

Political rights - the right to vote and women in the executive and legislative power

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We could begin to talk about political rights for women since the XX century. Although the feminist movement asked for right to vote it was not granted until the times after the I World War. In this Great War women stood out for their contribution at the war efforts at the same level than men, working as hard as them. When the conflict finished in 1918 almost all the countries in Europe admitted the right to vote. This was the case for Germany, Poland and Austria.

In the case of Austria women were represented in Parliament in 1919 and the next year it was settled a Federal Constitution Law with two chambers and free elections. In Poland women acquired their right to vote and to be elected by the decree of the Chief of State in November 1918. In the first election in 1919, during which women were entitled to vote, only 8 female members of the parliament were elected. It was 2% of the overall number of the elected. The Constitution of 1921 guaranteed equal rights for women and men. In Germany the process went on in a similar way. Spain, however, did not participate in the I World War and the women had to wait until some years later.

The so called interwar period (1919-1939), especially the 1930's were very difficult for the national and international coexistence. In many countries emerged anti democratic political systems, totalitarian and dictatorships which were prejudicial to the whole society, mainly to the women. In Austria the austro-fascism policies organized motherliness and gender segregation, while in Germany the nazi government in 1933 deprived women of the right. In Spain, conversely, the period 1931-1939 was the best for women history. The II Spanish Republic proclaimed in April 1931 and the new constitution included equal rights for both sexes: political, social and civil rights. The first woman was elected as Ministry of Health and many were in important positions in local power. Women voted in 1933 and 1936 elections, but the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War and the victory of Franco's army in April 1939 removed all the rights. The new Franco's government abolished the republican constitution, the political parties were prohibited and the policy for women was to segregate them at home with the support of the Catholic Church.

Unfortunately a new war broke out in Europe in September 1939. After the II World War there were deep changes along the countries. Europe was divided in two parts, the so called Capitalist Europe and Communist Europe by the Iron Curtain. In the western part, Germany passed a new constitution in 1949 which admitted equal rights and in the fifties and sixties took place advances in political, civil and social rights. In this post war period Austria moved forward and some women occupied ministries. In the eastern part, with a communist government was Poland where the number of women in the Parliament increased. The new Constitution of 1952 guaranteed equal rights for all citizens, notwithstanding of sex, in all the fields of public, political, economic, social, and cultural life. The Civil Code of 1964 regulated civil and legal relations on the basis of equality of men and women. The first Polish female Minister held the office of the Minister of Justice in 1956. Women were visible in the public life; however, only one political party held power, thus this factor determined their election. Meanwhile in Spain many women who defended the II

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Republic in the Spanish Civil War had to exile or were imprisoned and even though some of them were executed; the ones who defended the dictatorship had not any rights. There were no political progresses along years neither right to vote, not only for women if not for men. Spaniards had to wait until the Franco's death in November 1975. When the first elections were celebrated after the dictatorship, women had exercised their right to vote only for three times (1933, 1936 and 1977).

In the seventies and eighties, Austria and Germany increased the women participation in politic and policies. Both countries had women in several ministries, and in 1986 Austria had its first female candidate for President of State. In Spain there were also women in Parliament, in ministries and in local powers, although her number was reduced and the political parties adopted a quota system in order to improve her participation.

In Poland, hope for the change of women's status increased after the transformation in 1989. However women, who participated in the "Solidarity" movement, did not play an important part in politics. In the first democratically elected Parliament in 1989 women constituted only 12% of the members of parliaments. However, the first female Prime Minister was in 1992. The results of it more and more women's movements were formed, which motivated women to greater activeness. In 2009 Congress of Women Association was created, which advocated implementing quota system in elections. By its initiative a quota law was adopted in 2011, which changed electoral system for election to Sejm, European Parliament, communes and poviats. This law does not cover elections to Senate. Electoral lists must include not less than 35% of women and not less than 35% of men. As result of it, the number of women in Sejm increased to 24%, but only by 3 %. It appeared that the quota law is not a sufficient enough a solution. Most often women are positioned on electoral lists in such way that their chances are smaller. It means on last positions. The Congress of Women prepares an amendment of the law. Electoral lists are to be composed with the use of a sliding method, called "zipper" method, that means with men and women placed on them alternately. If the "zipper" method was implemented, it would have a real chance to equalize the number of men and women in Sejm.

As we have read the political rights, especially the right to vote, was given in almost all the countries after a big conflict, as it was the Great War (1914-1918). Women get their rights when the countries have democracies and free constitutions, although that not means they can give up of fighting for improving their situation and position in the political field.