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INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments

CONTRIBUTION

by

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to the debate on

“Gender inequality in parliaments – what are the solutions?”

Manama Session
March 2023

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Women,

In Poland equality between women and men is one of the fundamental principles of the legal order. The Constitution of the Republic of Poland grants men and women equal rights in all civil spheres, namely in family, political, social and economic life.

Poland's outstanding achievement for gender equality is **granting women the right to vote as early as 1918**, shortly after the independent state had been restored. Thus, **Poland became a leader** in this respect, ahead of many countries such as the United Kingdom, Spain, Belgium, France, Italy and Switzerland. Moreover, unlike the long-standing struggle for the emancipation of women's groups in other countries, the **equalisation of voting rights between Polish women and men did not encounter significant protests** in our country. Public approval for such a solution resulted from recognition of women's extensive participation in the political conspiracy during the partition period and the merits incurred in the struggle for Poland's independence during and immediately after the First World War.

Today, in terms of equal participation of women in parliament, **Poland is ahead of other countries, especially in the Central and Eastern European regions**. Since 2011, the so-called "quotas" have been in force in the Electoral Code, which stipulates that electoral lists must include a minimum of 35% of representatives of a gender other than the dominant one. Practice looks even more promising, as women have consistently accounted for at least **42% of candidates in parliamentary elections** since 2011. Moreover, women accounted for a record high proportion of candidates - 47% in the 2019 European Parliament elections.

In the Sejm of the current ninth term, **women account for 28.3% of all parliamentarians**. There are 130 women out of a total of 460 MPs on the parliamentary benches, and **54 women represent the ruling party** in the Sejm, which amounts to 23.7% of all parliamentarians of this political option.

The **representation of women in** the Lower Chamber's **praesidium** is also significant. Currently, the Marshal of the Sejm is Elżbieta Witek, and the Deputy Marshals of the Sejm are Małgorzata Gosiewska and Małgorzata Kidawa-Błońska. Consequently, there is gender parity in the Presidium of the current Sejm (three women and three men). In previous terms of office, women have also stood at the

head of the Parliament. In the 2011-2015 term, two women served as Marshals of the Sejm. Currently, in the Sejm, women head seven parliamentary committees, and 42 female MPs are vice-chairpersons of committees. Furthermore, the **Women's Parliamentary Group**, which brings together women MPs fighting for women's rights from all political options, **has been active in the Sejm for many years** (in the current Sejm, the Women's Group has 87 members).

Poland's experience shows that **habits and customs**, not a legal barrier, constitute **the most common reason for women's absence** from politics. Although women make up 52% of Poland's total population, they are more likely to find themselves working closer to their families or in jobs that are not necessarily related to politics. The above stems from the belief that politics requires fierce competition, uncompromisingness and brutality, as qualities quite stereotypically attributed to men. Meanwhile, women, as they often declare, enter politics to soften its image and to introduce more competencies associated with conciliation, tolerance and dialogue.

The positive note is, however, that both the role and women's independence in public life are steadily increasing, which is linked to two fundamental factors. The first is the **participation of women in the public and social life** of our country. It manifests itself, for example, in **the number of women in the highest state positions** - Prime Minister, Marshal of the Sejm, the Ombudsperson or president of the highest courts. **Women's participation can also be seen in Polish entrepreneurship**, as confirmed by "Forbes" magazine research or the regular "Women in Business" survey. According to statistics, while on average, 22% of people in senior managerial positions are women worldwide, **in Poland, this figure is as high as 34%. It is worth emphasising that the result is better than the EU average.**