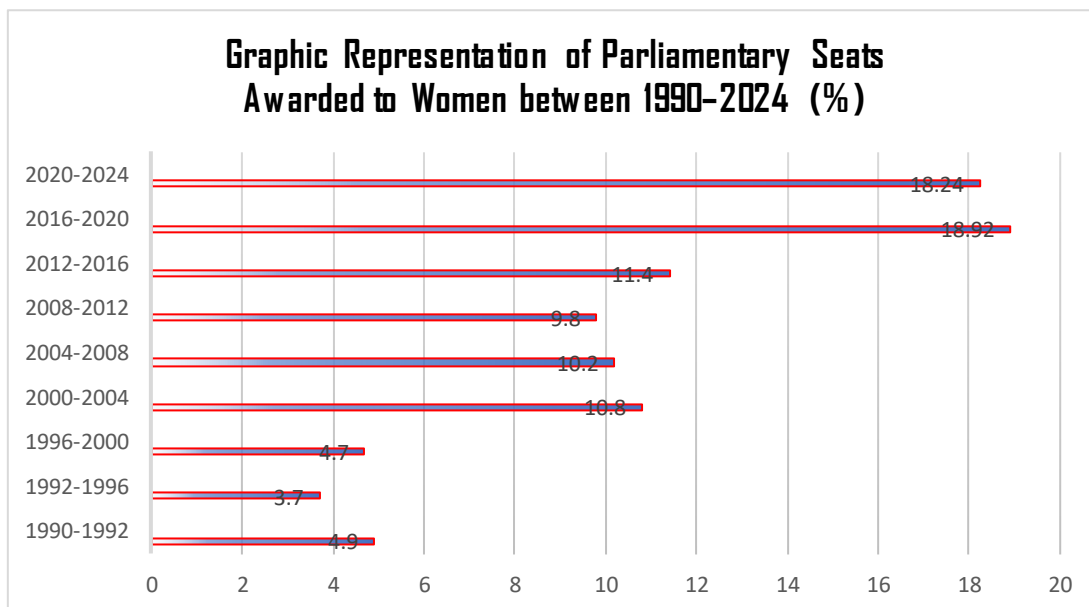


Figure 1. *Women in the Romanian Parliament (1990–2024)*

Source: Author data processing

The political underrepresentation of women in the first years of democracy is more than obvious if we refer to the Romanian Senate, where we note that, in 1990, there was only one woman with a portfolio and 118 men. Practically, the underrepresentation of women at this level was so small that it could not even be considered that the voice of a single woman could be heard in any way (99.2% men vs. 0.8% women). Unfortunately, the following legislatures were not better from this point of view either – three women in 1992 and two in 1996. Things were a little better for the Chamber of Deputies, but the representation there was quite small as well: 22 women in 1990, 13 in 1992, and 25 in 1996 [Băluță, O. 2014, p. 4]. The Romanian political space was an exclusively male arena.

Dynamism of the political representation of women in Romania can be observed from the year 2000 onwards, when it increased from 3.5–5% between 1990 and 2000 to 10–11%, between 2000 and 2016. The 2000 general election saw a tripling of the number of women in both Houses of Parliament and an increase in representation in government, but still far below the EU average. The increase is explainable if we consider that they had become much more involved in social and political life in a society already with other priorities, in which the accession negotiations to the European Union were essential. Later, between 2016 and 2024, the number reached 19%.

For the 2012 elections, 452 uninominal colleges were assigned and 2,473 competitors submitted their candidacies. Of these, 2,124 (85.89%) were men and 349 (14.11%) were women (for the Chamber of Deputies – 85.21% men and 14.79% women; for the Senate – 87.20% men and 12.80% women). The discrepancy between women and men can be seen right from the submission of applications. Following the validation of the elections, 588 mandates were assigned, of which 412 in the Chamber of Deputies (359 men and 53 women) and 176 in the Senate (162 men and 14 women) [Guvernul

României. Reprezentarea femeilor și bărbaților în alegerile parlamentare din 2012. Situația candidaturilor și a mandatelor atribuite în urma validării alegerilor, p. 7]. The representation of women in the Parliament for 2012 was kept within the percentage margins specific to the election rounds after 2000 (see Figure 2), with the gap between men and women still being very large, but not as large as in the first 10 post-December years.

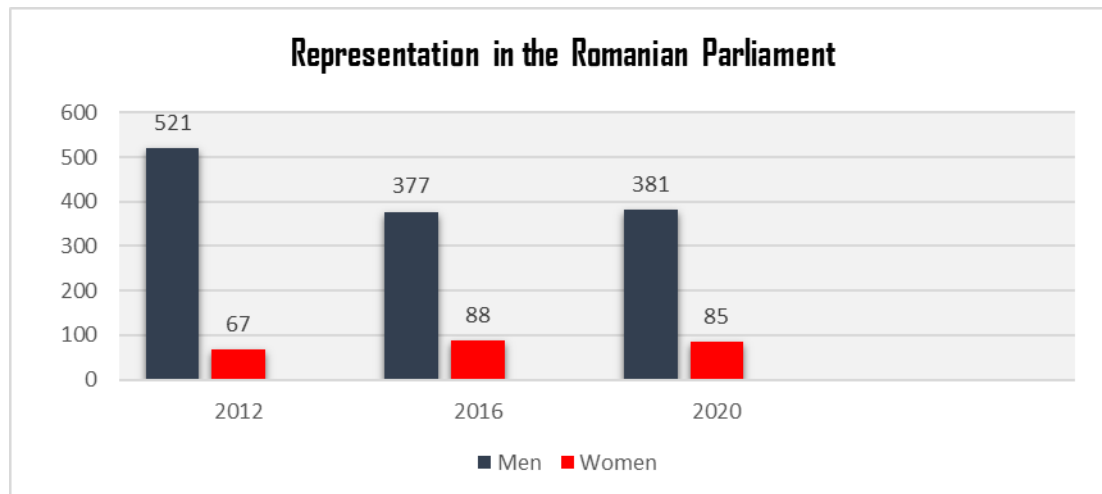


Figure 2. Women's Mandates vs. Men's Mandates in the Romanian Parliament (2012–2020)

Source: Author data processing

A change of direction followed at the policy level with the objective of increasing the number of women in Parliament. It was not by imposing gender quotas through legislation, but as an action to nominate a greater number of women to eligible seats at the party level. Thus, for the next two legislatures (2016–2020 and 2020–2024), some improvements were noted in the degree of representation, but still below the European average. Most women reached the Romanian Parliament in 2016, when 377 male parliamentarians (deputies and senators), i.e. 81.08%, and 88 female parliamentarians, i.e. 18.92%, were elected. Even if a higher percentage of women were assigned mandates compared to the previous elections, the gap between men and women has been registered since the candidacies, and was preserved when the mandates were assigned [**Reprezentarea femeilor și a bărbaților în alegerile parlamentare din 2016**, p. 13].

Also in 2016, a bill was tabled that proposed the establishment of gender quotas – a proposal that modified and completed part of the electoral legislation in force. The intention was to introduce a minimum gender quota of 30% for both women and men. Unfortunately, the legislative proposal was voted by the Chamber of Deputies in 2016, but not by the Senate, where it was rejected in 2018. We believe that this rejection should not surprise us, considering that the representation in the Chamber was colossally dominated by men. However, in 2018, the amendment to the law on financing political parties was adopted under Law No. 34 of 17 January 2018, amending Art. 18(2) as follows: *The amount allocated annually to political parties from the state budget is at least 0.01% and at most 0.04% of the gross domestic product. For the political parties that promote women on the electoral lists, on eligible seats, the amount allocated from the state budget will be doubled in proportion to the number of mandates obtained in elections by female candidates* [**Law No. 34** of 17 January 2018 for the amendment of Art. 18(2) of Law No. 334/2006 regarding the financing of the activity of political parties and electoral campaigns, published in the Official Gazette No. 55 of 18 January 2018]. In other words, in the absence of legislation imposing gender quotas, an attempt was made to stimulate the parties to nominate a higher percentage of women. However, the number of female candidates is still low, and monitoring reports show that there are still parties that submit lists of representatives without any women. Electoral legislation is not specific for sanctions in this regard [**Gabor, A.** 2021, p. 8; **Bărbieru, M.** 2021, pp. 260–261].

In 2020, in the Chamber of Deputies, out of the 330 elected deputies, 60 (18.18%) were women and 270 (81.82%) men, and in the Senate, out of the 136 elected senators, 25 (18.38%) were ladies and 111 (82.62%) were men [**Participarea femeilor și a bărbaților la alegerile parlamentare organizate în anul 2020**, p. 104]. Compared to the previous elections, the representation of women in Parliament recorded a very slight decrease, so that 2016 became the year in which women had the highest political representation in Romania in the last 30 years.

The representation in Figure 3 shows a clear picture of the very large discrepancy between the number of parliamentary seats occupied by women (red) and by men (grey) from 1990 to the present.

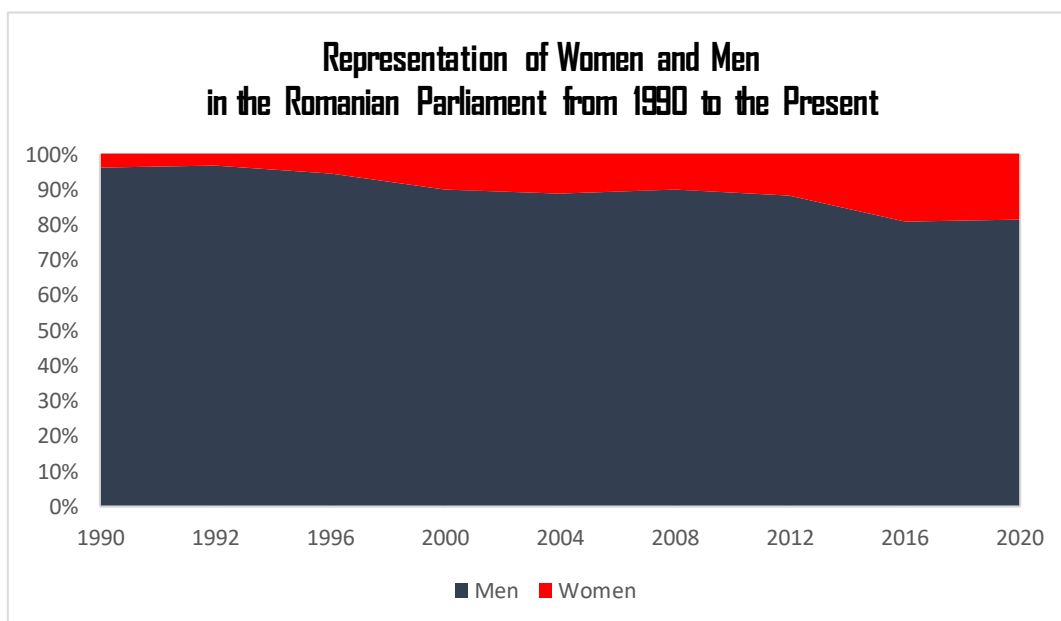


Figure 3. *Women and Men in the Romanian Parliament (1990–2024)*

Source: Author data processing

Romania has not had a female president until this moment. The first candidate, Graziela-Elena Bârla, was registered in 2000; she ran as independent and obtained 0.55% of the votes. The next two candidacies were registered in 2014 – Elena Udrea from the Popular Movement Party, supported in the presidential race by the PMP–PNTCD Alliance, and Monica Macovei, an independent candidate. The voting percentages registered by them were significantly higher and placed them in the first round of the elections in 4th and 5th place (Elena Udrea with 5.20% and Monica Macovei with 4.44%). None of them received the required number of votes to enter the second round.

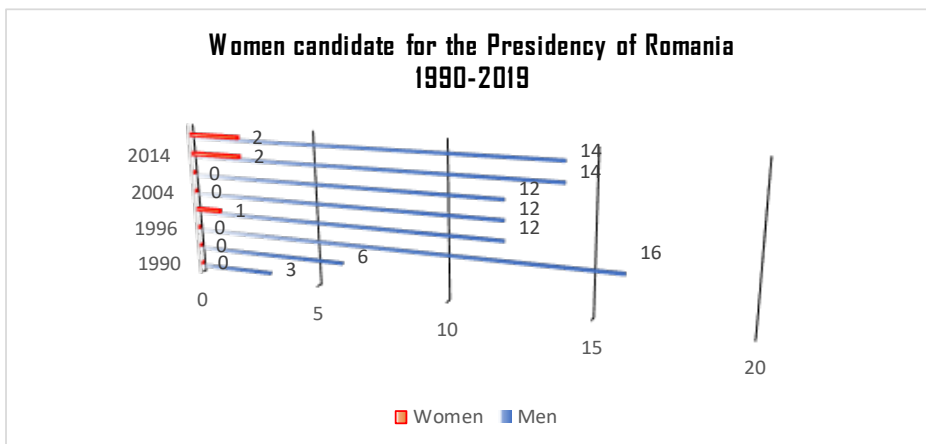


Figure 4. Female Candidates for the Presidency of Romania (1990–2019)

Source: Author data processing

2019 was the year that gave Romania a female candidate in the second round of the presidential elections, but not a female president. Two candidates registered for the elections – Viorica Dăncilă (Social Democratic Party) and Ramona Bruynseels (independent). Dăncilă had been Prime Minister of Romania until 4 November 2019, and she was the first and only woman to hold this position. She received 22.26% of the votes in the first round, thereby becoming the first woman to enter the second round. As I already mentioned, she did not become the first female president of Romania, because she was overtaken in the second round by the incumbent president, Klaus Iohannis, who received 66.09% of the votes.

In terms of representation for the European Parliament, the percentages seem to tell us that the gender quota has been abandoned in Romania. Good European practices in gender equality have made their influence felt in appointing female candidates to eligible seats for a period of time, with the representation for the current legislature being far from what the European Union supports. For example, for the 2009–2014 legislature, there were five female parliamentarians out of 11 from PSD+PC, four out of five from PNL, and two out of ten from PDL. The total percentage of female parliamentarians was 36%[□]. For 2014–2019, out of a total of 32 MPs, ten were women, i.e. 31%. In the current legislature (2019–2024), out of a total of 33 parliamentarians, only five are women, i.e. 15% [Parlamentul European. Biroul de legătură în România].

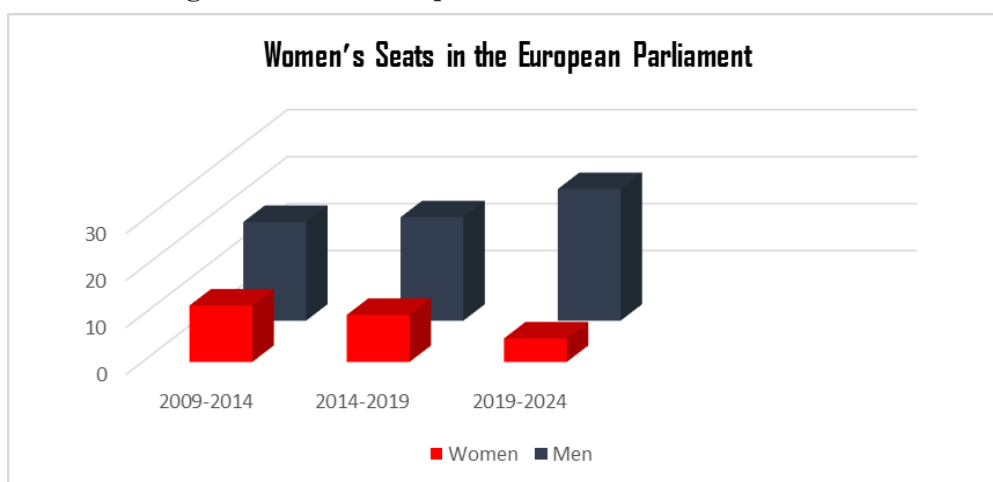


Figure 5. Representation of Women in the European Parliament

Source: Author data processing

At the level of the European Union, the proportion of women in high-level positions is on the rise, both in terms of community space and in terms of national spaces[□], although most political parties are still led by men and stereotypes still prevent equal representation. The issue of gender equality has become mandatory and has required an adaptation of the European legal framework to support this objective. For the EU states, ensuring equal treatment between women and men is reflected in the common normative provisions in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, as well as in the national legislation of the Member States [Valdini, M. E. 2013, pp. 76–92; Olimid, A. P., 2013, pp. 9–18; Ilie Goga, C. 2014, pp. 194–206; Georgescu, C. M. 2015, pp. 117–124]. In support of gender equality and of a better representation of women in the political space (the gender balance being generally considered 40/60 and the critical mass at least 30%), some Member States have strengthened their commitments and introduced mandatory or voluntary gender quotas. In March 2020, the European Commission adopted the Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025, which sets out a rather ambitious but necessary framework for a five-year period. The strategy is based on the vision of *a Europe where women and men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, are free from violence and stereotypes and have the opportunity to thrive and take leadership positions* [Uniunea Europeană. Drepturile femeilor: este egalitatea de gen o realitate în Europa?].

From this research, we observe that women in Romania have become more involved in politics in recent years and have managed to access elected political positions, such as parliamentary, governmental, but also local ones (in this sense, we exemplify Lia Olguța Vasilescu – Mayor of the Municipality of Craiova in 2012–2016, 2020–present; Gabriela Firea – Mayor of the Municipality of Bucharest in 2016–2020; Elena Lasconi – Mayor of the Municipality of Câmpulung in 2020–present). However, they are still underrepresented in political life and there is a very clear imbalance between the participation of men and women in political decision-making. On the other hand, even if progress has been made in recent years, especially in the last two rounds of elections, it is very slow in a traditionalist society with many stereotypes. The gender quotas did not find their solution in the Romanian Parliament, but it is possible that in the not too distant future, taking into account the gender equality policies of the EU, this topic will be brought back to the attention of decision-makers. It is desirable that a future vote will be favourable and that the representation of women in Romanian politics will go on an upward trend, as is already happening in other European Union states (the most eloquent example in this sense is Sweden). It is also desirable that the societal mentality and stereotypes will change, and that women will become more confident in their own strength and overcome the fear of the “dirty fight,” as the political fight is called. The political game is like any other game – with losers and winners, with harder and easier fights, admittedly frequently “dirty.” But beyond any traditionalist mentality or any kind of stereotypes, Romanian women are at least as combative as men in political battles, and not only that.

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