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**The Republic of Kazakhstan:  
modern gender politics**

The theme of women's participation in decision-making is very important and urgent. It is difficult to overestimate, because without understanding and realizing it, we will not be able to make real steps towards economic and political advancement of women in society. In this article the emphasis is placed by the author to the political status of women, the lighting of the influence of women on the political situation in modern Kazakhstan. Statistics is provided by the author, which confirms that women are poorly represented at decision-making level in Kazakhstan. The author shows several approaches to the explanation of the reasons for the gender discourse in the political life of the community, identifies some of the main reasons for the low representation of women in politics and barriers to participation in elections.

**Key words:** gender policy, decision-making, elections, gender analysis, leadership, power.

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**Қазақстан Республикасы:  
заманауи гендерлік саясат**

Шешім қабылдау деңгейіндегі мәселелерге әйелдердің қатысу тақырыбы өте маңызды және өзекті болып табылады. Оны асыра бағалау қиын, себебі, оны түсініп, қабылдамай, біз қоғамда әйелдердің экономикалық және саяси жылжуына нақты қадамдар жасай алмаймыз. Мақалада автор негізгі екіпінді әйелдердің саяси статусын қарастыруға, қазіргі Қазақстандағы саяси жағдайға әйелдердің ықпалын анықтауға қояды. Автор әйелдердің шешім қабылдайтын деңгейдегі өкілдердің төмендігін, аз тағайындалатындығын көрсететін статистика ұсынады. Автор қоғамның саяси өміріндегі гендерлік дискурстың болу себептерін түсіндіретін бірнеше тәсілдерін көрсетіп, саясаттағы әйелдер өкілдігінің төмендігін және сайлауға қатысуға кедергі болатын басты себептерін айқындайды.

**Түйін сөздер:** гендер саясат, шешім қабылдау, сайлау, гендерлік талдау, көшбасшылық, билік.

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**Республика Казахстан:  
современная  
гендерная политика**

Тема участия женщин на уровне принятия решений чрезвычайно важна и актуальна. Ее трудно переоценить, поскольку, не поняв и не осознав ее, мы не сможем сделать реальных шагов к экономическому и политическому продвижению женщин в обществе. В статье основной акцент автором сделан на рассмотрение политического статуса женщин, освещение вопроса о влиянии женщин на политическую ситуацию в современном Казахстане. Автором предоставлена статистика, которая подтверждает, что женщины слабо представлены на уровне принятия решений в РК. Автор показывает несколько подходов к объяснению причин гендерного дискурса в политической жизни общества, выявляет ряд главных причин низкой репрезентативности женщин в политике и барьеров для участия на выборах.

**Ключевые слова:** гендерная политика, принятие решений, выборы, гендерный анализ, лидерство, власть.

**THE REPUBLIC OF  
KAZAKHSTAN: MODERN  
GENDER POLITICS****Introduction**

Many policymakers write that «21 – century is the century of women’s politics».

In the Millennium Declaration of the United Nations (2000), which was signed by Kazakhstan, promotion of the equality of men and women, expansion of women’s rights and opportunities were declared as the main goals for the development of the mankind in the third millennium [1].

Historically established domination of men over women has been changing nowadays. In industrially well-developed and socially oriented countries women have practically achieved equality with men in respect of their rights and opportunities. There have been some remarkable improvements in the state of women: literacy, education, women have won voting rights, the right to hold public office, most of the governments have signed international treaties committed to women’s rights. The importance of such gains shouldn’t be underestimated. But this list is short in comparison with other areas of concern emerging nowadays: poverty, unemployment, unpaid housework, underrepresentation of women in decision – making, violence against women, healthcare, family planning. But we also know that worldwide women have fewer rights than men. They have lower education and health status, less income and less access to resources. Worldwide only 15 percents of landowners are women and the majority of unpaid workers are women and as we know violence against women is still widespread. Achieving true gender equality is to change that picture. Achieving gender equality means increasing women’s status and the opportunities that are available to them – opportunities for education, for health care and the economic-political opportunities. Really, the women in Kazakhstan can have an equal voice with men, they can participate equally in making decisions that affect their lives, their families, their communities and the future of the country.

Most women are unaware of their basic human rights. Though many Conventions were ratified on women, however, much remains to be done in the field of equality. Equality is a cornerstone of every democratic society which aspires to social justice and human rights. In virtually all societies and in all spheres of activity women are subject to inequalities. Discrimination against women is widespread,

while consequences and causes may vary from country to country. It is perpetuated by the survival of stereotypes and of traditional cultural and religious practices and beliefs detrimental to women.

Political life of Kazakhstan undergoes a complex process of modernization and democratization. Building a truly democratic society is impossible without active women's participation. Underrepresentation of women at all levels of government lessens their role in the society.

During the years of independence Kazakhstan has achieved certain progress in the field of protection of rights and legitimate interests of men and women taking an active role in the integration of gender equality at a national and international level.

### **Current analysis of the situation**

When highlighting positive measures being taken by the government in the area of observance of a right to equality between men and women in exercise of political and civil rights, it is necessary to indicate that position of women in Kazakhstan still needs practical support and gender adjustment. Kazakhstan has over 17 million inhabitants. Women in Kazakhstan account for 52% of the population. In average there are 1077 women versus 1000 men.

Gender structure of the population from birth up to the age of 24 demonstrates numerical superiority of men, due to the fact that normally more boys are born compared to girls. Starting with the age of 25, men's share becomes less than 50% and is gradually reducing with the age increase.

The average life expectancy in Kazakhstan is 66.2 years, including 60.6 for men and 72.0 for women. Women live 11.3 years longer than men [2]. At present women constitute half of those employed, but their salaries make up only 61 percent of the men's salaries. The reason is that women, as a rule, are occupied in less paid positions even in such traditionally «women's» fields as public health and education. There are still facts of violence against women and their sexual exploitation persisting.

Even though Kazakhstan adopted Strategy of Gender Equality for 2006-2016 these measures remain a mere formal declaration which is evidenced by an absence of any progress in involvement of women in policy and government of the state.

### **Gender equality achievements**

Kazakhstan as UN member has taken responsibility to eliminate gender equality in the country. The contacts with national, regional and interna-

tional organizations, involved in gender issues, have been established. Due to lobbying of human rights advocates and cooperating with international organizations Kazakhstan has become a participant of more than 60 international agreements on human rights. International human rights standards were adopted by ratifying conventions focusing on women's rights such as the Convention on Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women. The international treaties on civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, etc. were signed. Kazakhstan has also signed a number of statutes of the International Labor Organization concerning the rights of women and children.

The leadership of the country is actively promoting achievement of real gender equality. The National Commission on Family and Women's Affairs under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan was established, National action plan for women was drawn up (1999), and the Concept of Gender Policy in the Republic of Kazakhstan (2003) was adopted. This document sets forth the main principles, priorities and objectives of gender policy in Kazakhstan.

The Gender Equality Strategy for 2006-2016 is another conceptual instrument that specifies areas of gender policy and is aimed at more effective resolution of the most significant gender issues in politics, economy, education, family, health protection issues and prevention of violence against women and children. A special section of the Strategy concerns gender education and advocacy among the population, in particular state officials, parliamentarians, the Maslikhat deputies, managers at all levels, and the mass media.

The new laws of the Republic of Kazakhstan «On State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women», «On Domestic Violence» were adopted in January 2010, after years of activism by gender advocates and women's organizations. According to law: «The main goals of the state policy is to ensure equal rights and equal opportunities for men and women in all spheres of public and social life» (Article 3.) [3].

The implementation of the afore-said legal documents is still outstanding. Education on gender equality issues, is still at a very low level, thus most women are unaware of their rights and in everyday life, women experience their legal rights infringed or limited in the street, in public places, at work and at home.

The non-governmental organizations are becoming more active in solving gender equality prob-

lems. An active role in solving socially important problems is played by about 300 non-governmental organizations and public associations, including 150 women's NGO's, working in the field of protection of rights and legitimate interests of family, women and children.

Although women take the opportunity to get involved in society by establishing NGO, they are so far refraining from launching a broad women's movement. Up to now there is no feminist agenda. Mostly they remain active at the local, grass-root and civil society level. Only in rare cases they succeed to influence government legislation or become involved in political discourse and decision-making.

I think that women's participation in politics presents adequate competition to men and contributes to the improvement of the situation in the country and their presence in the administrative structures develops more flexible management forms, oriented at the permanently changing situation, because women in Kazakhstan are more educated, dutiful, orderly, communicable, and express greater interest and care about the people.

Today the increasing economic growth of the country and raise of the living standards of people expand opportunities for men and women to realize their rights. Certain conditions have been created for studying other countries' experience in solving gender problems.

Despite my country's great accomplishments and the efforts to ensure equal rights and opportunities for women, we still face some challenges in this area.

### **The factors hindering gender equality achievement**

There is still insufficient understanding of the need of gender equality in the society. Stable traditional stereotypes about the role and place of a woman in the society and patriarchal approach to the issue of the sex equality still exist.

Women are insufficiently represented at the decision-making level in the government bodies and in highly-paid positions in various economic spheres.

We must understand that formal equality of men and women does not promote democracy and further development of the society. Obvious women's minority in power at the decision-making level decreases their possibilities to participate in establishing a fair social society and lowers their role in conducting reforms in the country. We see prevalence of women among unemployed and poor. The government must work to reduce unemployment

among women, which now equals to 6.3%, while the average for both sexes is 5.5%. Women are still discriminated at employment, career promotion, skills development, redundancy, etc. We still face legal ignorance and legal nihilism of the considerable part of the population.

### **Gender goals**

The Gender Equality Strategy for 2006-2016 provides implementation of the tasks to achieve equal rights and opportunities for men and women in the period 2006 – 2016. In order to realize socially fair gender policy in Kazakhstani society it is necessary:

- to raise the level of legal and political culture of the society for self-realization of the citizens, as well as for provision of sex equality in all spheres of life, including politics, social and labor and family relations;

- to achieve raising of gender sensitivity at all levels of developing social and economic policy and making decisions;

- to ensure improvement of the legislation and establishment of gender equality institutions with the aim of realization of legal mechanisms for protection of women's and men's rights;

- to introduce gender indicators and gender statistics, to conduct obligatory gender expertise of the normative legal acts, state plans and programs;

- to achieve the 30 percent representation of women in power at the decision-making level in compliance with the requirements of the Beijing Platform of Action for improvement of the women's status (1995);

- to conduct educational work through seminars and trainings for the party leaders as well as the women, willing to be involved in political activity.

- to introduce quotas for women as a temporary measure to provide their wider participation in the executive and legislative power according to the UN Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women.

- to study the experience of the well-developed countries in political advancement of women [4].

### **Conclusion**

In the article, an attempt is undertaken to understand the developing experience of gender policy in modern Kazakhstan and some achievements and specific barriers that women face on the way to big politics. Yes, we have come a long way, but there is still much to be done. We have to consider

gender equality issues as an area of high priority. It doesn't give prepared solution for all problems of society, but it makes us think that the problem is not probably in «men's politics» being too much, but in «women's politics» not being enough. Gender equality is no longer a women's issue: it is a policy area affecting us all. It requires active efforts from women and men in the public sector as well as the private sector. The gender perspective shall be mainstreamed in all areas of policies and politics. Society continues to reject the idea of gender equity

and tends to see the programs which promote it as an inevitable part of international politics.

Without the active participation of the President and the Government and without national laws in this area, it will be difficult to maintain the efforts of women. Kazakhstan has the potential to achieve gender equality by 2016. The issue now is how this potential will be developed and used, how deep the institutional and cultural changes in the society will go, and whether new threats to equality might arise.

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