Promoting gender balanced decision-making in the European Union:

International and transnational strategies for parity democracy*

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Recent years have witnessed an explosion of interest in issues of women's political representation. Around the world — but especially in Western Europe — academics, activists, and politicians, often in collaboration, have begun studying and documenting women's underrepresentation in politics, and subsequently, reflecting over and proposing concrete measures to bring more women into political office. With their attention focused on national level developments, however, few observers have noted this common cross-national trend in mobilizing for gender-balanced representation. Even fewer have paid attention to the role that international level activity has played in identifying political decision-making as an area critical to overcoming gender-based inequalities.[1] A closer look at the genealogy of campaigns to increase women's political representation, however, suggests that all of these developments are fundamentally linked, as activism at the international and transnational levels has produced studies, declarations, and actions that have served as a point of support for women nationally who demand the equal sharing of decision-making power.

In Western Europe, and particularly in the member states of the European Union, the question of women's representation gained sudden prominence in the early 1990s as regional institutions like the Council of Europe and the European Commission began to recognize publicly the need for gender-balanced decision-making and to provide grants to facilitate research and the formation of transnational networks to increase public awareness on the issue. Building on the work of the United Nations, the first international institution to place 'decision-

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[1] Notable exceptions include Gaspard (1997); *Hacia una Democracia Paritaria* (2001); Raevaara (1998); Sawer (2000); and Wisler (1998).

making' on the gender equality agenda, European institutions then quickly came to play a major role in the development and the diffusion of the concept of 'parity democracy,' the idea that representative assemblies should be composed equally of women and men. While international level attention has given much publicity and legitimacy to the goal of gender-balanced representation, however, the origin of this activism is not in international institutions or even in women-friendly national governments. Rather, I argue, the sudden politicization of representation across Western Europe is the result of a major shift in feminist strategy — from 'separation' to 'integration' — that occurred in the 1980s and 1990s in countries across Western Europe. Whereas in the 1960s and the 1970s many feminists were skeptical about participation in conventional politics, preferring instead to engage in extra-parliamentary activities, in the 1980s they slowly reversed this stance as they began to focus increasingly on women's exclusion from the public arena as a major reason for why women's status had not significantly improved, despite numerous formal legal advances.

European institutions, nonetheless, have been instrumental in bringing the issue of equal representation to the forum of political debate, especially in countries like Greece, France, the United Kingdom, Portugal, Italy, and Belgium, where women's representation has historically been very low. Even more crucially, these institutions have facilitated the accumulation of knowledge and the exchange of 'best practices' across the continent: in 1998 alone, the EU financed sixteen transnational action projects that covered such action as a European database on women in political decision-making; European networks of local-, regional-, and national-level women politicians; mentoring schemes for women politicians and leaders; a political school on gender and politics; and conferences and seminars for raising awareness on the need for gender

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balance in decision-making (European Commission 2000, 22). Perhaps most interesting from the

perspective of national politics, however, are the two campaigns funded by the Commission and

run by transnational women's organizations that sought to increase women's representation in

the European Parliament in 1994 and 1999. While the European and the national parliaments

differ in significant ways in terms of their respective powers and roles, these campaigns lay bare

in a very broad sense the challenges entailed in effecting changes in patterns of parliamentary

representation. Moreover, the 1994 and 1999 experiences have propelled European women's

groups, as well as all three major EU institutions, to seek out more effective strategies for

overcoming obstacles to women's participation in politics. Their efforts have been so thorough-

going that, indeed, recent EU documents present a more compelling account of the reasons for

women's underrepresentation in politics, *as well as the necessary steps for overcoming them*,

than much recent scholarship in political science.[2]

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[2]Much of the literature on women in politics has been about why women are not more involved in politics, rather than how and why they are. Standard explanations points to individual level factors like socialization into prescribed gender roles (Sapiro 1983), situational constraints related to motherhood and occupational opportunities (Randall 1982), and levels of educations and labor force participation (Togeby 1994), as well as national level factors like types of electoral systems (Rule and Zimmerman 1994) and the recruitment practices of political parties (Lovenduski and Norris 1993), to reveal a sturdy configuration of barriers to women's full political participation. Despite major changes in patterns of women's representation worldwide in the last ten years, recent scholarship in political science (Caul 1999; Matland 1998) continues to recycle these obstacles without accounting for how or why women seem to have suddenly overcome them in countries around the globe. Exceptions to this trend include Sawer (2000),

Siim (2000), and Skjeie and Siim (2000).

In this paper I aim to address a number of gaps in the current literature on women's political representation. First, I present a genealogy of international efforts to target 'decision-making' as a policy area crucial to promoting substantive equality between women and men. While I signal the vital role of two UN documents — the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) from 1979 and the Platform for Action (PfA) adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing from 1995 — in placing 'women in decision-making' on the international political agenda, I stress how actions in Western Europe have further developed the normative principles and the practical strategies necessary for effecting changes in patterns of representation. To elaborate on this point, I next discuss the shift in feminist strategy that I argue lies behind the sudden international concern with gender balanced decision-making. I trace the evolution of feminist attitudes towards politics, which I link to changing interpretations about the source of inequalities based on gender, and I note how women's activists have developed a new normative argument calling for 'parity democracy' which has proven to be quite effective in bridging differences among women across the political spectrum. In the final section, I then catalogue the various practical strategies employed by the European Union to increase women's representation in the European Parliament and, by extension, in national and local assemblies. Many of these efforts are quite innovative and illustrate the breadth of political commitment necessary for effecting changes in patterns of representation. While results have varied across countries and across institutions, the length of this list itself indicates the crucial recognition by EU actors that increases in women's political representation do not occur spontaneously, but rather require deliberate intervention into processes of candidate recruitment and nomination.

International fora and efforts to promote women in decision-making

The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination

Against Women (CEDAW), the first international document to treat 'equal opportunities' as an

issue of global concern, was also the first to extend the purview of 'equality policy' to include

political decision-making (Rossilli 1997, 70). In Article 7, signatory states pledge to:

> "take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the
> political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women,
> on equal terms with men, the right: (a) To vote in all elections and public
> referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies; (b) To
> participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation
> thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of
> government; (c) To participate in non-governmental organizations and
> associations concerned with the public and political life of the country (United
> Nations 1979, 7).

In the years that followed, women parliamentarians from all over the world began to meet

informally to coordinate their views and concerns regarding women's issues. Building on these

initiatives, the Inter-Parliamentary Union organized an international conference in Geneva in

November 1989 on the theme "Women's participation in the political and parliamentary

decision-making process" (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2000a and 2000b). During the same

month, the Council of Europe sponsored a seminar in Strasbourg on *la démocratie paritaire*, or

'parity democracy,' a phrase that experts believe was coined by the Council that same year

(Hoskyns 1996, 22, n. 15; Mossuz-Lavau 1998).

Some years later in Beijing, delegates to the Fourth World Conference on Women

composed the Beijing Platform for Action (PfA),which calls itself "an agenda for women's

empowerment. It aims at accelerating the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking

Strategies for the Advancement of Women [from the Third World Conference on Women in 1985] and at removing all the obstacles to women's active participation in all spheres of public and private life through a full and equal share in economic, social, cultural and political decision-making." It sets two strategic objectives in section G on "Women in Power and Decision-Making": (1) to take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making, and (2) to increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership. Governments commit themselves in §190 to establishing the goal of gender balance in governmental bodies and committees, public administrative bodies, and the judiciary through the possible use of targets and positive actions (190a); to taking measures to encourage political parties to integrate women in elective and non-elective public positions in the same proportion and at the same levels as men (190b); to reviewing the differential impact of electoral systems on the political representation in elected bodies and considering, where appropriate, the adjustment or reform of those systems (190d); and to monitoring and evaluating progress in the representation of women through the regular collection, analysis and dissemination of quantitative and qualitative data on women and men at all levels of decision-making (190e) (United Nations 1995). Despite the major advances of this document, however, UN experts and the representatives of the member states refused to include the term 'parity' in the Platform (Vogel-Polsky 2000).

According to the European Commission (2000) in its review of European implementation of the PfA five years later, the three principles which underlie the Platform — the promotion and protection of the human rights of women, the empowerment of women, and gender mainstreaming — have been essential springboards to further gender equality at the European

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Union level. Even before the PfA, women's policy in the European Community/European Union had been one of the few well-developed areas of European social policy. 'Gender equality' in the EC had long been confined, however, to issues relating to women as workers, since European integration was defined as a mainly economic project until the early 1990s. This changed in 1992 when member states ratified the Treaty of European Union, better known as the Maastricht Treaty, which introduced the concept of 'European citizenship' and thus transformed the EU into a political entity of sorts. Not coincidentally, around this time a major shift began to occur in EU gender equality policy to include the larger political, social, and economic context within which women operated as workers.

This shift is most strikingly evident in the evolution of the various Community Action Programmes on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men. The first two Programmes — the Action Programme on Equal Opportunities for Women 1982-1985 and the Second Action Programme on Equal Opportunities for Women 1986-1990 — mainly focused on questions of women's employment but expanded these to include the sharing of family and occupational responsibilities through a reconsideration of women's reproductive roles and a revaluation of domestic and unpaid work (Glasner 1998, Hoskyns 2000). The Third Medium-Term Community Action Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men 1991-1995 was, in contrast. a much more comprehensive document. Its innovations included attention to the socioeconomic *context* within which women operate as workers, to the role of different actors in improving the situation of women, and to the differential impact of legislation on women and men, as well as the commitment to improve the involvement of women in the political decision-making process. This Action Programme funded nine expert networks on different aspects of women's policy,

including a European Expert Network on "Women in Decision-Making," and inspired the Commission to fund the European Women's Lobby, a non-governmental organization established to represent women's interests at the European level, and the Council to issue various pieces of 'soft law' (Resolutions, Recommendations, and Communications that have little binding force) encouraging member states and European institutions to take steps to recruit more women.

The Fourth Medium-Term Action Programme on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men 1996-2000 slightly reoriented Community policy on gender equality. It pushed this policy forward by establishing 'mainstreaming' — the idea that policy-makers should consider the gendered effects of legislation before deciding on which policy to adopt — as the main organizing principle and by transforming gender-balanced decision-making into one of the six main aims of the Programme. In light of the new focus on 'subsidiarity' in EU policy-making, however, the Programme reversed course by giving a lesser role to Community institutions. Deeming member state action to be primary, it emphasized instead 'Community added value,' the notion that EU action should not replicate or replace what is, should, or can be done at the national level, but rather should add something to it, either by dealing with the EU level or by making connections between or extrapolations from diverse national practice. Consequently, the role of the Commission was now seen to be one of facilitating communication by gathering information, sponsoring research, encouraging transnational contact, disseminating 'best practice,' and monitoring developments (Hoskyns 2000).

The shift in focus of EU gender equality policy is also evident in the pieces of 'soft law,' passed by the Council during the same time period, which grew increasingly more detailed over

time with regards to women in decision-making. Earlier legislation like the "Council Recommendation of 13 December 1984 on the promotion of positive action for women" (*Official Journal* No L 331, 19.12.1984, 34-35) and the "Second Council Resolution of 24 July 1986 on the promotion of equal opportunities for women" (*Official Journal* No C 203, 12.08.1986, 2-4) briefly mentioned decision-making as one element of the larger strategy for achieving gender equality. Legislation in the 1990s, in contrast, placed decision-making at the center of attention. "Council Resolution of 27 March 1995 on the balanced participation of men and women in decision-making" (*Official Journal* No C 168, 04.07.1995, 3-4) highlighted gender-balanced decision-making itself as a goal meriting special attention. The Resolution invited member states to promote balanced participation by developing an integrated global strategy that would include publishing reports; developing incentives and supporting measures for NGO's; supporting research; and devising, launching, and promoting information and awareness campaigns at regular intervals. It also called upon the institutions and bodies of the EU to implement measures to increase women's representation. It prevailed upon the Commission, in particular, to step up its efforts to promote research to increase public information and awareness, as well as to draw up in the context of the Fourth Medium-Term Action Programme a draft Recommendation aimed at promoting balanced participation.

The resulting Recommendation, "Council Recommendation of 2 December 1996 on the balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process" (*Official Journal* No L 319, 10.12.1996, 11-15), integrated proposals and opinions from the Commission, the European Parliament, and the Economic and Social Committee to present a detailed set of normative arguments and practical measures to increase women's political representation. It

argued:

> "participation in the decision-making process depends on representation on decision-making bodies at all levels of political, economic, social and cultural life and requires, in particular, presence in posts of responsibility and decision-making bodies"; "balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process is a requirement for democracy"; "the under-representation of women in decision-making posts constitutes a loss for society as a whole and may prevent the interests and needs of the entire population from being catered for in full"; and "balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process is likely to give rise to different ideas, values and behaviour which will result in more justice and equality in the world for both men and women."

It recommended that member states "adopt a *comprehensive, integrated strategy* designed to promote balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process and develop or introduce the appropriate measures to achieve this, such as, where necessary, legislative and/or regulatory measures and/or incentives" (my emphasis). Such a strategy might include public campaigns to alert public opinion; the collection of statistics; education and training programs; quantitative and qualitative studies on legal, social, and cultural obstacles to women's participation, as well as strategies for overcoming such obstacles; and the exchange of good practice. The Recommendation also called on the institutions, the subsidiary bodies, and the decentralized bodies of the EU to design strategies for achieving balanced participation. In particular it called on the Commission to encourage and to organize a systematic pooling of information and experience between the member states on good practice and an assessment of the impact of measures taken to achieve a better balance between women and men in decision-making; to step up efforts to provide information, to alert public opinion, to encourage research, and to promote schemes aimed at achieving gender balance; and to submit a report to the European Parliament, the Council of Ministers, and the Economic and Social Committee three years later.

To operationalize these grand pronouncements of intentions, the Commission sought throughout the 1990s to establish its own contacts with women organizing outside the formal political arena, as well as to facilitate the establishment of networks of women's groups across Europe (Lister 1997). In 1990 it funded the creation of the European Women's Lobby (EWL), a non-governmental organization established to represent women's interests at the European level that acts as an umbrella organization for women's groups in the various member states. Europe-wide women's organizations with a commitment to equality have the right to direct representation on the EWL's General Assembly and national women's organizations or coordinations of women's organizations in each country have the right to four delegates each. The EWL's primary mission is not only to lobby for measures to compel member state governments on issues of gender equality, but also to exchange information and to develop transnational campaigns (Helfferich 1994; Hoskyns 1991). Under the auspices of the Third Medium-Term Action Programme, the Commission also established a European Expert Network on "Women in Decision-Making" in 1992. This Network, which had one expert in each Member State and a European Coordinator based in Brussels, was charged with the tasks of examining the hurdles that kept women from attaining decision-making positions, of informing and sensitizing the general public on this subject, and of devising strategies and instruments to achieve a larger participation of women and men in decision-making. While the EWL continues to exist, the Network of Experts was funded only for the years 1992-1996. The work it performed, however, has continued up to the present in the form of the European Database — Women in Decision-Making at <http://www.db-decision.de> (email from Jaana Kuusipalo, former Finnish Expert in the Network, 3 April 2000).

Taken together, these efforts — the Action Programmes, the 'soft laws,' and the women's networks — have helped render gender equality one of the major priorities[3] of the European Union. The Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997 cemented its importance by declaring 'equality between women and men' to be one of the major missions of the Community on par with economic development and cohesion. The recent Finnish Presidency Report on European implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action argued, further, that this "concept of equality must be understood as including the task of the promotion of equality between women and men in power and decision-making" (Permanent Representatives Committee 1999, 2). In one further demonstration of its commitment, the EU has even started to conduct actions in third countries — especially the applicant countries — to encourage women's participation in the decision-making process. One such project is the Phare Democracy Programme, integrated into the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights in 1998, which seeks to train women as decision-makers in order to increase the participation of women from Central and Eastern Europe in politics and public life (European Commission 2000; European Women's Lobby 2000).

Feminist strategy: from separation to integration to parity democracy

While international (and especially European) institutions have played a crucial role in publicizing and legitimizing the goal of gender-balanced decision-making, I argue that their actions have not been self-initiated but rather represent a direct response to women demanding an equal presence in politics. Such a demand is a new one in the context of Western European

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[3]It is a priority policy-wise, not budget-wise.

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feminism, which at least since the 1960s has largely eschewed participation in conventional politics ('integration') in favor of more civil society-oriented activity ('separation'). A dramatic shift in this stance began to occur, however, in the 1980s and early 1990s as feminists started to focus increasingly on women's exclusion from the public arena as a major reason for why women's status had not significantly improved, despite numerous formal legal advances. They devised a number of practical strategies to increase women's presence in politics which included pressuring political parties to recruit more women and attempting to change public attitudes by calling attention to gross imbalances between women and men at all levels of political power. At the same time they also began to develop a new normative argument for 'parity democracy' — the idea that representative assemblies should be composed equally of women and men — which has proven quite effective in bridging differences among women across the political spectrum.

Feminists have not always shunned conventional politics. Indeed, nineteenth century suffragettes fought for the right to vote *and* the right to stand in elections, because they were convinced that changes in women's condition would come about only if women themselves became members of elected legislatures (Lovenduski 1993). 'Second wave' feminists in the 1960s and 1970s, in contrast, believed that women's standing for election signified cooptation, and thus the validation of patriarchal power structures, because they saw it as representing the adaptation of women to men's roles, a process they vehemently rejected in favor of revaluing womanhood. Convinced that women's status would improve only if people's ways of thinking and acting changed, they emphasized the need to make visible women's situation in various areas — in the family, in the workplace, and in society — and to secure new rights — to contraception, to abortion, and to equal pay, among others — as a guarantee against sudden reversals in public

opinion. They considered it essential that women worked collectively for these common goals, and in the process they hoped to develop a new way of doing politics by making the personal political (Dahlerup 1986; Gaspard 1997).

By the early 1980s feminists began to reconsider the importance of mainstream politics as the lack of women in decision-making began to be perceived as one of the reasons why policy change for women was becoming harder to achieve (Hoskyns and Rai 1998). They interpreted gender inequality increasingly as a *structural* problem whose solution required that women assume positions of power themselves in order to intervene in the causal processes which establish and reproduce inequalities (for more on structures and categorical inequality, see Tilly 1998). While some European feminists still preferred 'separation,' many others chose 'integration' and became active members of political parties in the 1980s and 1990s. The creation of the European Women's Lobby (EWL) itself provides quite striking evidence of this shift in feminist strategy. When the idea to establish a EWL was first proposed in the early 1980s, nothing came of it then because of the hostility and the distance between separatist and integrationist women across Europe in terms of their interest in either the European Community or in mainstream politics. Over the course of the 1980s, however, both the hostility and the distance lessened, with traditional integrationist women's organizations becoming somewhat more radical and with more formerly-separatist feminists seeing the need to 'enter the mainstream' (Hoskyns 1991). This crucial change in strategy, I maintain, is directly responsible for the sudden emergence of political representation as a new issue of concern in countries across Western Europe. Although many authors link this attention to initiatives taken by political parties, "[t]here is no party in which efforts to nominate more women have occurred without an

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intervention by women making claims" (Lovenduski 1993, 14). Women's choice to lobby at the European Union level *per se* represents an additional tactic for forcing change at the national level. As Barbara Helfferich, one-time secretary general of the EWL, once noted: "Women have said to themselves that what could not be done at the national level might be able to be done at the European level. But for this to be possible, they know that they must engage very actively in the discussions taking place in the European assemblies" (1994, 167).[4]

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[4]"Les femmes se sont dit que ce qui ne pouvait pas être fait sur le plan national pourrait l'être sans doute sur le plan européen. Mais pour que cela soit possible, elles savent qu'elles doivent s'engager très activement dans les discussions qui se déroulent dans les assemblées européenes."

As feminists began brainstorming over practical measures for bringing more women into political office, they also began rethinking their normative arguments for why increasing women's political presence was in fact important. Initially they drew on three existing normative arguments — based on justice, interests, and resources, respectively — that Nordic women had used in campaigns to increase women's representation in their own countries in the 1960s and 1970s[5] (Hernes 1987). The justice argument stresses equality between women and men to frame women's access to politics as an issue of fairness and democracy. The arguments from interests and resources, in contrast, emphasize sexual difference. The interests argument claims that women have certain interests that are different from men's and thus cannot be represented by men, while the resources argument maintains that women have certain resources — namely values, experiences, and expertise — that differentiate them from men which would improve political life if included in the political arena. Which argument is most effective depends on the context in which it is applied, but speaking more generally, the argument from justice tends to be less problematic than the arguments from interests and resources, which tend to essentialize falsely the differences between women and men without regard to important differences *among* women and *among* men. In the justice framework, the fact that women are being denied rights and opportunities that are currently available to men provides a *prima facie* case for action. What makes the justice argument most compelling, however, is the difficulty opponents have in refuting it. As Anne Phillips writes: "There is no argument from justice that can defend the

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[5]Women's movements in the Nordic countries — Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden — turned to conventional politics about twenty years earlier than feminists elsewhere. In another paper (Krook 2000), as well as in my dissertation, I argue that the timing of this strategic choice explains why women's political representation in these countries increased decades before anywhere else and is now the highest in the world, with a regional average today of 38.8% female representation in parliament (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2000c).

current state of affairs; and in this more negative sense, there *is* an argument from justice for

parity between women and men" (1995, 65).

Apparently recognizing this, European feminists in the 1990s have elaborated a case for

'parity democracy' that builds on the justice argument. They have not totally abandoned the

arguments from interests and resources, which sprinkle the documents of the EU and the EWL,

but these play a far smaller role than they did in the Norwegian and Icelandic cases, for example.[6]

While the 'parity' concept is perhaps best known in association with the French case — where *le*

mouvement pour la parité hommes-femmes dans la vie publique (The movement for parity

between men and women in public life) successfully pressured the National Assembly and the

Senate in 1999 to amend the French constitution to state that men and women had to be equally

represented in political life — international organizations have played a determining role in the

development of this concept, according to Françoise Gaspard, one of the key figures in the

French movement (Gaspard 1997). At its most basic, the parity argument asserts that only when

women and men participate equally in decision-making processes will both democracy and

equality between women and men come close to realization. An apparently simple claim, parity

in fact poses a fundamental challenge to established principles of political practice:

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[6]The Norwegian women's movement used arguments about interests and resources to build on the
Norwegian tradition of descriptive representation to establish gender as a category relevant for group representation.
The Icelandic women's movement used similar arguments and formed an all-women's political party to enter politics
'on their own terms' (Skjeie 1992; Styrkársdóttir 1986).

"The implementation of parity would entail changes reaching into the very heart of the machinery of political life and the operation of institutions. The establishment of parity would affect to differing degrees the political premises governing the organization of our democratic society as a society of individuals. It would also effect the atomistic view of the formation of the social bond, political equality as a formal equality under the law, and the automatic transposition, through representative mechanisms, of the elector's free choice...[...]...Democracy based on parity cannot be a question of treating women as either a specific group or a minority group in a dominant framework, but of ensuring that the two sexes — of equal value and importance — hold an equivalent position in a relationship of structurally established interdependence. The logic of parity excludes the quota technique.[7] The question of parity between women and men must be seen as a political priority, stemming from the founding and constitutive principles of citizenship, in the same way as universal suffrage or the separation of powers" (Vogel-Polsky 2000, 64, 70).

While implementing parity in practice may take on a number of forms — Dominique Wisler

(1998) distinguishes three: *de facto* parity on electoral lists, without legal obligation; a legal

obligation, inscribed in the constitution or in an electoral law and imposed on the political parties

so that they present lists based on parity; and 'quotas of results,' which impose a minimal

representation in parliament, inspired by the empirical fact that list quotas do not automatically

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[7]Supporters of parity repeatedly distinguish their demand for the equal sharing of power from the demand for what seems to accomplish the same thing: a 50%-50% quota for women and men. This emphasis stems in part from negative historical experiences with quotas, in which quotas for women were introduced at less than 50% or were revoked by courts as unconstitutional. More importantly, however, the demand for parity aims to transform both political theory and practice to give two sexes to the historically single-sexed 'universal citizen.' This feat can only be accomplished, they argue, through a fair and equal sharing of decision-making power, not via a temporary suspension of current conceptions of 'equality' and 'universalism.' For a good discussion of the differences between the demand for parity and the demand for quotas, consult Siim (2000).

imply parity — their common thread is a reversal in the 'burden of proof' regarding women's representation. As Éliane Vogel-Polsky points out, with the parity argument it is no longer up to feminists to prove that particular institutional mechanisms are discriminatory in practice and that they need to be corrected. Rather, it is now up to the defenders of the *status quo* to demonstrate that the demand for parity is unfounded or unwarranted (Vogel-Polsky 2000).

Although scholars like Angela Glasner (1998) have argued that feminism in Europe has exhibited such a wide variety of forms and has such a broad agenda of issues and concerns that women are unlikely to form a common movement, I contend that the argument for parity democracy has in fact proven quite effective in bridging differences among women across the political spectrum and across national borders. As Catherine Hoskyns (1996) has explained, the advantage of the parity argument is that, as a demand, it appeals to both traditional and feminist women and, as a slogan, it conveys a simple and easily understood message. The parity demand is nonetheless problematic in her estimation, because it prioritizes the sex/gender division above all other differences and it seeks to impose a rigidity on the process of representation that might inhibit other equally necessary reforms. I acknowledge this negative aspect of the parity argument, which might extend to *any* argument for increasing women's political representation, but I also share Chiara Saraceno's (1997) intuition that a very loose definition of women's common interest has the potential to mobilize women all over Europe for much-needed democratic reform at both the national and the European level.

I base this intuition on my conviction that European women do share an interest in having a less gender-blind and a less gender-asymmetrical EU, despite the fact that they may have different stakes in mobilizing at the European level, depending on the gender equality *status quo*

in their respective home states. Anna Jónasdóttir (1988) has made a strong case for identifying women's exclusion from full citizenship as a common interest: while women may differ widely regarding the *content* of so-called 'women's interests,' they do share a *formal* interest in having access to political power. Here the crucial requirement is for *women's political presence*, a goal which makes no claims about only women being able to speak on women's issues or about women having to speak only as a sex (Phillips 1991).

These expectations appear to be borne out in practice. In an address describing the origins of the EWL, former EWL secretary-general Barbara Helfferich (1994) notes that despite the persistence of national differences, the demand for equal opportunities and for equality of representation in political decision-making has helped women overcome their individual, ideological, and cultural differences in order to form the Lobby. Despite their coming together, however, differences among women do not subsequently disappear, but indeed remain important through the time that women attain positions of political power. Part of the value of having more women present in decision-making is that this increases the possibility that women of various experiences and outlooks will be elected to the European and national parliaments. The ensuing conflict between their different nationalities, political affiliations, and interest groups would then compel these women, as well as the men in parliament, to negotiate amongst themselves regarding their common and varying interests (Saraceno 1997).

The European Union and transnational strategies to increase women's representation

In response to women's mobilization for parity democracy, the institutions of the European Union have engaged in a variety of efforts in recent years to try to increase women's

representation both in the European Parliament and in local and national assemblies. European institutions have been particularly instrumental in bringing the issue of equal representation to the forum of political debate, especially in countries where women's representation has historically been very low, and in facilitating the accumulation of knowledge and the exchange of 'best practices' across the continent. While results have varied across countries and across institutions, the sheer length of this list itself demonstrates the crucial recognition by EU actors that changes in patterns of representation do not occur spontaneously, but rather require deliberate intervention into processes of candidate recruitment and nomination. Partly successful campaigns to increase women's representation in the European Parliament in 1994 and 1999, moreover, have propelled women's groups, as well as all three major EU institutions, to seek out more effective strategies for overcoming obstacles to women's participation in politics.

The two major motors behind EU efforts to promote gender-balanced representation have long been the Commission and the transnational women's groups it has helped to establish over the years. While the Council of Ministers has issued all the pieces of EU 'soft law' pertaining to women's and decision-making — a relic of the fact that it is the only EU institution with the power to decide on policy — the Council has since the late 1970s tended to resist widening the scope of EC intervention in the area of equal opportunity policy. The Commission and the European Parliament, on the other hand, have tried to push ahead, largely under pressure from increasingly vocal women and feminist lobbies (Mushaben 1998; Saraceno 1997). For example, the Commission recognized early that "formal equal opportunities alone do not automatically result in either equal treatment or proper representation of women at decision-making levels. Closer examination is required of the entrenched institutional and cultural barriers that inhibit or

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prevent the proportional representation of women in public and political bodies" (European Commission, 1994: 43-44). A specific action taken by the Commission to bring more women into positions of power was the decision by Jacques Santer, then-President of the Commission, to name a record five women (of a total 20 Commissioners) to the Commission in 1994. At that time Santer also established the Group on 'Equal Opportunities for Men and Women and Women's Rights' consisting of five members — two female and two male Commissioners plus the President of the Commission — who interact regularly with the EP Women's Rights Committee and the EWL. More broadly, the Commission has supported the establishment of numerous networks and exchanges among women across the EU since the advent of the Third Medium-Term Action Programme.

The most formalized of these organizations is the European Women's Lobby, which I have already discussed at length above. A second group crucial in this context is the European Expert Network on "Women in Decision-Making," active between 1992 and 1996, whose main tasks included examining the hurdles that kept women from attaining decision-making positions, informing and sensitizing the general public on this subject, and devising strategies and instruments to achieve a larger participation of women and men in decision-making. In 1992 the Network published the first extensive study of female representation at the national and Community levels entitled *PANORAMA, Statistical data concerning the participation of women in political and public decision-making* which was edited by Sabine de Bethune, the Network Coordinator in Brussels. Together with the Commission, the Network devised three broad projects aimed at promoting women in the decision-making process addressing the European elections in 1993, the participation of women in regional and local decision-making in 1994, and

networking among women in decision-making posts in each member state in 1995.

To facilitate the coming together of politicians, scholars, and activists, the Network also sponsored a series of Europe-wide conferences on women in decision-making. Because there was no special Council of Ministers meeting for national Equality/Women's Affairs Ministers, the Network, together with the EWL, organized in 1992 an ex officio summit of European women leaders in Athens. This conference culminated in the Athens Declaration, which demanded the equal participation of women and men in decision-making and underlined the need for structural changes in the decision-making process. The group met again in 1994 in Brussels to discuss the upcoming European elections and then once more in 1995 in Dublin to devise strategies to promote women in political decision-making. The Dublin conference resulted in a guide entitled *How to create a gender balance in political decision-making: A guide to implementing policies for increasing the participation of women in political decision-making*, edited by Monique Leijenaar and eventually published in 1997, which listed the strategies used in the different member states and recognized the need for a global strategic plan to promote women's participation in politics. Conference participants agreed that such a plan should address at least six areas — the compilation of statistics, support for NGO's, scientific research, the organization of information and awareness raising campaigns, the implementation of positive actions, and the drawing up of a legal framework — which taken together would serve to complement and to reinforce one another. The final conference organized under the auspices of the Expert Network took place in Rome in 1996 in collaboration with the Italian Commission on Equal Opportunities. When the Network ceased to exist, other actors took it upon themselves to continue the conferences. In 1998 the Commission organized a seminar for senior officials in

member states responsible for the implementation of the 1996 Recommendation in order to encourage activities in this field. One year later in 1999, the French government itself arranged a conference in Paris on "Women and Men in Power," which produced yet another declaration: referring to the persisting inequalities between women and men in decision-making, ministers called upon the EU and the member states to take actions and measures in order to attain equality in power and *parity democracy*. In so doing they recognized the question of women in decision-making as a problem concerning society as a whole, not only women (European Network "Women in Decision-Making" 1996; Mushaben 1998; Permanent Representatives Committee 1999).

The 1992 Athens conference inspired the EWL and the Expert Network to orchestrate a campaign in 1993-1994 entitled "Vote for balance between women and men" with the goal of promoting a larger presence of women among both the candidates and those elected to the European Parliament in 1994. While they targeted especially those countries — Greece, France, the UK, Portugal, Italy, and Belgium — where women held 10% or less of the seats in the national parliament, and often fewer in the European Parliament, their two more general objectives were to inform and to increase the awareness of the general public and to promote the active participation of women in European politics. To this end they produced an 'action-kit' available in all EU languages, as well as a brochure entitled "Women in decision-making: facts and figures on women in political and public decision-making in Europe," which contained basic information on women in politics across Europe and was also published in all EU languages. Campaign slogans called attention to the paradox that in a Union where 51% of citizens were women, only 19% of MEP's were female: "Can you imagine a world with 81% fathers and 19%

mothers?"; "Can you imagine a world with 81% Romeos and 19% Juliets?"; and "Why does

81% of Parliament have to shave each morning?" As a complement to these efforts, government

agencies, political parties, and women's NGO's conducted their own actions, which included: a

'Parity Parliament' in Portugal organized by women MEP's in January-February 1994; a

petition drive for 100,000 signatures demanding an equal share of seats for women in France

(which *Le Monde*, *Liberation*, and *Le Figaro* refused to print); candidate visits to workplaces and

educational institutions in Denmark; questionnaires sent to all Irish candidates testing their views

on women's issues; and media spots in Greece and Luxembourg (Mushaben 1998).

When the election took place in June 1994, women's representation in the European

Parliament rose from 19.5% to 25.6%. While not a high aggregate shift, the increase in individual

member states was much more striking, especially in those member states that otherwise have the

lowest levels of female representation, where the figures for the EP are almost five times

(France) to twice as high (the UK) as those of national legislatures[8] (European Parliament

Directorate-General for Research 1997, ch. 6, 1-2). In these cases, evidence suggests that parties

are more willing to try new methods of candidate recruitment for EP elections well before they

are willing to try them at the national level: a number of French parties, for example, applied the

principle of parity in 1994, five years before the French constitution was amended to state that

women and men had to be equally represented in politics (Gaspard 1997). An indication of

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[8] In general women tend to be better represented at the European than at the national level. While this has not always been the case — women's representation in the EP reached a high of only 5.5% in 1978 under the old appointment system — it has been true since 1979, when direct elections to the EP were first held. Vallance and Davies (1986) attribute this disparity to the fact that the processes and arrangements of the EP are somewhat of an encouragement to greater female representation, including the lack of incumbents to overcome (at least in 1979), less intense competition for seats, and less confrontational political debate style within the EP than in national legislatures.

increased public attention to the campaign is the fact that a tally of women elected, and data about them, was available instantly after the election, although no other data beyond party allegiance was prepared as quickly (Hoskyns and Rai 1998).

Five years later, the Commission and the EWL launched a second campaign to increase women's presence in the European Parliament. This time, a far greater swathe of actors and strategies were involved. The transnational party groupings, for example, addressed the issue of gender-balanced decision-making in their party platforms: the European Social Democratic Group's manifesto stated that to exclude anyone from fair access to influence in the democratic process was to weaken society, while that of the European People's Party group called for a change in the lack of balance between women and men in all levels of political representation . In addition, four of the thirteen projects that the Directorate-General X chose to finance under the auspices of the program "Information for women and youths" in 1998 were directed at information campaigns targeted at women in the run up to the European elections of 1999, the project countries being France, Italy, Germany, and Greece. Directorate-General V provided a campaign packet consisting of a CD-rom disk; campaign materials including a logo, slogans, announcements, posters, and television advertisements; and guidelines in all EU languages for how the material should be used (*Nyhetsbrevet: Europas kvinnor* (Women of Europe Newsletter), March/April 1999, no. 85).

As early as 1998, the Women's European Network of Documentation and Information (EUDIF) published Éliane Vogel-Polsky's (1998) "Appeal to the female and male citizens of Europe for the European Elections of June 1999," which furnished the legal foundations for a transnational campaign to get national political parties to present lists based on the principle of

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alternation, according to which male and female names must alternate on parties' electoral lists so that men and women will be equally represented. The EWL joined in this appeal in 1999 when the two organizations conducted a joint fax campaign at both the European and national levels to press for balanced representation of men and women in the European Parliament. Their message read:

> "Dear Sir or Madam,
>
> Re: *Lists of candidates form* [sic] *the European elections of 1999 and representation of women*
>
> As a European citizen, I hereby join in the campaign launched by the European Women's Lobby (EWL) and the European Network for Documentation and Information on Women (EUDIF) to urge you to prepare lists of candidates for the European elections of 1999 that reflect the proportions of men and women in society.
>
> As the third millennium approaches, we as European citizens refuse to tolerate the failure of the high-ranking institution in the European Union and of the Member States to translate their solemn commitments concerning balanced participation by women and men in political decision-making into action.
>
> We demand the effective implementation of the basic right to equality between women and men in all areas of decision-making. We further demand that electoral lists reflect the principle of female/male parity on electoral lists.
>
> *The EWL and EUDIF, conducting this campaign in a spirit of solidarity in the 15 Member States of the European Union, warn that any political party that does not present a list based on the principle of alternation between women and men will lose women's votes.*
>
> Sincerely yours, [...]" (European Women's Lobby 1999a).

The EWL, in addition, composed a strategy piece exhorting women's organizations across Europe to organize for the upcoming European elections. In particular, they stressed the necessity of lobbying national parties represented in the EP to present lists of candidates based on the principle of alternation and, to accomplish this, they furnished a variety of arguments to help

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win over national policy-makers. They imbued urgency on the situation by noting that laying the groundwork for balanced representation in the next EP would be crucial, because that Parliament would be charged with the responsibility of drawing up a proposal for uniform electoral procedures, and "[o]nce women are present in the Parliament, they can work to ensure that the proposal for uniform European legislation concerning European elections (article 138) encompasses the principle of alternation between women and men." Furthermore, they argued, the election of a balanced EP could have a tremendous impact on the composition of national parliaments because a "party that has established a European electoral list including a large number of women would have a hard time refusing to apply the same principle of alternation between men and women within its party as concerns national-level elections" (European Women's Lobby 1999b).

Finally, the Commission itself supported the campaigning organizations by providing various campaign materials, including posters and a TV spot with the slogan "Vote for a gender balance in the European Parliament." It also published and distributed 350,000 copies of a brochure entitled "Europe for Women and Women for Europe," available in all eleven EU languages, which linked the fight against gender discrimination to the political involvement and better representation of women and outlined different steps already taken in the EU to promote women in politics. The brochure ended with the following call to arms:

> "Equality between women and men is a question of basic human rights, social justice and democratic representation. It cannot be fully realised without equal participation for all, women and men, in every area of activity, including the political process. One way to do this is *through the vote*, the primary expression of the will of the people. It is therefore vital for women to vote in the European elections of 1999 to express their views on Europe. ... *Now is the time to make your voice heard. Women must increase their involvement in the European debate. The European elections of June 1999 are your opportunity. Take it — vote*

for gender balance" (European Commission 1999, 4, emphasis in original).

The election in June 1999 increased the proportion of women MEP's to 30% of all MEP's. To many this represented very modest progress, although women's representation at the European level continues to be roughly double the average level of women's representation nationally across Western Europe. The EP election result was also surprising, given that a number of political parties had indeed presented lists on which women's and men's names alternated. One clear advance, however, was that a woman became President of the European Parliament for the first time. In light of the results more generally, however, the EWL has begun to argue that the goal of parity democracy should be added to the agenda for the revision of the Treaty of Amsterdam. They have also suggested that governments of the EU should re-establish and/or reinforce awareness campaigns to encourage voters, both male and female, to vote for women in European and national elections (EWL 2000).

Conclusions

While only partly successful, the 1994 and 1999 EP election campaigns have been crucial to the cause of gender-balanced representation, because they have propelled European women's groups, as well as all three EU institutions, to seek out more effective strategies for overcoming obstacles to women's participation in politics. Two documents published after the 1999 campaign, in particular, indicate this continuing commitment to bringing more women into political office: the Finnish Presidency's Report reviewing EU implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, especially the section on women in decision-making (Permanent Representatives Committee, 1999), and the European Commission's Report on the

implementation of the 1996 Council Recommendation on balanced decision-making (Commission of the European Communities, 2000). Both documents demonstrate a comprehensive and a highly nuanced understanding of reasons for the progress (and the lack of progress) made thus far and reach conclusions on requirements for further action that scholars, politicians, and activists alike would be wise to heed.

In reviewing EU implementation of the Beijing PfA, the Finnish Presidency Report uncovered a need for more consistent and systematic EU monitoring of progress made in the field of women in power and decision-making. The Report, consequently, developed a simple set of indicators and benchmarking criteria for evaluating progress. These indicators are: (1) the proportion of women in the single/lower houses of the national/federal parliaments of the member states and in the European Parliament; (2) the proportion of women in the regional parliaments of the member states, where appropriate; (3) the proportion of women in the local assemblies of the member states; (4) policies to promote a balanced participation in political elections; (5) the proportion of women of the members of the national/federal governments and the proportion of women members of the European Commission; (6) the number of women and men senior/junior ministers in the different fields of action (portfolios/ministries) of the national/federal governments of the member states; (7) the proportion of the highest ranking women civil servants; (8) the distribution of the highest ranking women civil servants in different fields of action; and (9) the proportion of women of the members of the Supreme Courts of the Member States and the proportion of women of the members of the European Court of Justice and the Court of First Instance.

The Report observed that one crucial area for intervention was indicator (4), policies to

promote a balanced participation in political elections:

> "Interesting observations can be made on the basis of the policy indicator. It seems that those Member States which traditionally show a high proportion of women in the national assemblies report about an *influential role of women's groups or organisations within the parties* or trade unions. They also report a long tradition of measures by the political parties or trade unions to support a pursuit to increase women's share in the legislative bodies....The highest proportions of women in parliament have been attained by *political movements within the parties* and not by legislation. This is not to undermine the role of law reforms — because the parties in those countries have taken influential actions, there was less need of legislation" (Permanent Representatives Committee 1999, 12, my emphases).

It noted that the most effective way to increase the proportion of women in parliament seemed to be to have formal and informal gender quotas on candidate lists set by political parties, although the effect of this policy would depend on the electoral system. In proportional representation systems with closed lists (Sweden, Austria, Germany, Portugal, Spain) and where preferential voting is either impossible (Portugal, Spain) or limited (Germany, Sweden), political parties decide winnable positions or a rank ordering on closed lists. In these cases getting women candidates in winnable seats or at the top of the list, for example through the application of the alternation principle, ought to be the primary tactic. Where there is preferential voting (Austria, Finland, Denmark, and the Netherlands), electoral campaigns for female candidates conducted by women's organizations will instead be the most important measure to promote gender balance. The Report also made the extremely crucial point that more data needs to be gathered on the proportion of women *among the candidates* for parliamentary and EP elections, because such data would contribute to the identification of the *reasons* for women's underrepresentation, for example whether they are to be found in the selection process, in the voting behavior, in the electoral system, or in other factors.

The Commission Report examined the situation of the member states with respect to the

four priorities laid down in the "Council Recommendation of 2 December 1996 on the balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process": (1) the adoption of a comprehensive, integrated strategy designed to promote balanced participation in the decision-making process; (2) the mobilization of all the actors in economic and social life to achieve equal opportunities; (3) the promotion of the collection and the publication of statistics to provide a clearer picture of how women and men are represented in decision-making, and the identification of good practice; and (4) the promotion of a gender balance in committees at all levels. The Report's findings are based on member states' answers to a questionnaire prepared by the Commission. Efforts, results, and even the degree of detail in the answers to the questionnaire varied considerably across the member states.

The Commission noted at the very beginning that the Recommendation did not define the term 'balanced participation,' an oversight that has enabled member states to choose which percentage of women in decision-making bodies they considered 'balanced': whereas the Scandinavian countries and the UK have a target of 50% women, most other countries consider a participation rate of 30% to constitute the critical mass above which women and men can exercise any real influence. Observing that legal and policy initiatives to promote women in decision-making vary enormously across the member states, the Commission argued that the basic policy mix needed to promote gender balance is one combining long term political commitment, sound statistics, regular monitoring, and appropriate structures — depending on the culture of the member states — anchored in legislation and the provision of financial resources. More broadly, it recommended that member states intervene to change attitudes and behavior, to improve knowledge, and to facilitate women's participation in politics and in the public and

private sectors. It found that most member states had adopted a host of different measures to enhance equality between the sexes — like legislation on gender balance in bodies from parliamentary level down to regional committees, positive action to increase the number of women in higher positions, enforcement mechanisms such as equal treatment offices, information campaigns and training, and financial resources to promote these policies — instead of applying a specific strategy for increasing balanced participation. The Report thus called upon members states to adopt a comprehensive approach, because "the problem of under-representation of women in decision-making posts is structural and multifaceted. It has to be tackled at the same time in all its aspects both in terms of political and social mechanisms and in terms of awareness raising and change of attitudes and behaviours" (Commission of the European Communities 2000, 21).

These two documents currently typify the 'state-of-the-art' in terms of strategies to increase women's political representation and, in fact, no comparable scholarly work as of yet addresses as broad a set of issues and recommendations regarding the promotion of women in decision-making. While reality has much to do to catch up with these proposals, these documents may provide important guidance for efforts to reach parity representation both in the European Parliament and in national and local assemblies. The next step will be to publicize their findings more widely so that scholars, activists, and politicians may apply these insights to effect changes in patterns of representation world-wide.

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