

Women and political participation in Malta

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Introduction

The Prime Minister of Malta acknowledged in January of 2014 that Malta has not achieved parity between women and men in politics (Dalli, 2014). This is because in 2014, 9 out of the 70 members forming the Maltese parliament (incorporating the speaker), that is 13% of the members were female (European Commission, Justice, 2014a). Schiavone (2013) underlines that Malta ranked lowest among the EU 27 member states in 2013 in relation to women's representation in parliament. In 2014, only Hungary had a worse track record than Malta among the EU 28 (European Commission, Justice, 2014a). Among the 57 OSCE participating States, Malta has the eighth lowest representation of women in parliament (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2014).

Maltese women do better in local council elections. In 2013, 21 % of those elected as local councillors were women (European Commission, Justice, 2013). Maltese women were more likely to be elected in local council elections rather than at national level in 2014 and in the years before this. At the same time one should point out that in the same year only 9% of the mayors were female (6 out of 62 mayors).

On the other hand, 4 (67%) out of the 6 MEPs elected in 2013 were female (European Commission, Justice, 2014b). Malta can also boast of having a female President, the only female president in the EU member states apart from Lithuania. Ms. Coleiro Preca was appointed president on 4 April 2014 (European Commission, Justice, 2014c). When she became president, Malta lost one of the two women who were in charge of a ministry at cabinet level. As things stand, in 2014 Malta had a female president, a male prime minister, and one female out of 15 ministers which adds up to 7% of all ministers (European Commission, Justice, 2014d).

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE, 2009) Ministerial Council's Decision 7/09 on Women's Participation in Political and Public Life underlines that participating States need to take effective measures to ensure women's equal participation and representation at all levels of life. This is because the OSCE believes that the promotion of equality between men and women and the protection of human rights "are essential to peace, sustainable democracy, economic development and therefore to security and stability in the OSCE region" (OSCE, 14/04, p. 1).

The objective of this paper is to outline the level of political participation of Maltese women in local councils, national and European parliaments. When the level of participation of women in these political structures falls drastically below that of Maltese men – as in the case of national elections - this paper sets out to delineate what obstacles might prevent women's representation at this level and what might need to be done to ensure that more women are elected. The paper takes into consideration the six possible areas of intervention proposed by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) in the baseline study entitled "Gender equality in elected office: a six-step action plan" (Norris and Krook, 2011), namely constitutional rights, electoral system, legal quotas, party rules and recruitment procedures, capacity development and parliamentary reform.

The paper was presented at the Conference on "Women's Political Participation in Malta", organized by ODIHR, in partnership with the House of Representatives, the Commissioner for the Promotion of Equality, and the National Council of Women of Malta, on 3 November 2014 in Valletta. Conference recommendations are outlined in the last section of the paper.

History

Maltese women were given the right to vote and the right to stand for elections in 1947 (Callus, 1992), two years after the end of World War II. Men of means had been given this right in 1921 when a limited form of self-rule was acceded to by the British government of the time (Frendo, 1988).

Women's political participation

General Elections 1947-2013

Table 1 - Male and female candidates and their respective electoral success in general elections 1947-2013

| Year | Male Candidacies | Female Candidacies | All Winners | Male Winners | Female Winners | Male % of seats | Female % of seats | % Male Success | % Female Success |
|------|------------------|--------------------|-------------|--------------|----------------|-----------------|-------------------|----------------|------------------|
| 1947 | 122 | 2 | 40 | 39 | 1 | 97.50 | 2.50 | 31.97 | 50.00 |
| 1950 | 180 | 7 | 40 | 37 | 3 | 92.50 | 7.50 | 20.56 | 42.86 |
| 1951 | 124 | 6 | 40 | 36 | 4 | 90.00 | 10.00 | 29.03 | 66.67 |
| 1953 | 165 | 7 | 40 | 39 | 1 | 97.50 | 2.50 | 23.64 | 14.29 |
| 1955 | 136 | 7 | 40 | 39 | 1 | 97.50 | 2.50 | 28.68 | 14.29 |
| 1962 | 293 | 9 | 50 | 48 | 2 | 96.00 | 4.00 | 16.38 | 22.22 |
| 1966 | 259 | 5 | 50 | 48 | 2 | 96.00 | 4.00 | 18.53 | 40.00 |
| 1971 | 195 | 4 | 55 | 53 | 2 | 96.36 | 3.64 | 27.18 | 50.00 |
| 1976 | 219 | 7 | 65 | 63 | 2 | 96.92 | 3.08 | 28.77 | 28.57 |
| 1981 | 221 | 10 | 65 | 63 | 2 | 96.92 | 3.08 | 28.51 | 20.00 |
| 1987 | 233 | 9 | 65 | 63 | 2 | 96.32 | 3.08 | 27.04 | 22.22 |
| 1992 | 238 | 8 | 65 | 64 | 1 | 98.46 | 1.54 | 26.89 | 12.50 |
| 1996 | 233 | 15 | 65 | 61 | 4 | 93.85 | 6.15 | 26.18 | 26.67 |
| 1998 | 260 | 24 | 65 | 59 | 6 | 90.77 | 9.23 | 22.69 | 25.00 |
| 2003 | 224 | 23 | 65 | 59 | 6 | 90.77 | 9.23 | 26.34 | 26.09 |
| 2008 | 240 | 19 | 65 | 60 | 5 | 92.31 | 7.69 | 25.00 | 26.32 |
| 2013 | 227 | 40 | 65 | 60 | 5 | 92.30 | 7.70 | 26.43 | 12.50 |

Note: Does not include winners of casual elections or those or those chosen for "bonus" seats.

Sources: University of Malta (2014a).

Less women than men participated in and were elected in the Maltese national elections which took place between 1947 and 2013. The best record attained by women was in 1951 when in spite of the fact that female candidates represented 6.2 percent of all candidates, they managed to win only 10 percent of all seats (see Table 1, Female % of seats column). Table 1 does not include winners of casual or bonus seats, which therefore explains the reason why the percentage rate is lower. In 1951, the percentage of women in parliament was so high because of Mabel Strickland, who was the leader of the Constitutional Party, and was also the owner of The Times of Malta, one of the most popular English language newspapers in Malta. She used the media to persuade the electorate to vote for her and other female

candidates who formed part of this party, namely Celia de Trafford Strickland (Laiviera, 2004; Cutajar, 2011).

The columns devoted to male and female candidacies in Table 1 also illustrate the huge discrepancy between the percentage of men who contest Maltese general elections, and the low number of women who do so. More men win on the whole because more men candidates contest Maltese general elections. In fact the number of men elected in these elections never fell below 90 percent between 1947 and 2013 as Table 1 demonstrates. Lane (1995) however concludes that on average, Maltese women have the same chances of being elected as men once nominated.

The columns entitled male and female success in Table 1 also demonstrate that in the elections which took place between 1947 and 1981 with a repeat in 1998 and 2008, Maltese women who contested national elections were more likely than men to be elected. Lane (1995) sustains that although more men contest elections, a lower proportion of them win when one compares this with the percentage of women who contest the said elections with the percentage of women who win seats. The number of male individuals who win elections is by far exceeded by the number of men who do not. Lane (1995) concludes that on average, Maltese women have the same chances, albeit lower, of being elected when one studies aggregate data.

According to data found on the University of Malta’s website (2014b), 96 female candidates took part in these elections. Of the 96, 55.2% of female candidates tended to be neophytes. Only a few (12 women) contested general elections more than 3 times in the period between 1947 and 2013. Statistics demonstrate that it is more difficult for women to win general elections if they are neophytes. In fact, a good proportion of neophyte female legislators get elected through by-elections (Cutajar, 2011).

Table 2 demonstrates that the majority of legislators, especially those elected from 1966 onwards, were more likely to be incumbents and resurgents (those who re-entered the political fray after a break), rather than neophytes. From 1996 onwards, candidates with previous legislative experience formed up to three quarters of the legislative membership, hence decreasing the electoral success for newcomers. Lane (1995) sustains that incumbency is strongly related to electoral success since candidates who have already spent a number of years in politics would have accrued the necessary political skills and acumen to help them consolidate their position in the political sphere (Miguel, 2008). Lane notes that according to aggregate data there were more male than female incumbents, something also noted by Schiavone (2013).

Table 2 - Returning Members' Share of Legislative Seats

| | Size of Legislature | Incumbents | Resurgents ¹ | Neophytes | Percent Neophytes |
|------|---------------------|------------|-------------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| 1924 | 32 | 19 | 0 | 13 | 40.63 |

¹ ‘Resurgents’ are individuals who served in another legislature.

| | | | | | |
|------|----|----|---|----|-------|
| 1927 | 32 | 19 | 2 | 11 | 34.38 |
| 1932 | 32 | 23 | 1 | 8 | 25.00 |
| 1939 | 10 | 6 | 0 | 4 | 40.00 |
| 1945 | 10 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 80.00 |
| 1947 | 40 | 9 | 4 | 27 | 67.50 |
| 1950 | 40 | 21 | 0 | 19 | 47.50 |
| 1951 | 40 | 26 | 2 | 12 | 30.00 |
| 1953 | 40 | 27 | 2 | 11 | 27.50 |
| 1955 | 40 | 32 | 0 | 8 | 20.00 |
| 1962 | 50 | 21 | 3 | 26 | 52.00 |
| 1966 | 50 | 31 | 3 | 16 | 32.00 |
| 1971 | 55 | 41 | 3 | 11 | 20.00 |
| 1976 | 65 | 44 | 1 | 20 | 30.77 |
| 1981 | 65 | 52 | 1 | 12 | 18.46 |
| 1987 | 69 | 47 | 0 | 22 | 31.88 |
| 1992 | 65 | 50 | 0 | 15 | 23.08 |
| 1996 | 69 | 44 | 0 | 25 | 36.23 |
| 1998 | 65 | 54 | 2 | 9 | 13.85 |
| 2003 | 65 | 52 | 3 | 10 | 15.38 |
| 2008 | 69 | 55 | 0 | 14 | 20.29 |

Source: Cutajar, 2011, p. 409.

Lane (1995) sustains that on the whole, when there is a critical mass of female candidates, more women are elected. He noted an inverse relationship between the size of the candidate lists and the magnitude of female representation. He was proven right during local council and European parliamentary elections where the percentage of women contesting in these elections never fell below 16 percent of all candidates. Miguel (2008) does not agree with this premise noting that when a number of women are fielded during elections, the higher number of female candidates pulverise votes for women's overall chance of winning elections. This might have been the case in 2013 when the higher number of women who contested the local elections did not translate into more women being elected.

Local council elections

Table3 - Women's percentage share of candidacies and seats in local council elections, 1993-2013

| | % Candidacies | % Seats |
|---------|---------------|---------|
| Round 1 | 16.00 | 13.15 |
| Round 2 | 16.89 | 17.10 |
| Round 3 | 21.58 | 20.28 |
| Round 4 | 19.60 | 17.17 |
| Round 5 | 20.16 | 18.27 |
| Round 6 | 19.95 | 18.34 |
| Round 7 | 23.74 | 23.55 |

Source: University of Malta (2014c).

More women are fielded by the main Maltese political parties during local council elections. Cutajar (2011) notes that the percentage of women contesting national elections never surpassed 10 percent of all candidates, in the time period of 1947 to 2008. Since more

women participate in local elections, they are more likely to win seats. Female councillors were however less likely to become mayors as noted above.

Lane (1995) believes that local councils are used by successful candidates as a stepping stone into national politics. In Malta, male rather than female local councillors are more likely to resort to this (Cutajar, 2011).

European Parliamentary elections

Table 4 – Women’s and men’s participation in Maltese European elections, 2004-2014

| Elections | Male candidates | Female candidates | % Female candidates | Male winners | Female winners |
|-----------|-----------------|-------------------|---------------------|--------------|----------------|
| 2004 | 25 | 2 | 7.4 | 4 | 0 |
| 2009 | 34 | 8 | 23.5 | 6 | 0 |
| 2014 | 24 | 8 | 25.0 | 2 | 4 |

Source: Data derived from University of Malta (2014e).

The percentage of Maltese female candidates who participated in the European parliamentary elections in 2009 and 2014 was higher than the number of female candidates who contest national elections. Initially, their electoral success was however dismal, in this case disproving Lane’s observation that with a wider slate of women, more women would be elected.

Two of the female candidates elected in 2014 had acted as MEPs in 2013 for a short while. They were given the chance to prove themselves in 2013 when three of the male MEPs had to resign to participate in national elections. Three women were elected in by-elections to replace them (Sansone, 2014). Astounding results were attained in 2014 when four out of the six MEPs to be elected were women. Two of the female MEPs were reinstated, and they were joined by two newcomers – Miriam Dalli and Theresa Cachia Commodini.

Sansone (2014) notes that the successful female candidates were specifically targeted since the candidates in question received a substantial number of number one preferences. The reporter stresses this to underline that the successful candidates did not benefit from donkey voting, when voters first select the preferred candidate and then go on to tick all boxes in alphabetical order.

When political commentators were asked why women were more successful at MEP elections in 2014, Carmen Sammut, one of those interviewed, noted that when political parties invested efforts into promoting their female candidates, these were more likely to be elected (Sansone, 2014). Sammut also underlined that Maltese political parties were in a better position to persuade more female candidates to contest MEP elections than national ones since EU structures are more gender and family friendly than the Maltese parliament.

Experience garnered at this level is also crucial for neophytes who want to successfully contest Maltese general elections. Cutajar (2011) notes that past MEP members used their experience at this level to successfully contest the leadership of Malta’s main political parties. Others used this experience to successfully participate in general elections (Government of Malta, 2014, Hon. Edward Scicluna MP – Minister for Finance. Retrieved from <http://www.parlament.mt/scicluna-edward>)

Constitutional rights

Briguglio (2009) maintains that legal impediments regarding the participation of women in politics have been removed. Chapter IV of the Constitution of Malta delineates the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual under Maltese law. The Constitution of Malta guarantees equality between women and men, and protects against discrimination of gender. Article 45(3) (Government of Malta, p. 23) of the constitution underlines that “‘discriminatory’ means affording different treatment to different persons attributable wholly or mainly to their respective descriptions by race, place of origin, political opinions, colour, creed, sex, sexual orientation or gender identity whereby persons of one such description are subjected to disabilities or restrictions to which persons of another such description are not made subject or are accorded privileges or advantages which are not accorded to persons of another such description”.

This article promotes special measures to help accelerate de facto equality. Although Maltese legislation does not prevent the introduction of special measures – such as legal quotas - as a means to attain gender parity in the political field, Maltese political parties have been hesitant about doing so. As the male and female MEP candidates who took part in a seminar organized by the MCWO in 2014 emphasized, the political will to ensure gender parity in the political field seems to be missing (Piscopo, 2014).

The Malta Council of Women Organisations (MCWO, 2013) underlines that the directives and proposals made by a number of international entities pushed successive Maltese governments to introduce legislative changes which promoted gender equality in Malta. They cited the United Nations’ Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Violence against Women (CEDAW), which in 1991 Malta committed itself to implement and which bound the Maltese government to take measures to promote women’s participation in decision making and leadership. The MCWO also mentioned the 4th Beijing Conference, which in 1995 put more pressure on the Maltese government to implement CEDAW through the United Nations.

Malta became part of the European Union in 2004 (Terry, 2014). Before Malta could join the EU, a number of legislative changes were made. These included the Equality for Men and Women Act of 2003 (Government of Malta, 2007) and the Employment and Industrial Relations Act of 2002 (Government of Malta, 2012) among others. Prior to and after accession into the EU, Maltese governments had to respond positively to EU directives, whether or not gender equality was perceived as a priority by political leaders.

Electoral system

Terry (2014) maintains that the Maltese electoral system is similar to open-list proportional representative systems. The Maltese system incorporates the Single Transferable Vote (STV) which ensures that candidates promoted by a small party rarely get elected. In the 2013 national elections only, 1.8% of the votes were garnered by smaller parties or independent candidates.

During elections (national, EU, or local council ones), voters are presented with a list of candidates who are running under the flag of any of the Maltese political parties or as independents. Voters rank the candidates according to preference. Terry (2014) notes that

voters can vote for candidates across political parties. In fact he refers to this electoral system as a ‘candidate centred proportional electoral system’.

Malta’s political scene however is very much dominated by two main political parties – namely the Nationalist and Labour parties who are constantly vying with each other to attain the few votes which might elect them into cabinet. This ensures that national elections tend to be highly contested elections. In fact 91.7% of voters voted in the last election which took place in 2013 (Alvarez-Rivera, 2014). Voter turnout for local council and/or European parliament is lower if they do not coincide with the national elections. This type of voting system means that it is not only the political parties which are competing with each other, but candidates from within the same party (Balzan, 2014a).

With the single transferable vote system, the candidates who manage to attain the stipulated quota are elected. Schiavone (Di-Ve.com news, 2013) notes that candidates need to attain 16.6% of votes to be elected. The quota is based on the number of votes and seats which need to be filled (Terry, 2014). Those candidates who manage to attain the quota on the first count get elected. The extra votes that are attained by an elected candidate are then redistributed to other candidates on the basis of whether voters gave them a second, third fourth, etc. preference until all seats are filled. When none of the candidates succeed in reaching a quota, the worst performing candidate is eliminated from the process and their votes redistributed on the basis of the voters’ preferences. The number of seats per party is adjudicated by the number of number one votes each party receives during the election.

Threlfall (2007), Miguel (2008) and Lane (1995) believe that this type of electoral system helps more women get elected than other types of electoral systems. Norris and Krook (2011) believe that proportional representation with large district magnitudes increases women’s chances of winning elections. The European Commission for Democracy through Law (2009, p. 9) however notes that “it is rather misleading to discuss the impact of electoral systems on women’s parliamentary representation only on the basis of the basic distinction of electoral system ‘families’”. As this source underlines, the electoral system is affected by the respective political and social conditions of the country in question. He adds that women’s success in politics depends also on the role played by women in society, politics, as well as the behaviour of political parties, as well as the voters.

Schiavone (2013) does not feel that the electoral system used in Malta puts female candidates at a disadvantage. Marlene Mizzi, one of the female MEPs, however underlined that the electoral system worked against her as a woman in the 2011 European Parliament elections in Malta (Bonello, 2013). She explained that although she was one of the four MEP candidates with the highest number of number 1 preferences, she did not get elected because of the vote transfer system used in Malta. Neophytes of whatever gender are more likely to run afoul of the vote transfer system.

Women have to compete against men in their own party to be nominated as potential candidates, and eventually selected, the European Commission for Democracy through Law (2009) notes. A quote from Cutajar (2011, p. 430) illustrates what female candidates have to face:

“the candidate’s biggest enemy will be her own party contestants – plenty of macho bullying takes place at district level – some women do not wish to engage in that. Moreover campaigning is still a very traditional affair with gallopini and family

influence together with the trading of favours being influential factors in one's chances of getting elected. Some successful women may not wish to be part of that system."

Apart from the party contacts, successful candidates who have substantial campaign resources, namely finances, media attention, electoral contacts, and/or party backing, tend to win (Miguel, 2008). The European Commission for Democracy through Law (2009) underlines that, apart from these, female candidates need the party label. Women are more likely to be elected if they are nominated and supported by strong parties.

Malta adopts open lists, which means that voters are required to pick women from a long list of candidates arranged in alphabetical order. The European Commission for Democracy through Law (2009) notes that open lists may work against women. When voters are asked to choose from a long list of candidates, they are more likely to choose well-known male candidates, the European Commission for Democracy through Law notes. This is the case in general elections in Malta. For voters to vote for women, the political parties in countries which adopt the open list electoral ballot need to convince voters to actively vote for women candidates. The European Commission for Democracy through Law believes that closed lists may better guarantee women's representation. The European Commission for Democracy through Law also adds that quotas work better with closed lists than open lists.

Abela Baldacchino (by correspondence), one of the MEPs who got elected through a by-election in 2013, adds that

"The main issue of concern is not the electoral system itself, but the political system in general. I believe that more can be done to make the political system attractive to persons who can give a contribution, but who are presently deterred due to such aspects as timing of meetings. The fact that the Maltese Parliament, as most Local Councils largely meet in the evenings and late into the night, is certainly a hindrance to many women for instance".

Electorate

Roberta Metsola (Bonello, 2013) underlined that the electorate asked her whether politics is the place for a mother when she was contesting the 2009 and 2014 MEP elections. McKew (2009) underlines that these questions are likely to be directed at female rather than male politicians. These types of questions undermine women's efficacy, as they seem to allude to the fact that their competence lies in the private rather than the public sphere. Abela Baldacchino (by correspondence), however felt that during the 2014 MEP elections, the Maltese proved to be a discerning electorate, since they opted to choose those candidates they felt "better represent their ideas, hopes and aspirations".

Borg (2014) and Schiavone (Di-Ve.com news, 2013) however feel that political parties need to be more proactive when it comes to promoting women in politics. Political parties, according to the European Commission for Democracy through Law (2009, p. 13), not only need to convince party gatekeepers to include women on party lists, but also convince voters to vote for women candidates. Continuous media and educational campaigns are needed to teach the electorate as well as political leaders about the importance of gender equality and equity, and how this can be attained.

Borg (2014) suggests that male and female candidates should be listed on separate ballot sheets during the next national election. Schiavone argues that Malta can adopt the electoral system adopted by Nordic countries. Here the electorate votes for the party, and the parties

then get to pick the people to represent them in parliament. Schiavone also suggests that when the winning political party is forming its cabinet, a proportion of the seats should be reserved for women as has happened in other countries. The efficacy of these measures however depends on whether or not the leaders of the political parties and the other gatekeepers are convinced about the importance of gender parity. These are some of the innovative suggestions provided by the media to bring about gender parity in politics.

Political parties

Since 1921 to date, Malta has had 22 political parties participating in local, national and/or MEP elections (University of Malta, 2014d). The University of Malta (2014f) website on political parties notes that two parties have come to the fore since 1976, namely the Nationalist (centre right ideological leaning) and Labour (centre left ideological leaning) parties. These two political parties have to struggle to attain the few votes needed to help them win the race. Only a few Maltese voters vote across party lines, notes this website.

Terry (2014) describes Malta's politics as 'deeply polarised, even though it adopts a relatively proportional electoral system. Only the Labour Party and Nationalist Party have managed to win the national elections in the last 50 years. The highest support for minor parties was attained in 2013 by *Alternativa Demokratika* (Alternative Democracy) when it managed to garner 1.8% of votes, the highest support for minor parties since 1966 (Terry, 2014).

The two main parties vie with each other to garner the extra votes that might help them win the elections. Since in Malta, as in other countries, every vote counts, this means that when a particular party starts promoting the interest of a particular interest group or undertakes changes to ensure that members of these interest groups are represented within its party's structures, the other party is sure to follow. This mutual contagion effect has to a certain extent led to a convergence of trends across parties (Threlfall, 2007).

Malta's two main political parties have a symbiotic relationship where gender issues are concerned. Both of them have adopted voluntary measures to ensure that more women are represented within party structures. The Labour Party adopted a quota system to help facilitate women's participation at party and national level in the 1990s. In the 2000s, it adopted a voluntary 20 percent quota for women on party lists (Krook, 2007). In 2009 (*Partit Laburista*, 2009), the Labour Party statute proposed that at least 4 out of the 12 ordinary members elected on the party's national executive have to be women. This policy was adopted in the off chance that few female ordinary members were elected on the national executive. When this ratio was not attained, the elected male member with the least votes had to be replaced with the non-elected female candidate with the highest votes. This measure was taken to ensure that some women participated at this level. The Labour Party also has set aside a 1/3 quota in favour of women within the local government section of the Party (correspondence with Abela Baldacchino). These measures were taken to ensure some level of representation within these party structures, rather than gender parity. The party wanted the members to go beyond these thresholds.

The Nationalist Party adopted voluntary party measures to increase female visibility in party structures in 2008 (Cutajar, 2011). Galea (2014) notes that prior to 2014, the Nationalist party had policies which ensured that four out of the thirteen members from the general council on to the executive council had to be female. This changed in 2014 when new

procedures were adopted. The *Moviment Opportunitajiet Indaqs* (Equal Opportunities Movement) was established with statutory rights to be represented in party structures (Micallef, 2014). Nine women and nine men were elected from two separate lists on to the executive committee. The same exercise was extended to local sectional committees. Balzan (2014b) notes that although the party dismissed the idea of introducing similar rules when it came to the selection of candidates, the party in question felt that changes in the internal rules will automatically lead to a more balanced candidate list where gender was concerned.

Azzopardi and Abela Baldacchino (contacted via e-mail) maintained that the measures adopted by the two main parties to ensure a more balanced gender ratio in party structures gave women more confidence to participate in the party. These measures ensured that there was a critical number of women in higher party echelons to ascertain that women's interests and those of other interest groups (disabled, youth, race and ethnic minorities) were promoted. They argue that the presence of a substantial number of delegates who believe in and promote equality is necessary at the national executive committee, since this is the structure which sets the agenda where elections, party conferences and congresses are concerned.

These two exponents feel that such measures do help legitimise women's presence in politics. This is evident in the results attained in the 2014 MEP elections when four out of the six candidates the electorate elected were women. These and other female exponents who participated in another research (Cutajar, 2011) feel that, although the pool of professional women with a wide client base has increased since 1997, political parties still find it difficult to find women who are ready to participate in national elections. Azzopardi (private communication) states that women tend to be culturally burdened with family responsibilities, which do not allow them the time and energy to participate in politics. Women with family support do not face this problem. The fact that Maltese women are less reluctant when it comes to participating in local council and MEP elections also demonstrates that women are more likely to be politically active when organisations adopt family friendly measures and/or are closer to home. Sammut (Sansone, 2014) described parliament as 'taxing' and not 'family-friendly' at all.

Sanbonmatsu (2010) underlines that women are less likely to present themselves as potential candidates: they need to be actively recruited by political parties, unlike their male counterparts. Galea (2013) states that all political parties encourage women to come forward as candidates. This however does not work with women who, according to Sanbonmatsu (2010), are more reluctant to run if they are not assured that they will receive the necessary party backing. As noted above, female candidates are more likely to be elected when they are supported by strong parties. This means that political parties need to be proactive in this field as Marlene Farrugia and Marthese Portelli (Higgins, 2013) were cited as saying in a newspaper article. Political parties need to identify potential female candidates at an early date before elections, to "allow people to get to know them" (Higgins, 2013).

Legal quotas

Schiavone (2013) points out that the two main political parties in Malta have voluntarily reserved seats for women in executive committees. Political parties might find it more polemical when it comes to adopting measures to ensure that more women are elected or chosen as ministers and parliamentarians. Spiteri (2012) conducted a study to find out how the general public as well as the political, economic and social stakeholders viewed legal

quotas after this issue was raised by the Nationalist Party in a document entitled “Our Roots” (see Borg, 2011; Dalli, 2011).

From the discourse analysis conducted on online debates on quotas, the majority of readers, male and female, were against quotas (Spiteri, 2012). The reasons cited were that quotas are discriminatory to men, and that when such measures are adopted, they can lead to internal conflict within those organisations which adopt them. Those who were against quotas stated that women should be promoted on the basis of their credentials and expertise, and not through special measures. The commentators felt that meritocracy ensures that those who deserve to be promoted, are elected/nominated at decision making level. They do not believe certain social groups in Maltese society have access to tangible and intangible resources, which puts them at an advantage over others.

The commentators who were in favour of temporary measures to rectify a biased gender representation at decision making levels felt that such measures were necessary for a better and just representation of society. These commentators felt that women in decision making roles would provide other women with positive role models, while at the same time being in a position to promote women’s interests.

Spiteri (2012) notes that women’s organisations such as the Malta Confederation of Women’s Organisations (MCWO), the National Council of Women (NCW), and the Foundation for Women Entrepreneurs felt that this was the only solution to bring about change. The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality is also in favour of quotas. This organisation maintains that quotas are only effective in increasing women’s representation when supported by other measures, such as media and educational campaigns. For quotas to be effectively implemented, sanctions need to be imposed on those organisations or individuals which do not adopt special measures to promote gender parity.

When interviewed, female politicians such as Marlene Mizzi (MEP) (Bonello, 2013), Marthese Portelli (MP) and Marlene Farrugia (MP) (Higgins, 2013) stated that they are against mandatory quotas accompanied by sanctions because according to the former, this might lead to a “box ticking exercise and token women” (Bonello, 2013). Abela Baldacchino, a former MEP, underlined that gender equality can only be attained by “supportive measures” and here she referred to the EU directive regulating compulsory female quotas among non-executive directors of companies listed on stock exchanges (Bonello, 2013). She hoped that such measures would lead to a change of mentality, so that eventually mandatory quotas as a measure would not be needed.

Spiteri (2012) notes that the introduction of mandatory quotas and the accompanying sanctions would prove to be quite a challenge. Before such a step can be enacted, a strong media and educational campaign needs to be undertaken to persuade politicians and the general public, including women, that it is the most viable option to ensure that more women are represented in politics. Voluntary quotas, Spiteri concludes, are not effective, because this depends on the goodwill of individual political leaders and party gatekeepers. Legal gender quotas promoted by constitutional and/or national electoral laws are more effective, according to European Commission for Democracy through Law (2009). The successful adoption and implementation of legal quotas require mostly the commitment of political parties, rather than strict placement mandates and effective enforcement mechanisms. Without this commitment, political parties can easily find ways of circumnavigating quota legislation.

Capacity development

The Institute of Directors (2013), an international network promoting corporate governance standards, economic growth and development, is also of the opinion that women are not adequately represented at decision making spheres due to culture, history, societal norms and government involvement. The Institute underlines that government introduced legislative and regulatory regimes at corporate and government level, would enable more women to participate in decision making within the business and political field. Legislation induced structural changes, the Institute proposes, should be accompanied by capacity development programmes.

As Lane (1995) notes, Maltese candidates are more likely to derive from the business and professional classes. Spiteri (2012) and Cutajar (2011) maintain that since 1997, the number of women going to university has superseded that of men, but these women tend to opt for careers that lead to professions from which few candidates are recruited. This might be a hurdle. Campaigns therefore might be needed to persuade women to enter professions where men outnumber women. Successful Maltese candidates tend to be architects, engineers, lawyers, or doctors (Cutajar, 2011). Although the number of female professionals has increased (see Table 5, where the ratio of female to male professional and associate professionals in the labour market tends to be higher), women are still under-represented in the political sphere.

Table 5 - Main occupation of total employed persons and sex: April-June 2013

| Occupational Group | Sex | | | | Total | |
|--|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| | Males | | Females | | | |
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Armed Forces | 1,734 ^u | 1.6 ^u | : | : | 1,812 ^u | 1.0 ^u |
| Managers | 12,197 | 11.1 | 4,542 | 6.9 | 16,739 | 9.6 |
| Professionals | 16,573 | 15.2 | 13,518 | 20.6 | 30,091 | 17.2 |
| Technicians and associate professionals | 15,196 | 13.9 | 9,579 | 14.6 | 24,775 | 14.2 |
| Clerical support workers | 5,868 | 5.4 | 12,375 | 18.9 | 18,243 | 10.4 |
| Service and sales workers | 17,250 | 15.8 | 17,026 | 26.0 | 34,276 | 19.6 |
| Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers | 2,184 ^u | 2.0 ^u | : | : | 2,252 ^u | 1.3 ^u |
| Craft and related trades Workers | 17,652 | 16.1 | : | : | 18,361 | 10.5 |
| Plant and machine operators, and assemblers | 9,438 | 8.6 | 2,402 ^u | 3.7 ^u | 11,840 | 6.8 |
| Elementary occupations | 11,244 | 10.3 | 5,210 | 8.0 | 16,454 | 9.4 |
| Total | 109,336 | 100.0 | 65,507 | 100.0 | 174,843 | 100.0 |

[∴] unreliable - less than 20 sample observations

^u under-represented - between 20 and 49 sample observations

Source: NSO, 2014, Table12.

Measures were also taken to ensure that childcare facilities and after school services increased in the last year (Abela Baldacchino in correspondence). This will enable more women to retain their presence within the labour market, which is more likely to facilitate their entry into politics.

Both Spiteri (2012) and Cutajar (2011) note that women might surpass promotions or desist from participating in politics, because they might feel that they are detracting from their family responsibilities. Cutajar (2011) notes that Maltese women who received support from their family members in their political career, were more likely to be successful. Strengthening family measures in private and public life might help, but men need to become conscious that when they participate more in family life, it is a win-win situation, for themselves, and the stronger bonds they will forge with their partner and children (Allen & Daly, 2007). Children who are raised by both parents benefit from the wealth of each parent's life experiences, styles and approach to dealing with life. Children raised in families with high father involvement have less physical, emotional and psychological hang ups - and so do the fathers! Men's increased participation in family life will in turn facilitate women's participation in other fields (National Council of Women, 2013).

Capacity building of incumbents was an issue raised by Cutajar in a conference organised during the launch of *Nisa Laburisti* on 8 March 2014. During this conference, it was suggested that potential candidates could benefit from a series of courses that can be conducted by the state, political parties and/or women's NGOs on how the electoral system, political parties and parliament work in Malta. Courses or lectures on how to communicate with potential voters; how to make good use of diverse media forms; how to build a good team, or how to derive financial backing during an electoral campaign were also discussed. The public was very receptive to these suggestions. So was the idea of pairing and mentoring new candidates with experienced politicians, although some were somewhat sceptical about how helpful the incumbent would be if he or she felt that the neophyte might be a threat. The argument raised was that these courses/lectures should be available to all neophytes, male and female.

During this conference, the general public was less supportive of suggestions that the political parties themselves or the state might come up with measures to subsidise the electoral campaigns of new female candidates. Cutajar (2011) found that a lack of financial resources might prevent some women from entering the political fray. Women are less likely to attain a well remunerated job, or receive the same wages as men for the same job (Cutajar, 2011), so they find it harder to find the income needed to finance an electoral campaign. Some of the suggestions raised by the United Nations Development Programme et al. (2012) and OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (2014) were received positively. The suggestion of establishing fundraising networks for women candidates, such as EMILY's list, went down well, but when it was suggested that some party funds should be set aside to support women candidates, or that women candidates should be provided with state subsidies, these were not welcomed at all.

The female delegates who attended the above mentioned conference were very enthusiastic about the suggestion that party members, delegates, candidates, and elected officials should be encouraged to attend courses where the significance of diversity and equality were discussed. They felt that any decision taken or policy written at party level should be informed by the ideologies of equality and diversity at party level and beyond.

Alternattiva Demokratika (ElectionsMalta.com, 2013) sustains that the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality, the structure with the remit to ensure that equality and diversity are promoted, should be provided with the necessary resources and power to ensure that these principles are efficiently enforced. Women candidates and other NGOs might also be in need of resources and capacity building to tackle on issues or create educational campaigns, which cannot be undertaken by state entities. Sammut (Sansone, 2014) maintains that these organisations play a crucial role in Malta, because, according to her, the electoral successes attained by women during the 2014 MEP elections were due to the pressure maintained by women's organisations that pushed for gender equality in the public sphere.

The Institute of Directors (2013) however feels that the promotion of women in the public sphere is not only an issue which involves individual women or organisations that promote women's interest. They feel that the University of Malta, Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology, associations, business schools, and NGOs should come up with initiatives and developments to ensure that the number of women at decision making level increases substantially. The example they set would send a message to the general public that women are as capable as any other individual when it comes to leading, managing or taking decisions.

Parliamentary reform

Sammut (Sansone, 2014) sustains that Maltese women are more likely to participate in MEP elections rather than national ones, due to the taxing parliamentary career. Spiteri (2012) adds that Maltese women who are successful in politics and business might find boardrooms, committees and parliament non-family and non-women friendly, which might explain why the majority of women who win national elections do not contest elections more than once (Schiavone, 2013). Female participants in a study conducted by Cutajar (2011) also stated that they do not feel comfortable with the way politics is enacted in Malta, as noted above. Perkins (2007) notes that women prefer consensual to confrontational politics.

Cutajar (1995) also notes that when women are given the chance to be part of a cabinet, they are usually saddled with 'soft' areas such as education or social policy in Malta. Male politicians are put in charge in areas deemed as more important, such as finance, international affairs, or energy for example. Changing the internal parliamentary procedures "including the facilities and working conditions, hours of sitting, principles for leadership recruitment, and provision of childcare facilities" (Norris and Krook, 2011, p. 7) might help in increasing the number of Maltese women participating in the public sphere.

Conclusion

A range of formal rules and informal practices and customs in Malta are making it difficult for Maltese women to gain entry into or to function in organisations and institutions linked with political decision-making, as this paper has shown. Although Maltese legislation guarantees the rights and freedoms to every citizen on paper, these practices and procedures ensure that de facto democracy is missing in Malta, to the detriment of both the individuals who are prevented from exercising their democratic right, and the country which has deprived itself from benefiting from the investment in these human resources on a political, social and economic level.

The results cited above underline that certain changes need to be made to attain the democratic mandate. The Maltese Constitution guarantees equal rights for women and men,

while acknowledging that special measures need to be taken to bring about equity between the two genders.

Changes might need to be enacted in the electoral system to ensure that more Maltese women are elected in general elections. The Maltese need to decide whether they wish to retain the present electoral system and perhaps fine tune it to ensure that more women are recruited, nominated and elected. This might need for example the introduction of legislation which limits the incumbency term, and/or legislation which provides for and allocates campaign funds to new female candidates.

An alternative would be to change the electoral system and adopt proportional representation. This will facilitate the entry of more women at decision making level, but will also enable minor parties and independent candidates to attain seats in parliament. Malta needs to explore how it might increase district magnitude to accommodate a proportional representative system – whether by increasing the total number of parliamentary members, while ensuring the number of districts remains the same, or reducing the number of electoral districts while maintaining the number of representatives (European Commission for Democracy through Law, 2009).

Another factor which was mentioned in the sections above was the internal in-fighting that occurs between candidates when an open ballot party list is adopted. Malta needs to ask itself whether a closed ballot party list might provide a more level playing field for female candidates, especially those without the advantages of political, financial, social and cultural capital. The efficacy of these measures however depends on whether or not the leaders of the political parties and the other gatekeepers are convinced about the importance of gender parity.

Women's organisations, as underlined above, sustained that legal quotas are a necessary step to ensure that more women are nominated and elected into legislative office. The European Commission for Democracy through Law (2009) underlines that quotas can help women surmount the existent structural, cultural and political constraints which at the moment prevent them from gaining legislative office, until these are removed. The European Commission for Democracy through Law also argues that for gender quotas to be effective, legislative changes need to ensure that more than 30% of the female candidates on party lists are women.

Electoral gender quotas however would be more effective if they ensure strict ranking rules or placement systems, such as the zebra and zipper systems alluded to above. To ensure the effectiveness of these legislative changes, effective monitoring measures need to be adopted accompanied by sanctions against those political parties which do not comply. Norris and Krook (2011) also suggest reserving seats for women members in parliament, an issue raised in this paper by Schiavone.

The European Commission for Democracy through Law (2009) sustains that reforms can only be successful if the political parties involved are committed to adopting and implementing new regulations. The success of these reforms also necessitate that the political parties make some changes to party practices and procedures. The United Nations Development Programme and National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (2012) believe that, before changes can be effectively enacted, political party stakeholders need to be persuaded of the importance of gender equality. This might necessitate that party elites, once

nominated and/or elected to office, need to undergo an educational programme which explains the need for gender equity, and how this can be attained within the party and once in government. Having an enlightened leader is not enough, if the decisions he or she tries to implement are then undermined by those around him or her.

Maltese political parties espouse to be champions of women's rights and interests. A cursory look at the gender representation within party leadership, administration and the myriad committees and sections that form the party, often leaves one disappointed. More special measures need to be taken to ensure that gender parity is attained in all party structures, and across all levels.

Norris and Krook (2011) also suggest that each political party needs to review its candidate recruitment procedures to ensure that they are transparent and applied in a standardized manner across the board. At the same time, the time has come for political parties and other entities to adopt gender and family friendly measures that encourage more women to participate in politics, at different levels. Political parties might also need to invest in an educational campaign which can help its members adopt a less macho, combative and more conciliatory stance in politics.

It might also help if women who are interested in politics and those organisations that lobby for more female representation at decision making level benefit from capacity development. Norris and Krook (2011) underline that their skills and resources can be strengthened through knowledge networks and mentoring programmes, skills training as well as funding which can be obtained at the national and/or international level. These experts suggest three different types of capacity development. Equality of opportunity initiatives involving media and educational programmes can prove useful when it comes to recruiting and training candidates. Media campaigns and education are also crucial when it comes to raising awareness about gender discrimination among the general public, and instigate a change in mentality. Political parties (or others) can design and develop their own educational programmes to enable new recruits to learn how the political system in Malta works, how to finance a political campaign, how to effectively run such a campaign, and how to use the media insightfully.

In the sections above it was underlined that political structures need to be rendered gender and family friendly. This would necessitate reviewing the internal procedures adopted at parliamentary, local council and political party level. Governments and political parties also need to ascertain that each policy and procedure they produce and implement is gender sensitive. It has already been mentioned which measures can be taken at political party level to ensure that gender parity is attained at leadership level. Similar measures can be adopted at parliamentary level. Schiavone who was cited above also sustains that certain leadership roles need to be reserved for women at parliamentary level. More women can be put in charge of ministries or committees, even those dealing with areas traditionally not assigned to women, such as finance or defence issues.

A democratically oriented society would take extreme measures to ensure that disadvantaged social groups also become involved in the political arena, the arena where the necessary social, economic and political changes can be envisaged to bring about equity.

Conference recommendations

This paper was presented at the Conference on “Women’s Political Participation in Malta”, organized by ODIHR, in partnership with the House of Representatives, the Commissioner for the Promotion of Equality, and the National Council of Women of Malta, on 3 November 2014 in Valletta. Recommendations raised by conference participants are as follows:

Constitutional rights

1. Constitutional changes might need to be enacted to make it possible to introduce some of the recommendations made below.

Electoral system

1. In countries where proportional representation was adopted, more women, minor parties and individual candidates won seats at parliamentary level. The Maltese government might need to explore whether it might need to change the electoral system or fine-tune the present one, aiming at increasing the number of elected women.
2. Malta can retain the present political system and explore district magnitude, which might help more women get elected. This can be done by reducing the number of electoral districts, while maintaining the number of members of parliament.
3. Explore the viability of replacing open lists with closed lists. Legal quotas work better with closed lists.
4. In the eventuality that open lists are retained, the Maltese ballot system needs to be changed. Legislative measures need to be taken to introduce one of the following ranking rules or placement systems:
 - a. placing the names of all female candidates first on the list, followed by male candidates for each political party,
 - b. adopt the zipper/zebra system, where the name of each female candidate is followed by the name of a male candidate,
 - c. Voters are provided by 2 separate ballot sheets, one listing the male candidates and the other listing the female ones per political party. The political party with the highest 1st preferences wins. The voters vote for 50% of candidates from each sheet, on the basis of the number of 1st preferences attained.

Legal quotas

1. The viability of introducing a gender quota system has to be explored.
2. Explore the possibility of introducing a 50% compulsory gender quota for non-executive directors of companies listed on stock exchange, executive positions within the public sector as well as educational institutions, such as University of Malta and the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology, since candidates in Malta tend to be recruited from these sectors. Tax incentives coupled by sanctions can be used to persuade these organisations to promote more women at decision making levels. When capable women are appointed to these posts, it will be easier for political parties to find potential female candidates. This move will send a message to the general public that women can lead.

3. Explore the possibility of introducing legislative changes to ensure that political parties present an equal number of male and female candidates for local council, national and MEP elections.
4. Before legal quotas are introduced, a strong media and educational campaign needs to take place to persuade political leaders, party gatekeepers and the general public that this is the most viable option until the necessary cultural changes take place. This can be undertaken by the government, in collaboration with national and international NGOs promoting gender equality and diversity.
5. Effective monitoring measures need to be put in place to ensure the effectiveness of the legislative changes mentioned above. Compliance can be linked with funding – those organisations or political parties which do not comply would receive less state funding.

Other legislative changes

1. Policies need to be drawn and forcefully implemented to ensure that boardrooms and committees within political parties, parliament, businesses, and other institutions are family and women-friendly.
2. Legislative changes need to be made to ensure that political parties adopt transparent measures on how candidates are nominated by political parties.
3. Another important legislative change might include limiting incumbency terms. This would push political parties to constantly seek new potential candidates, which at the same time will keep them abreast with ‘new’ talent in the field.

Political parties

1. Political parties that want to attract more women within the political sphere need to assess and modify their own internal party procedures and practices. These include changing the facilities, working conditions, time of sitting, principles for leadership recruitment and allocation of resources, principles linked with the election and nomination of officials at administrative and decision-making level, while at the same time providing for childcare facilities.
2. Statutes and declarations drawn by political parties espousing equality between men and women, might need to be rewritten to incorporate measures on how this can be achieved, such as for example that:
 - a. leadership, decision-making and responsible bodies within the party should include an equal representation of men and women.
 - b. Candidate lists for elected positions need to have identical participation from both genders.
 - c. In positions involving single-members, genders will alternate over time.
 - d. Delineate what measures the political party adopts when in government, to enable women’s and men’s equal participation in leadership and decision-making positions at national, district level, as well as within workers’ and professional unions, the Judiciary and collegiate bodies.²

While some of these suggestions are cited in political party manifestos, they are not always implemented when the party wins an election.

² Suggestions a, b, c & d adopted from the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA). (2008). *From words to action: Best practices for women’s participation in Latin American political parties*. Stockholm, Sweden: Author.

3. Political parties need to review candidate recruitment procedures, and at the same time identify a profile of the candidate they are looking for (for party positions and elections), while fashioning a more transparent and meritocratic selection process. For example, one of the criteria for candidates might be that they need to have an academic background or work experience in the position they intend to occupy; have plans or proposals which they can implement; be gender sensible, etc.
4. Political parties need to promote pairing and mentoring programmes where new female candidates are paired up with experienced politicians.
5. Political parties need to allocate and provide campaign funds to new female candidates. Women's branches in political parties might come up with innovative ways to raise this money. EMILY's List, an American NGO established to financially support the election of women to elected office, is just one example of how this can be undertaken.
6. Political parties need to adopt gender and family friendly measures across the board, if they want to attract more women into politics.
7. Political parties and/or pro-democracy entities need to design educational campaigns targeting leaders, elected officials, party members and candidates promoting equality and diversity. These courses need to provide those who attend with the skills of incorporating these principles within the policies and practices adopted for the running of the party, and the drawing up of political agendas. These sessions can also be used to help the political party to come up with a vision and a mission which promotes social justice and diversity.
8. Political parties need to create a commission which oversees the implementation of recommendations promoting equality and diversity. The commission needs to see how the different commissions within parties can attain the general and specific objective and the policies and strategies of equality and diversity.
9. Political parties need to initiate a process of political development and capacity building for women within the party, so that they can contribute to internal party development and can help increase female leadership within the party.
10. Political parties need to organize seminars and conferences (on their own initiative or in tandem with other agencies) to publicize and debate issues related to the economic, political, social and legal situation of women. These should not be one of sessions held close to 8th March, International Women's Day.
11. Each section and/or committee within political parties needs training to ascertain that each policy and procedure produced and implemented is gender sensitive.
12. Political parties need to improve their outreach to under-represented groups.

Capacity development

1. A good proportion of members of parliament derive from professions where men outnumber women. This means that political parties need to recruit candidates from other professions and be more proactive in the promotion of such candidates.
2. The Maltese culture, as many other cultures, is based on the idea that domestic and caring responsibilities are mainly female related tasks. This leaves women with less time to devote to other endeavours. In Malta, there is the need of a strong media and educational campaign, where boys and men learn how to care for others. This will help lessen crime rates and also ensure healthier relationships in Malta, help men wind down after a stressful day, while giving women more space to devote to politics.

3. The state, political parties, and/or women's NGOs can be encouraged and/or aided financially to come up with courses to train neophytes on conducting a successful political campaign. Issues which can be tackled include how to communicate better with potential voters, how to make good use of diverse media forms, how to build a strong campaign team, as well as how to find financial backing during an electoral campaign. Other courses can focus on how the electoral system, political parties and parliament work in Malta.
4. Political parties, in conjunction with academia and/or national or international women's organizations, can design courses for party members, delegates, candidates and elected officials to promote the significance of diversity, equality and social justice. These courses also need to help those who attend reflect, discuss and come up with political strategies, mechanisms and actions to tackle the social processes which limit women's and other minority groups' rights.
5. The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality, the state structure with the remit to ensure the promotion of equality and diversity, should be provided by the state with the necessary financial and human resources and power to ensure that these principles are effectively enforced.

Parliamentary reform

1. To facilitate women's increased representation at parliamentary level, the Maltese government needs to review parliament's internal procedures to ensure that these and related structures are gender and family friendly.
2. The Maltese government needs to ascertain that each policy and procedure produced and implemented is gender sensitive.
3. Legislative changes might need to be undertaken to ascertain that more women are put in charge of ministries, secretariats and committees at parliamentary level, especially in areas not usually associated with women (for example foreign policy, finance, law, etc.).

Alliances between female politicians, women's branches within political parties, academia and women's NGOs

1. Women's branches within political parties, successful female candidates, together with women's NGOs can form an alliance to continue lobbying for gender parity within the political field.
2. These knowledge networks across political parties and civil society can be used to strengthen skills and resources among women interested in politics.
3. Women within these different entities can help come up with media and educational programmes to help raise awareness of what is gender discrimination, and what measures can be adopted by society in general to ensure that the social, cultural and economic barriers preventing women from participating fully in society, are removed.

Media

1. Women's NGOs and academics, in collaboration with the Institute of Maltese Journalists and media entities, especially those which produce programmes for the Maltese public broadcasting, can design educational programmes to help journalists and producers of talk shows be more creative when it comes to producing

programmes, and the way they promote women's issues, gender equality, and diversity.

2. State-funded spots or programmes are needed to help teach the general public what is gender-based discrimination, and identify proactive ways of addressing them.
3. State-funded spots or programmes underlining the importance of shared responsibilities of parenting are important for a number of reasons. Shared parenting has a positive effect on relationships, children's upbringing and can help improve men's health, while giving women more opportunity to participate in the public sphere or any sphere of life.
4. Women's NGOs, academics and political parties need to envisage proactive measures to eradicate the invisibility of women candidates' proposals and candidacies in the media.
5. The Maltese media is in dire need of training in the use of inclusive or gender-sensitive language.

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