

Achievements and Failures of Female MEPs from the Czech Republic: 10 Years in the EU from a Gender Perspective

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Although the Czech electorate approved the country's accession to the European Union in a national referendum, the Czech public and media are not interested in the EU agenda. The public is divided in their perception of the EU membership and the impact from having joined the EU is rarely discussed. Moreover, the public's euroscepticism accelerated during the time Václav Klaus was the president and has now entered the mainstream.

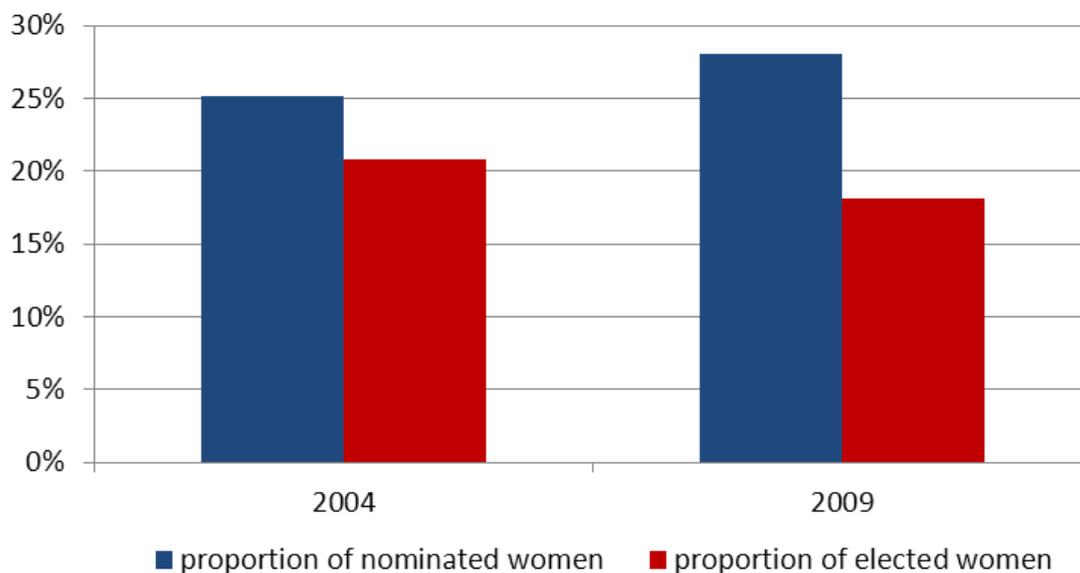
News from the European Parliament are still considered as foreign rather than domestic. That means the Czech MEPs are rarely involved in political discussions at the national level, and that includes female MEPs. They are publicly recognised only when they undertake some initiative which is also significant at the national level.

Therefore the only Czech female MEPs who got to the top of popularity rankings were the two presidential candidates in the 2013 election – Jana Bobošíková and Zuzana Roithová. Both of them were also well known before they became MEPs. Bobošíková was a popular TV presenter and one of the most visible players in so called Czech TV Crisis. Roithová was a senator and the Minister of Health. Jana Hybášková was the focus of the Czech media before the early elections in 2009 when she was first nominated and then rejected as the leader of the Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party.

1. Representation of Women in the EP (2004 – 2009), Membership in Factions and Czech Political Parties

Women's representation in the EP for the Czech Republic has been rather random and derived from the proportion and position of women on the candidate lists as well as from the number of seats occupied by the specific parties. Although 25% of the candidates nominated in 2004 in the Czech Republic were women, 5 were elected, making up almost 21%. In the following year's elections, the percentage of women amongst the nominees increased by 3%;, however, only 4 were elected (18%), which was the second worst result out of all member states.

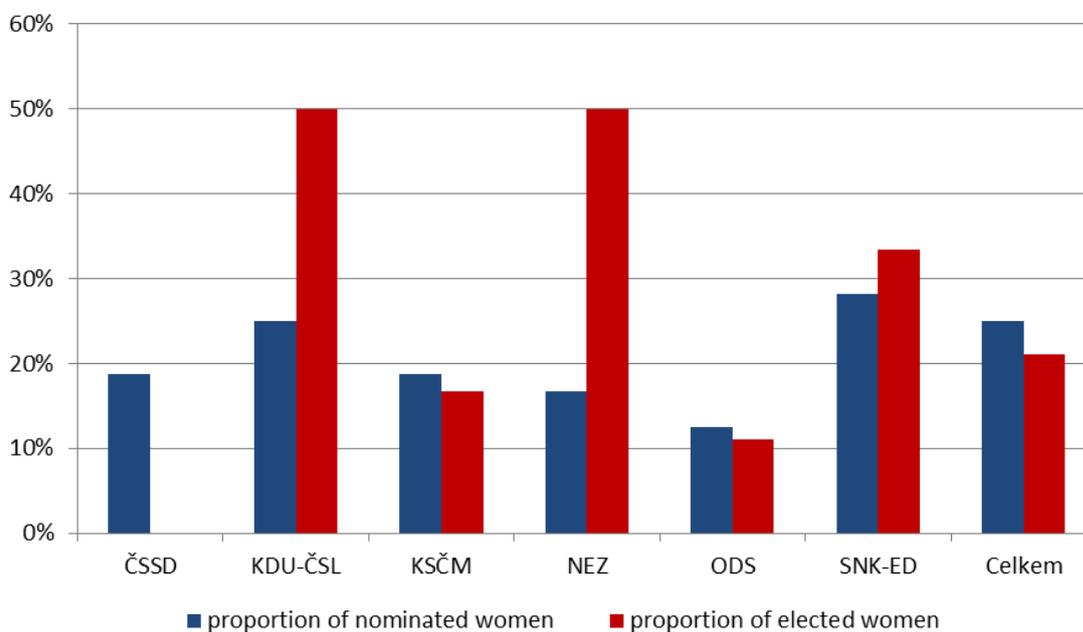
Chart no. 1: The Development of Women's Representation in the EP for the Czech Republic



Data source: Czech Statistical Office

There were big differences amongst the political subjects in terms of gained mandates and participation of female politicians. The Civic Democratic Party was the most influential concerning female representation of Czechs in the EP in 2004; however, only one female Eurodeputy (11%) was elected from the party. This was the second worst result in terms of gender representation, following the Czech Social Democratic Party that was represented by only men in the 2004 – 2009 electoral period. The other political parties were all represented by one woman each and that number was the maximum for all elected parties. One man and one woman were elected from the Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-ČSL) and the Independents, thus female participation by SNK-European Democrats reached one-third. The Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM) was represented by one woman, which makes up only 16.7%.

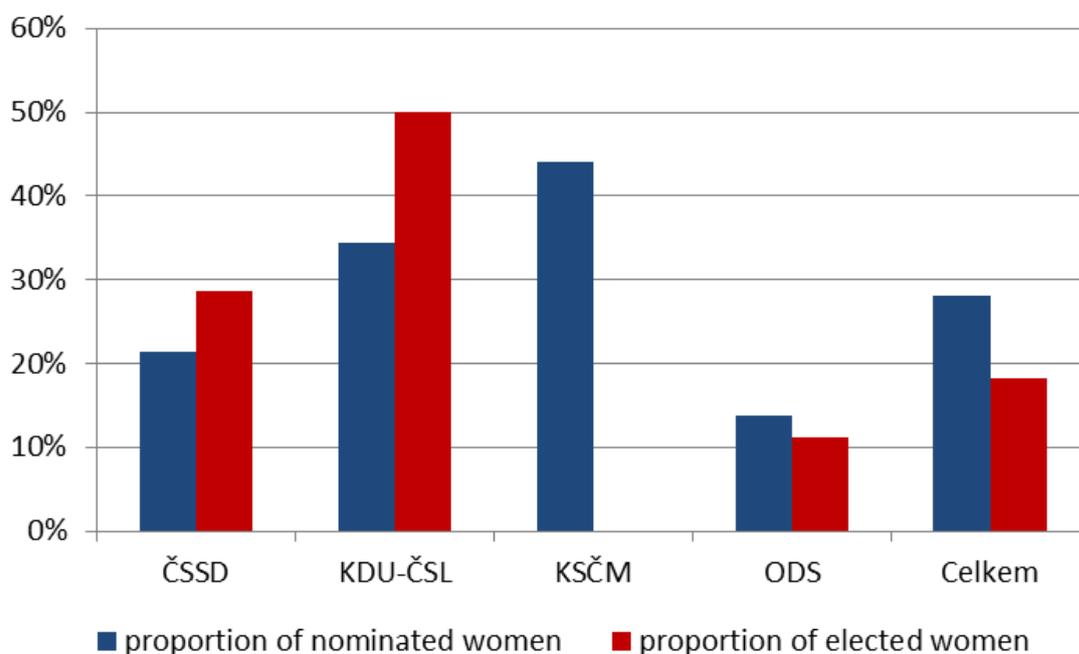
Chart no. 2: The proportion of women and men amongst the nominated and elected candidates to the EP in the Czech Republic in 2004 by each political party



Data source: Czech Statistical Office

In 2009, the overall participation of women decreased to 21% in comparison to the previous period. The Civic Democratic Party (ODS) again had the decisive impact on the total representation of women. And as in the previous elections, only one female Eurodeputy was elected from the party, and its percentage of female participation was 11%. By contrast, the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) suffered a great turnover. In the previous period, it had not been represented by any woman, but in 2009 two women were elected (which was the biggest number for any single political party). The participation of elected women thus rose to 28.6%. There was no woman elected from The Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM) in these elections, even though women nominees were represented in near parity (44%). However, they were nominated for lower positions on the candidate lists, which means that they were essentially unelectable with respect to the party's election results. The Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-ČSL) reached 50% in terms of female participation.

Chart no. 3: The proportion of women and men amongst the nominated and elected candidates to the EP in the Czech Republic in 2009 by each political party



Data source: Czech Statistical Office

2. Constituencies Represented by the Czech Female MEPs

The political membership of the Czech MEPs was reflected in their respective membership in each EP fraction. Jana Bobošíková was the only Non-Inscrit deputy in the 2004 – 2009 electoral period. Nina Škottová, Zuzana Roithová and Jana Hybášková were members of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats. Věra Flasarová was a member of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left political group.

In the 2009 – 2014 term, all women deputies were fraction members: Andrea Češková – The European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR); Zuzana Brzobohatá and Olga Sehnalová - Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) in the European Parliament; Zuzana Roithová - a member of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) board. By the end of the electoral period, Věra Flasarová of the Confederal Group of the European United Left–Nordic Green Left was allocated a seat. As indicated by the membership in the national political parties and EP fractions, the Czech female MEPs elected in 2004 represented rather conservative electorate. Although Jana Bobošíková was not affiliated with any fraction, her political activities

inclined toward a conservative, nationally oriented electorate. In the following period, two rather conservative female deputies and two social democrats were elected so the political spectrum represented by women became even. At the end of the term, a left-wing KSČM representative arrived and as a result female MEPs have been representing left-wing oriented voters since January 2014. Any further details on the elected women candidates' voters, e.g. their age or gender, are not available.

3. Previous Careers of the Czech Female MEPs and their Activities after Termination of their Mandate

In this part of the paper, brief bios of the Czech Female MEPs are presented. Particular issues linked to their political careers are mentioned in the following two parts.



Jana Bobošíková (2004 – 2009)

is a graduate of University of Economics, Prague. Before being elected to the European Parliament, she worked as a journalist and

Source: Wikipedia

a TV presenter. She worked for Czech Television as a public broadcaster (she played a significant role in the so called Czech TV Crisis), the Economic Newspaper (Hospodářské noviny), Czech Radio, Frekvence 1 Radio and Nova TV. She was elected as a MEP in 2004 from the Independent Democrats. Before termination of her mandate in 2008, she ran for the presidency for the KSČM. After termination of her mandate in 2013, she ran for the presidency in the first direct presidential election. She currently works as an assistant professor in the Department of Public Relations and Communication of the College of International and Public Relations Prague where she teaches media communication. She is the leader of the Sovereignty – Jana Bobošíková Bloc that was founded in 2011 and a member of the Czech Freedom Fighters Union committee.



Věra Flasarová (2004 - 2009; 2014)

is a graduate of the Faculty of Economics VŠB - Technical University of Ostrava and the Doctorate programme of the Higher Party School, Moscow, USSR. She worked in Vitkovice Ironworks in Ostrava (1977 - 1987). She was a secretary of the Municipal

Source: EP Website

Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (1985 – 1994) and an instructor at the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (1989-2004) in the then Ostravský Region (now Moravskoslezský Region). From 2000 to 2004, she was a representative for the Moravskoslezský Region. In the 2004 – 2009

term, she represented the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia in the European Parliament. Between 2009 and 2013, she was an assistant to a member of the European Parliament; since January 2014, she has been working as a MEP – she took the seat after deputy Vladimír Remek retired.



Jana Hybášková (2004 – 2009)

is a graduate of the Philosophical Faculty of Charles University; she worked as Director General of the Middle East Department of the

Source: Wikipedia

Foreign Ministry; afterwards she was the Ambassador of the Czech Republic to Slovenia (1997 – 2001), Kuwait and Qatar (2002 to 2004). In 2004 she was elected a Eurodeputy to the European Parliament for the Independent candidates and European Democrats. Since 2011 she has been the EU Ambassador to Iraq.



Nina Škottová (2004 – 2009)

is a graduate of the Faculty of Pharmacy of Comenius University, Bratislava. She worked as a Research Fellow at the Czechoslovak

Source: ODS Web

Academy of Science in Bratislava and she was an employee of the Institute of Experimental Endocrinology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. She chaired the Pharmacology Institute of the Faculty of Medicine of Palacký University, Olomouc. She was appointed a MEP in 2004 for ODS. She currently sits on the Scientific Committee of the Faculty of Medicine of Palacký University, Olomouc.



Zuzana Roithová (2004 – 2009; 2009 – 2014)

is a graduate of the Faculty of General Medicine of Charles University and Sheffield Hallam University. She is the only Czech woman politician to have been elected twice to the European Parliament, in 2004 and

Source: EP Website

2009. From 1978 to 1979 she worked as a doctor in a Beroun hospital and at Královské Vinohrady University Hospital (1985 – 1990) where she served as a director from 1990 to 1998. In 1998 she became the Minister of Health. Since 1999 she has been a member of The Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-ČSL) where she held the position of Vice President from 2001 to 2003. She worked in the Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic

from 1998 to 2004; she held the post of Vice-Chairwoman of the Committee for Social Policy and Health Care from 2000 for two years. In 2013 she ran for presidency in the direct presidential elections.

She currently chairs the International European Movement in the Czech Republic and is a member of the European advisory board of the Organisation for patient safety and of the board of directors of the Spojená akreditační komise ČR (joint committee on accreditation of health facilities in the Czech Republic). She was awarded a Prize of the International European Movement in the Czech Republic. She won the 'European of the Year 2006' award. Since June 2013 she has been the Vice-Chairwoman of KDU-ČSL.



Zuzana Brzobohatá (2009 – 2014)

is a graduate of Brno University of Technology. She was elected a MPE in 2009 from ČSSD; she has been a member of this party since 1998. Since 1990 she has been actively involved in the

Source: EP Website

Brontosaurus Movement, . a Czech civic association dedicated to the protection of the environment. From 1995 to 2000 ,she worked as an IT teacher at a secondary school and a vocational school; between 1998 and 2010 she was involved in the Tišnov town administration. From 2002 to 2006, she was a director of the Cabinet and Administration of the Ministry of Finance; from November 2008 to July 2009, she was a deputy of the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic. Between 2008 and 2012 she worked in the assembly of the Jihomoravský Region.



Andrea Češková (2009 – 2014)

is a graduate of the Faculty of Law, Charles University in Prague and has been a member of ODS since 1998. She worked in Prague 5 Municipal District assembly from 1998 to 2009. She was elected a MEP from the Civic Democratic Party in 2009.

Source: EP Website



Olga Sehnalová (2009 – 2014)

is a graduate of the Faculty of Medicine of Masaryk University, Brno and Business School. She worked as a doctor at Kroměříž hospital from 1995. She was also a member of the ČSSD Central Committee of (1995 – 2003; since 2005) and Vice-Chairwoman of the Social Democratic Women (2001 – 2002). She held the post of

Source: EP Website

Deputy Mayor of Kroměříž town from 1998, and from 2008 she was a Member of the Regional Assembly of the Zlín Region. Between 2000 and 2001 she was a Member of the EU communication strategy committee in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic; Member of the management and monitoring committee for the NUTS level 2 region Central Moravia (2000-2002); she chaired the National Network of Healthy Cities in the Czech Republic from 2003 to 2004; between 2003 and 2004 she was a member of the Government Council for Sustainable Development and chairwoman of the Communication Committee. She was elected to the European Parliament from ČSSD in 2009.

4. The Influence and Potential Impact of Czech Female MEPs on EU Agenda

As indicated in the introductory part, the EU decision-making level is not much reflected in the Czech media and NGOs. There are several think-tanks focusing on EU agenda, but these mostly focus on the Union itself or particular topics linked to it. The media do monitor and analyse activities of elected MEPs but usually without indicating the content of their initiatives.

According to these statistics Czech female MEPs were on average more active than their male colleagues (some of the women were among the most active of all Czech MEPs). Considering various indicators, such as attendance, presence during voting, motions for resolutions or reporting, activity of Czech female MEPs were above the EU average. On the contrary, the Czech delegation as a whole ranks below the EU average in all measures of MEPs activity.

Jana Hybášková has advocated closer relations between the EU and Israel, having enforced the prohibition of the Anti-Semitic TV broadcaster Al-Manar on European satellites. She has also contributed to the change in the racist content of some Palestinian textbooks financed by the EU. She became a member of the Steering Committee of the World Movement for Democracy in 2006.

All Czech female MEPs took a similar stand on the proposed ACTA international agreement - none voted for its adoption (three voted against it and one abstained). In general, all Czech MEPs addressed the issues of women's role in society and equal opportunity.

Andrea Češková, Zuzana Brzobohatá and Věra Flasarová focus on another significant social issue – equal remuneration for women and men. Andrea Češková has proposed introducing a legislation reducing persistent disparities in salaries between men and women. This legislation would foster equal working conditions and prerequisites for

starting a family. Věra Flasarová was a rapporteur on the *Report on Educational Discrimination against Young Women and Girls*.

The female MEPs agree on the relevance of higher female representation in politics and in decision-making posts in the economic sector; however, their views on how to achieve this differ. Zuzana Brzobohatá has expressed her support of equal representation of women and men in the European Parliament and generally in the political and private sectors by signing the declaration *No Modern European Democracy without Gender Equality*. Like Zuzana Roithová and Olga Sehnalová, she supports introduction of gender quotas in management boards.

On the contrary, Andrea Češková has expressed her disapproval of the proposed introduction of quotas, arguing that it would increase the administrative workload for business companies. She considers raising public awareness through the media, the educational system and an information campaign would be a more natural way of challenging gender stereotypes. She thinks that quotas could be counter-productive to women. As an alternative, she proposes increasing positive image of women politicians in the media and promoting successful female role models.

Thus, she supports even representation of women and men in the decision-making process, but she opposes legislative measurements like introducing quotas. She addresses the issue of combining professional and family life and the related subject matters of preschool child-care and combating violence against women and children. Zuzana Brzobohatá, Zuzana Roithová and Olga Sehnalová voted for the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and Council on improvement of gender equality in supervisory boards of companies listed on the stock exchange. Andrea Češková, however, voted against it. The adoption of the Directive is considered the biggest success in the field of gender equality.

5. Initiatives Undertaken at the EU and National Level

Zuzana Roithová supported the imprisoned Ukrainian ex-prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko and she pushed forward the cancellation of visa obligation for Czech citizens travelling to Canada. She also urges the cancellation of daylight saving time.

Consumer protection is a big topic for the Czech female MEPs. Zuzana Roithová has set up an online informative portal www.budulinek.eu that strives to protect children from dangerous products. She has also made a motion to modernise legislation on the import of low-quality toys from China. Within the field of consumer protection, Olga Sehnalová focuses primarily on protection from aggressive trade practices and false advertising. She deals with problems of double quality standards of groceries within the

EU member states. She has also expressed her disapproval to more frequent vehicle controls as proposed by the European Council. She supports unification of regulations so that technical inspections would be equally thorough in all countries.

Zuzana Brzobohatá is an advocate of promoting active citizenship as well as active ageing.

6. Female Deputies Membership on the EP Committees and Their Impact on the EU Agenda

As stated above, the activity of Czech (female) MEPs is not closely monitored, therefore only the memberships on EP Committees are listed:

2004 – 2009 term:

- Internal Market and Consumer Protection (vice-chairwomen, since 2007 the 1st vice-chairwoman)
- Regional Development
- Culture and Education
- Women's Rights and Gender Equality
- Foreign Affairs
- Budgets
- Development
- Economic and Monetary Affairs (substitute)
- Temporary Committee on Climate Change (substitute)

2009 – 2014 term:

- Budgets
- Budgetary Control
- Women's Rights and Gender Equality
- Internal Market and Consumer Protection
- Transport and Tourism
- Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (substitute)
- Constitutional Affairs (substitute)
- Culture and Education (substitute)

7. Involvement in Promoting New Legislation and Politics in the Area of Gender Equality and Elimination of Discrimination on Grounds of Gender and Sexual Orientation

As stated above, the majority support of the EP and Council directive on improving gender balance among non-executive directors of companies listed on the stock exchanges is considered to be the most significant involvement in promoting gender equality. The female MEPs voted unanimously in the case of motion for the resolution, *Women and Business Leadership*. They all spoke out in favour of the motions for resolutions such as *Combating Violence against Women* and *Gendercide: The Missing Women?*. There were disparities regarding motions for the resolutions *The EU Policy Framework to Fight Violence against Women* (one MEP against) and *Elimination and Prevention of All Forms of Violence against Women and Girls* and *Role of Women in an Ageing Society* (two MEPs against).

Zuzana Roithová and Olga Sehnalová voted for the motion for the resolution *Sexual Exploitation and Prostitution and Its Impact on Gender Equality*, Andrea Češková abstained from voting and the two remaining MEPs were not present at the meeting. All female MEPs except for Zuzana Roithová voted for the motion *Equality between Women and Men in 2012* (in case of the previous year's resolution, Andrea Češková abstained, two MEPs voted for and two against in 2009); the situation was the same in the case of voting for implementation of gender mainstreaming in the European Parliament work resolution on the situation of single mothers. The Czech female MEPs voted quite to the contrary on an alternative motion for resolution *Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights*. Only two MEPs from ČSSD voted for the resolution draft on educational and professional mobility of women just as in the case of resolution regarding women and political decision making, motion for resolution regarding Peking +15. Only two female MEPs voted, one for and the other against, on the assessment of results of male and female equality roadmap for 2006 – 2010.

Two ČSSD deputies voted for the *Undocumented Women Migrants in the European Union* motion for resolution; Věra Flasarová abstained in the vote and the remaining deputies voted against the resolution. The motion for resolution *Women with Disabilities* and the resolution on gender aspect of Roma inclusion strategies were supported by all female MEPs except for Andrea Češková. With regard to the system of equal compensation, Andrea Češková either abstained from voting or voted against, and the rest voted for it. The ODS representative was also the only one who rejected the resolution on equal treatment between men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services, the impact of the economic crises on gender equality and women's rights (only two MEPs voted on gender aspects of the economic downturn and financial crises – one voted for and one abstained), and a draft regarding the improvement of working conditions for pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding.

With respect to sexual minorities, Zuzana Roithová disapproves of equal status of registered partnership and marriage and opposes adoption of children by homosexual couples. On the contrary, all remaining female MEPs voted for the alternative motion for resolution proposed by EPP, S&D, ALDE, Greens/EFA and GUE/NGL *Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity*.

Summary

As mentioned at the beginning, the Czech MEPs and their work are not widely recognized in Czech society. The bulk of the responsibility for this situation lies with journalists and the media in general who report primarily about national affairs and assure that the EU agenda is overshadowed by other (sometimes less important) issues. Therefore the general public is not familiar with the representation of women in the EP (and gender aspect of political representation in general), female MEPs and their work.

Furthermore, even the NGOs focusing on gender issues are not systematically monitoring their work. Fórum 50 % as the only Czech NGO focusing on women's political participation investigates the phenomenon from the structural point of view (women's representation in decision-making bodies, barriers female politicians face, positive measures, etc.) without particular interest in the content of their work.

Therefore the only well-known (female) MEPs are those undertaking some initiatives which are significant also on the national level – often leading them to time off from their work in the EP. The only available data considering their work are those prepared by specialized think-tanks or the occasional academic research. None of these are focused specifically on women or gender equality.

It still remains a challenge for the media, women's NGOs and political think-tanks and watchdogs to make (female) Czech MEPs and their work more visible to the general public. Future success will probably go hand in hand with putting the EU issues on the agenda.

Veronika Šprincová graduated in Gender Studies from the Department of Gender Studies at Charles University in Prague where she teaches a course focused on contemporary feminist theories and discussions. Besides making analyses, lecturing and coordinating projects for the NGO Fórum 50 %, she is a PhD candidate in political science. She represents Fórum 50 % in The Government Council for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men and is also a member of its Committee for the Institutional Safeguarding of Equal Opportunities for Women and Men.



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