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**WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND FREEDOM OF  
EXPRESSION (COMPARISON OF ESTONIA, TURKEY AND  
IRAN)**

Master's thesis

Programme HAJM08/15 - Law, specialisation European Union and international law

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Tallinn 2019

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## **ABSTRACT**

Women's right to participate in elections and freedom of expression differ around the world. Understanding these differentiations is crucial for enhancing women's right to participate in elections and freedom of expression. As we all know, freedom of expression is one of the oldest preserved rights. Moreover, women's political participation is one of the most important indicators in the evaluation of gender inequality in all societies. In this master thesis, we will try to show how women are capable of participating in elections and how much they have the right to free speech in the selected three countries, which are Estonia, Turkey and Iran. Countries will be compared starting from their constitutions. Research questions which will be answered in this master theses are "to what extent women's right to participate in elections differ in Estonia, Turkey and Iran?" and "how the political participation and freedom of expression of women can be strengthened?"

Keywords: Women Rights, Human Rights, Estonia, Turkey, Iran, Participation in Elections, Free Speech, Freedom of Expression.

## INTRODUCTION

Human beings all around the world strongly believe that countries, states, unions and international organizations have to protect everyone's human rights, such as economic social and cultural rights which was stated in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and civil and political rights which were defined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. These expectations make a difficult situation for countries to deny the existence of an obligation that they have to protect human rights not only in their countries but also in other countries. With the enormous developments in technology, especially after social media platforms' popularity, it has been hard to hide violations of human rights. In that sense, countries and organizations have given an effort to protect and promote human rights in the international area. It might be said that peoples of the world have been witnessing a human rights revolution.<sup>1</sup>

The rights and liberties have core importance in making of well-being human. As might people think differently on that whether rights belong to only individual persons or also to groups; which one of the rights are important; relations between rights and duties, however, they never think differently on not to have their international human rights.<sup>2</sup> Even though it has not seemed to people are, or will be, willing to relinquish their rights, does an average woman fully profit or enjoy the rights and liberties that are coming from the human rights, in her daily life? The answer will be dissimilar and varied if it is asked in the United States of America or in India or in Pakistan or in the North and South Korea. As of May 2018, the world population is more or less 7.7 billion people. Half of the world's population consists of women; and as men are, women also are given to all human rights equally with men. Then, why does the answer depend on by country to country? The right to education, for example, it has been recognized in article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, "the present Covenant

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<sup>1</sup> Buergenthal, T., Shelton, D. L., & Stewart, D. (2009). International human rights in a nutshell.

<sup>2</sup> Nussbaum, M. (2000). Women's capabilities and social justice. *Journal of Human Development*, 1(2), 219-247.

recognize the right of everyone to education.”<sup>3</sup> However, can it be said that every women enjoy the right to education equally all around the world? In order to have the enjoyment of the right to education without discrimination, equality, human rights law requires countries to solve the particular and defined problems that women face in accessing education. These problems might be that: early marriages, pregnancies, child labour and violence. The right to education is just an example to show how it is important for women (of course for all human beings) to live equally with men, to have education equally with men, to have right to participate elections equally with men and to have right to free speech as much as men have had.

The freedom to vote and stand for elections ensure that the public affairs are literally public. These rights are linked with other rights, such as the right to free speech and the right to education. However, the idea of participate in elections is broader than the right to vote. Citizens are expected to be involved in decision-making processes that are going to affect them.<sup>4</sup> As in the international standarts, women and men should have an equal right to participate in elections, in all processes. It is highly important that right to participate elections but it might be also challenging for women to exercise this right. Especially, in some countries, there are extra barriers to women’s rights. At the level of political parties, women’s participation in elections is defined by them. Almost in every country, political parties can determine that the number of candidates as well as their gender. Because of political parties’ influence in shaping women’s political destiny, the existence of women in political parties is an important fact for political environment, especially at the international level. In many countries, constitutions define the right to participate in elections, which means no formal legal barriers exist about women’s political participation in elections. However, still, obstacles might be observed, in the male domain political traditions. In a male domain political traditions, women are found a burden, as a result of that, women face practical barriers to entering politics that men never have to. The right to participate in elections encourages consciousness of civil societies, which is basically a control balance system, so governments cannot act arbitrarily when the voters are observing and criticising them on what implementations governments have done. Unfortunately, women have been excluded from political life, especially in the decision-making processes and sadly this happens even in the very well developed countries and communities. For participation in the public and political areas, women have been in the campaigns since the nineteenth and twentieth

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<sup>3</sup> Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

<sup>4</sup> Fox, G. H. (1992). The right to political participation in international law. In Proceedings of the ASIL Annual Meeting (Vol. 86, pp. 249-253). Cambridge University Press.

centuries. As known, during the First World War, a couple of parliamentary democracies accepted women's right to vote. After United Nations' establishment, in 1945, most of the member countries that ratified the Charter did not desire to allow women to vote, some of them did give them restricted voting rights and even manipulate them on a decision of voting processes. Even though developed countries of the world nowadays have been trying to protect all women's right to vote, actually, in the conditions of the violations of freedom of expression, the absence of free and fair elections and lack of security, the right to vote might be unreasonable. As another problem, in particular countries, women are not able to have registration certificate to vote because once they could not obtain proper birth related papers which are issued just for men. Moreover, if there are traditional perceptions about women's and men's position in society, for instance when a woman is willing to access information or resources however society does not find it appropriate because for the traditional perceptions or stereotypes, this situation does not allow women to have possibilities to exercise and examine their fundamental right to vote.<sup>5</sup> Traditional perceptions have been shaping women's participation in public life, as well as in politic arenas. Therefore, women might be discouraged from desiring to participate in elections because of discriminatory attitudes.<sup>6</sup>

The freedom expression is also a fundamental right which is linked to other rights and without other rights the right to freedom of expression is almost impossible to acquire, demand and defend. The right to freedom of expression has ancient roots, although it is rooted in the 17<sup>th</sup> century struggle of legislators for freedom of speech, as Aristotle said, human beings are 'political animals' so it can be understood that the freedom of expression was important in the Aristotle's time.<sup>7</sup> The right to freedom of expression covers many activities and areas, also ideas, however, in this master thesis, mostly political activities of it will be examined and combined with the right to participate in elections. It is sure that the right to freedom of expression is absolute and immediate under current international conventions and countries' constitutions. In the legal context, as with other forms of rights, when the right to freedom of expression is completely unrestricted, then the problems occur, for instance, unlimited freedom of expression

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<sup>5</sup> Gaspard, F. (2007). Unfinished battles: political and public life. In *The Circle of Empowerment: Twenty-five Years of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women*, Hanna Beate Schöpp-Schilling and Cees Flinterman, eds. (New York, Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2007), pp. 145–153.

<sup>6</sup> Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women. Accessible: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/Beijing%20full%20report%20E.pdf> (10.02.2019)

<sup>7</sup> Jones, T. D. (1998). *Human Rights: Group Defamation, Freedom of Expression, and the Law of Nations* (Vol. 33). Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, pp. 36-38.

may cause to infringement on the rights of the other citizens.<sup>8</sup> As in the Declaration (Universal Declaration of Human Rights) “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers.”<sup>9</sup> the right to express people’s opinions aloud, in the context of political participation, covers published articles and books, television and radio broadcasts, art, as well as, especially nowadays, the social media and the internet. The main purpose of protecting and promoting the right to freedom of expression should be avoiding infringing other people’s rights. Based on all other fundamental rights, the right to freedom of expression is a key freedom to establish more democratic societies. Governments, of course, never will be willing to be criticized by mass media but the right to freedom of expression can assure to maintain diversity and pluralism, which are basic notions of democratic societies, as citizens live in a society that is varied by their nationality, religion, ideology, ethnicity and lifestyle. That brings the reality that half of the world’s population consists of women. Examining the right to freedom of expression as women’s rights is more challenging, because of the lack of women participation in elections, women politicians are definitely to defend women’s rights in better solutions than men can do. As a fundamental right, the right to freedom of expression is inevitably amongst the most violated rights. In the perspective of a woman, it is much more uncontrollable, therefore, it has been the object of struggle between man and women since the day that women have been endeavouring to maximize women’s right in all areas, as well as the political environment.<sup>10</sup>

Comparison the countries, Estonia, Turkey and Iran will help to understand differentiation in the traditional perceptions about women’s participation in elections and the right to have freedom of expression. Firstly, Estonia has been a member of the European Union since the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 2004. With its more than 1.3 million population and very high ‘Human Development Index’ Estonia is the perfect country to start to compare with others. Secondly, Turkey is in the position of a candidate country of the European Union, amongst Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. With its more than 82 million population and high ‘Human Development Index’ which is 64<sup>th</sup> in the world<sup>11</sup>, but below Estonia which is 30<sup>th</sup> in the world<sup>12</sup>, Turkey is the most proper

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<sup>8</sup> Bakircioglu, O. (2008). Freedom of expression and hate speech. *Tulsa J. Comp. & Int'l L.*, 16, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 10th of December, 1948.

<sup>10</sup> O’Flaherty, M. (2012). Freedom of Expression: Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Human Rights Committee’s General Comment No 34. *Human Rights Law Review*, 12(4), 627-654.

<sup>11</sup> Human Development Index. Accessible: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/TUR> (10.02.2019)

<sup>12</sup> Human Development Index. Accessible: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/EST> (10.02.2019)



country to compare with Estonia. Thirdly, another country, Iran, is neither member nor candidate country of the European Union. Therefore, its almost 82 million population and higher 'Human Development Index' than Turkey, which is 60<sup>th</sup> in the world<sup>13</sup>, Iran is the best option to compare with the countries, Estonia and Turkey. The political system is parliamentary in Estonia. In Turkey, it was parliamentary but recently changed to the presidential system. That means, in Estonia, there is a prime minister which is head of government. The head of government is nominated by the president and approved by 'Riigikogu'. Riigikogu is the name of the Parliament of Estonia. In Turkey, with the last system changing, the prime minister is no longer exist, instead, the President rules both country and government. It can be said that it is not the same with American Style Presidential System, but it is similar. In Iran, the situation is different because both Estonia and Turkey are secular countries, however, Iran has the 'Supreme Leader' who is responsible for the policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran.<sup>14</sup> The 'Supreme Leader' takes his power from Islam. So, it is obvious that an Iranian president has completely limited power compared to the 'Supreme Leader'. In the legal context, find the gaps, differentiations, variations and contradistinctions in the selected countries, in order to see whether secularism or hierocracy generate a difference or whether being a member of the European Union create an opportunity to protect and promote women's right to participate in elections and right to freedom of expression, will be highly effective to underline.

All around the world, in the sovereign states, women's right to participate in elections and freedom of expression might be different. Research questions which will be answered in this master theses are "to what extent women's right to participate in elections differ in Estonia, Turkey and Iran?" and "how the political participation and freedom of expression of women can be strengthened?" Understanding these differentiations is crucial for enhancing women's right to participate in elections and freedom of expression. As we all know, freedom of expression is one of the oldest preserved rights. Moreover, women's political participation is one of the most important indicators in the evaluation of gender inequality in all societies. The question that how women are capable of participating in elections and how much they have the right to free speech in the selected 3 countries will be explained. Countries will be compared starting from their constitutions. However, before the comparison of the selected countries, firstly, the countries will

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<sup>13</sup> Human Development Index. Accessible: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/IRN> (10.02.2019)

<sup>14</sup> THE CONSTITUTION OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

be overviewed and explained, which already mentioned in 'Introduction' part, but in elaborated way.

## 1. OVERVIEW OF THE COUNTRIES

On the most general level, women’s active participation in elections has to be supported by countries’ constitutions. In addition, political parties should have supportive attitudes toward women’s active participation in elections. In the party, national and international level decision-making processes, facilitating women’s active participation is to advance women’s right to freedom of expression. Nevertheless, women’s participation in the election is a natural and necessary step, so, the gender-balanced attitudes should support women’s active participation in the decision-making strategies. In some cases, when equal opportunities are not cultivated, the right to vote, as well as the right to free speech will be in a risky condition. Comparison the countries, Estonia, Turkey and Iran will help to understand differentiation and also risks on women’s participation in elections and the right to have freedom of expression. To understand women’s rights and to expand women’s rights, in the legal context, find the gaps, differentiations, variations and contradistinctions in the selected countries, will be highly effective to underline. Starting from Estonia, the selected countries will be overviewed.

Table 1. Proportion of seats in parliament held by women in 2012.

<b>Country</b>	<b>Proportion</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Proportion</b>
Rwanda	0.47	France	0.13
Sweden	0.45	Azerbaijan	0.12
Finland	0.38	Colombia	0.11
Cuba	0.36	Slovenia	0.11
Spain	0.29	Japan	0.09
Australia	0.27	Albania	0.07
Turkmenistan	0.21	Ukraine	0.06
Latvia	0.21	Armenia	0.05
Belarus	0.20	<i>Turkey</i>	0.04
Croatia	0.20	Sri Lanka	0.04
<i>Estonia</i>	0.19	Bahrain	0.04
United Kingdom	0.18	<i>Iran, Islamic Republic</i>	0.04
Lithuania	0.17	Kuwait	0.01
Czech Republic	0.16	Saudi Arabia	0.00

Georgia	0.08	United Arab Emirates	0.00
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Source: Women's political leadership participation around the world: An institutional analysis.<sup>15</sup>

Constitutions and electoral laws are important to the participation of women in politics. The constitutional development of a country's political freedom is positively related to women's right to participate in elections and the right to freedom of expression. Political freedom in a country is mostly about a "strong rule of law, respect for civil liberties, a lack of ethnic and religious determinations and discriminations, open political competition, low levels of corruption and an independent media."<sup>16</sup> Some countries can afford to supply their citizens the right to vote, free and fair electoral processes, political pluralism with competitive and open participation. Especially, right to freedom of expression in the media and the criminal legal systems, if a country can supply these rights, "have a higher representation of women in political leadership by providing an environment where individual citizens are allowed and encouraged to express their rights"<sup>17</sup>

## 1.1. Estonia

Estonia is a former soviet union country. As similar other former soviet union countries, Estonia had a recession problem after the separation of the communism. The recession problem can be observed in the economy, as well as in women's participation in elections. Fortunately, women's participation in elections and also in the implementations of political parties, especially in decision-making processes, has started to escalate.<sup>18</sup>

Women should be willing to portray themselves politically active and participate in the political processes of a politic party. It can be said that women are less interested in politics in Estonia, however, they actively participate in politics. Although women's active participation in elections,

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<sup>15</sup> Bullough, A., Kroeck, K. G., Newburry, W., Kundu, S. K., & Lowe, K. B. (2012). Women's political leadership participation around the world: An institutional analysis. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 23(3), 398-411.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p. 401.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p. 403.

<sup>18</sup> Lukić, J., Regulska, J., & Zaviršek, D. (Eds.). (2006). *Women and citizenship in Central and Eastern Europe*. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., p. 85.

a considerable gender gap exist in formal decision-making processes.<sup>19</sup> In 1991, the number of women in the national parliament Riigikogu was approximately 13% that number has been growing since then, in 2003, it was observed as almost 19% despite the proportion looks low if compare men about gender equal and balanced approachment in decision-making processes. Since the first parliamentary elections, there has always been less amount of women speaker in Riigikogu, basically, women are rarely chair or vice-chair in the parliamentary committees.<sup>20</sup> As it is mentioned before, since the year of 1991, the number of women in the national parliament Riigikogu has grown from 13% to almost 20% in 2011. As a member country of the European Union, Estonia's situation seems better than Turkey and Iran about female role in political parties as well as promoting gender equality.<sup>21</sup> As an example, the Ministry of Social Affairs established a gender equality department in 1996, which its role is to develop gender equality. Moreover, the Gender Equality Act was enacted in 2004 and the Equal Treatment Act entered into force in 2009, these two acts aim to defend the idea of "gender equality means that equal rights, obligations, opportunities and responsibilities are ensured for men and women to participate in all aspects of social life. The prevention of violence against women is an important prerequisite for achieving equality."<sup>22</sup> That sort of acts focuses on female participation in elections, politics and also educational areas. It should be underlined that influencing behavioral change by offering protection when a discrimination situation occurs needs an effective legislative framework to protect and promote women's rights. Gender Equality Act underlines that "State and local government authorities are required to promote gender equality systematically and purposefully. Their duty is to change the conditions and circumstances that hinder the achievement of gender equality."<sup>23</sup> Thus, it can be said that it obliges authorities to promote gender equality. Another example is the Estonian Government launched the Gender Equality Council in 2013. The Council is an advisory body to the Estonian Government, for instance, the Council gives advice to the Government to protect gender equality. In that way, Estonia seems to protect and promote women's right to participate in elections and the right to freedom of expression better than Turkey and Iran. However, in principle, most laws are gender equal but in practice the answer is different. Based on feminist political theorists' argumentation, "the

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p. 89.

<sup>20</sup> Estonian National Electoral Committee: <https://www.valimised.ee/en>

<sup>21</sup> Montécot, C. (2005). The Role of Women in Political Sphere France, Albania and Estonia. *Journal of Politics*, 7(1), 26-48.

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.sm.ee/en/gender-equality-and-equal-treatment>

<sup>23</sup> Gender Equality Act. Accessible:

[https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/compare\\_wordings?grupiId=100042&vasakAktId=516012019002](https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/compare_wordings?grupiId=100042&vasakAktId=516012019002) (11.02.2019)

appearance of neutrality toward gender or equality between men and women in government actually hides substantial gender inequality.”<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, in Estonia, better female representation might be seen in center or center-left Estonian parties. However, opposite of its name, the liberal parties seem they do not have equal gender opportunity principles.<sup>25</sup> Based on this information, it might be possible that center or center-left Estonian parties try to hide substantial gender inequality.

According to the Estonian Constitution, Estonia is a parliamentary democratic republic. In Estonia, the separation of powers are implemented. It can be said that the President holds the main power but the formal power is given to the parliament, so, for a woman, in order to exercise and enjoy the right to freedom of expression, using the right to participate in elections and to be in the parliament would be useful. Estonian national parliament, which is called Riigikogu, has 101 seats and these seats are fulfilled every four years. The first Baltic country that held the post-independence national elections was Estonia, after it separated from the Soviet Union, therefore, the election caused the adoption of a new electoral law<sup>26</sup> in April 1992.<sup>27</sup> At that time, preparing a new law was not easy. Also because of time pressure and lack of experts in Estonia, the legislation was brought, originated and inspired from Finnish and German electoral laws, of course with unique regulations and amendments that fit Estonian culture.<sup>28</sup>

Based on Riigikogu Election Act:

“1) Estonian citizens who have attained 18 years of age by election day have the right to vote.

(2) A person who has been divested of his or her active legal capacity with regard to the right to vote shall not have the right to vote.

(3) A person who has been convicted of a criminal offence by a court and is imprisoned shall not participate in voting.

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<sup>24</sup> Paxton, P., & Hughes, M. M. (2015). Women, politics, and power: A global perspective. CQ Press, pp. 15-18.

<sup>25</sup> Crowther, W. E., & Matonyte, I. (2007). Parliamentary elites as a democratic thermometer: Estonia, Lithuania and Moldova compared. *Communist and post-communist studies*, 40(3), 281-299.

<sup>26</sup> Riigikogu Election Act: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/514112013015/consolide/current>

<sup>27</sup> Teague, E., & Smith, J. (1999). *Democracy in the new Europe: the politics of post-communism*. Greycoat Press, pp. 123-154.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

(4) Estonian citizens who have attained 21 years of age by the last day for the registration of candidates have the right to stand as candidates.

(5) A person who has been divested of his or her active legal capacity with regard to the right to vote does not have the right to stand as a candidate.

(6) A person in active service in the Defence Forces or a person who has been convicted of a criminal offence by a court and is serving a prison sentence shall not stand as a candidate for election to the Riigikogu.”<sup>29</sup>

As in the Riigikogu Election Act, the distribution of the seats in Riigikogu should be proportionate. However, about the numerous revisions of the Riigikogu Election Act, for instance, at least 5% quota, decreases women’s chances to be able to achieve seats in the parliament. It can be underlined this threshold is high for a women.

In Estonia, local government council elections take place every four years and the European Parliament elections every five years. The Constitution of the Republic of Estonia supplies its citizens the right to vote at the Riigikogu elections and referendums. An Estonian citizen has the right to vote at all elections as well as referendums, if he or she is not restricted by law. Moreover, a citizen of a non-EU Member state, or a person who has no state and citizenship, who resides in Estonia may vote in the local government council elections if he or she has a long-term residence permit or the right of permanent residence, however, he or she cannot stand as candidate to the council. Although basic civil rights give the right to vote in elections to a citizen of a non-EU Member state or a person who has no state and citizenship, mainly, only Estonian citizens are allowed to vote in elections or stand of elections and administrative positions as well as belong and attend to political parties and its activities. Being of at least 18 years of age is a must to have the right to vote, but in local government council elections, 17 even 16 years old is valid to have the right to vote. Standing as a candidate has different age requirement, which means a person must be at least 21 years of age for the purpose of the Riigikogu and the European Parliament elections. In the legal context, Estonia’s Electoral Acts, Riigikogu Election Act, Local Government Election Act, European Parliament Election Act,

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<sup>29</sup> See Riigikogu Election Act.

Referendum Act, President of the Republic Election Act, design or prohibit certain activities that related elections.

## 1.2. Turkey

Basic problems, structural and cultural burdens which make obstacles to the empowerment women's right to participate in elections and the right to freedom of expression should be discussed in order to enhance women's political participation and usage of other rights. In case of the Turkey, the founder of the modern Republic of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, always believed and underlined the necessity of gender equality, therefore, women were given all absolute human rights as soon as new Republic established. Only 27 countries in the world had provided women to have the right to vote for parliament before Turkey, then Turkey provided women the right to vote and to be elected in local elections in 1930 and in Grand National Assembly parliamentary elections in 1934.<sup>30</sup> As known, French women gathered the right to vote in 1944, Italian women had it in 1945 and Belgium women had it in 1948. According to that information, it can be said that Turkey's initial position was absolutely positive in the world context. In Turkey, eighteen women were able to be elected as members of the parliament in 1935.<sup>31</sup> It is shameful that despite the number of women who are willing to attend in politics is enhancing, the number of women members has always been less than Atatürk's time. In 1999, 22 women were member of the parliament which totally have 555 MP, that means 4% of the members were women. However, there is an exception that shows that the number of women in parliament reached almost 10% in the 2007 general elections. 2007 general elections have indicated the highest percentage of women members in parliament in the history of Turkey's democracy. The UNDP report says that there are 834 female administrators out of 34,477.<sup>32</sup> Women generally have been doing their best to change the situation, but as mentioned before, traditional perceptions create barriers.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Kandiyoti, D. (1989). Women and the Turkish state: Political actors or symbolic pawns. In *Woman-Nation-State* (pp. 126-149). Palgrave Macmillan, London.

<sup>31</sup> Kasapoglu, A., & Özerkmen, N. (2011). Gender Imbalance: The Case of Women's Political Participation in Turkey. *Journal of international Women's Studies*, 12(4), 97-107.

<sup>32</sup> UNDP. (2010) Human Development Report on Turkey. New York: United Nations.

<sup>33</sup> European Commission. "EU-Turkey: In Istanbul on women's rights and gender equality", 2013. Available on: [http://ec.europa.eu/archives/commission\\_2010-2014/fule/headlines/news/2013/11/20131107\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/archives/commission_2010-2014/fule/headlines/news/2013/11/20131107_en.htm) (11.02.2019)



In the Ottoman period, it can be seen that the principle of equality among all subjects, including women and men, also muslims and non-muslims, in the ‘Gülhane Hatt-ı Hümayun’ on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November 1839. The ‘Gülhane Hatt-ı Hümayun’ provided equality that is mostly the equality between the Muslim population and the subjects of other religions and races.<sup>34</sup> After that, based on the ‘Gülhane Hatt-ı Hümayun’ another declaration, the ‘Islahat Fermanı’ was declared on the 28<sup>th</sup> of February 1856, so, with this declaration, for the first time in Turkish history, all the words and distinctions were eliminated to protect other classes, in terms of gender, religion and so on.

Estonian citizens mostly do not claim any religion and faith, however, opposite of Estonia, in Turkey, most of the citizens consist of muslims, therefore that, because of the association of the rise of political Islam with the resistance of headscarved women, it used to be observed that the exclusion of religious Muslim women from the public sphere.<sup>3536</sup> Religious Muslim Turkish women claimed that the ban on the headscarf is a violation of human rights.<sup>37</sup> Finally, in the legal context, there is no longer this problematic violation in Turkey. But still there is a stereotype against headscarved women all around the world, especially in political area. So that has always been a sensitive issue.

It should be noted that the ruling party, the AK Party (Justice and Development Party) with its Islamist roots, has enacted numerous legal reforms on human rights, in order to satisfy the Copenhagen Criteria. Ideological perceptions sometimes might be a confusing issue, however, the AK party has not just enacted laws that related headscarved women, as underlined above, also enacted numerous legal reforms on human rights in order to empowerment of women’s human rights in Turkey.<sup>38</sup>

The EU has always been absolutely important in the promoting, protecting and empowerment of women’s rights in Turkey. Due to politic reasons, the European Union’s reluctance to integrate Turkey caused deceleration the processes of democratization in Turkey. The European Union

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<sup>34</sup> Yilmaz, I. (2016). Muslim laws, politics and society in modern nation states: Dynamic legal pluralisms in England, Turkey and Pakistan. Routledge. (pp. 86-89).

<sup>35</sup> See Montécot, C. (2005).

<sup>36</sup> Ozcetin, H. (2009). ‘Breaking the silence’: the religious Muslim women’s movement in Turkey. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 11(1), 106-119.

<sup>37</sup> Saktanber, A., & Çorbacıoğlu, G. (2008). Veiling and headscarf-skepticism in Turkey. *Social Politics*, 15(4), 514-538.

<sup>38</sup> Kardam, N. (2011). Turkey’s response to the global gender regime. *GEMC Journal*, 4(1), 8-22.

declined the European project support, as a result of that, deceleration has been observed in the democratization in Turkey. It should be accepted that the EU has helped Turkey to strengthen civil society.<sup>39</sup> Turkey is in the process of becoming an EU member, negotiations have been frozen, however, the process still is a way for further progress to protect gender equality and naturally based on that, the right to participate in elections and the right to freedom of expression.<sup>40</sup>

In Turkey, it can be said that the secular legal framework is still standing and providing the strong infrastructure for empowerment the women's rights, in the basis of thesis, the right to participate in elections and the right to freedom of expression.

### **1.3. Iran**

Iranian women's political processes are defined as three periods which are 'Qajar Dynasty, Pahlavi Dynasty and the period of the Islamic Republic.'<sup>41</sup> Because of Qajar period's monarchic type, citizens' role in determining the politics was limited. Especially women's role in politics was more unimportant than men's. Until the Pahlavi period, women's role not just in politics, also in social life was negligible.<sup>42</sup> In the Islamic Revolution, women had a crucial role, so, it can be said that in the Islamic Republic period, women's political participation has increased.

From not allowing women to go out of their homes without a man's protection, Iranian women have gained a nine seats in Iran's parliament, which means 3,1% of the parliament consists of women.<sup>43</sup>

As mentioned in the article of 'Women in politics: A case study of Iran' despite women's limited political knowledge Iranian women have been in the revolutionary activities, such as:

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<sup>39</sup> Arat, Y. (2010). Religion, Politics and Gender Equality in Turkey: implications of a democratic paradox?. *Third World Quarterly*, 31(6), 869-884.

<sup>40</sup> Bozkurt, Emine. "Women's human rights: Turkey's way to Europe". Available on: [http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi\\_turkey\\_tpq\\_id\\_84.pdf](http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi_turkey_tpq_id_84.pdf) (11.02.2019)

<sup>41</sup> Shojaei, S. N., Samsu, K. H. K., & Asayeseh, H. (2010). Women in politics: A case study of Iran. *J. Pol. & L.*, 3, 257.

<sup>42</sup> Ahmed-Ghosh, H. (2008). Dilemmas of Islamic and secular feminists and feminisms. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 9(3), 99-116.

<sup>43</sup> Union, I. P. (2008). Women in Parliaments. Available on: <http://archive.ipu.org/pdf/publications/wiP2012e.pdf>

“distributing news and announcements; organizing charitable activities and satisfying social needs like helping the wounded and providing shelter for the activists; participating in demonstrations and street rallies; helping to make obstacles in the way of police forces; taking part in hidden political activities; participating in armed fights, making and using weapons; taking part in political meetings and speeches.”<sup>44</sup>

Furthermore, in the period of the Iraq-Iran War (1980-1988) “the image of the true Muslim woman during the war years was strictly limited to that of the mother and wife who sacrifices her sons and husband for the Islamic cause”<sup>45</sup> This quote says that to reach the equality of rights between women and men has not been easy to gather. Iranian women have not given the right to vote and freedom of expression, they literally gained it as one of the most important actors in Iranian civil rights movement between 1996-2000.<sup>46</sup>

After the victory of the Revolution in 1979, because of women’s significant role in the victory of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the revolution, pointed out that the participation of women’s is crucial.<sup>47</sup>

Table 2. Proportionate distribution of women candidates in the parliament.

<b>Parliament</b>	<b>% of Women Parliamentary Candidates</b>	<b>% of Women elected into the Parliament</b>	<b>Number of Women Deputies</b>
First Parliament	3.02%	1.66%	4
Second Parliament	1.98%	1.66%	4
Third Parliament	1.99%	1.66%	4
Fourth Parliament	3%	3.6%	9

<sup>44</sup> See Shojaei, S. N., Samsu, K. H. K., & Asayeseh, H. (2010).

<sup>45</sup> Kian, A. (1997). Women and politics in post-Islamist Iran: the gender conscious drive to change. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 24(1), 75-96.

<sup>46</sup> Mohammadi, M. (2007). Iranian women and the civil rights movement in Iran: Feminism interacted. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 9(1), 1-21.

<sup>47</sup> Moinifar, H. S. (2011). Participation of women in Iran’s polity. To aid in achieving its stated purposes and objectives this GCOE program launched a journal which publishes its academic research results in academic year 2008. Adopting the first letters from the GCOE’s program title “Gender Equality and Multicultural Conviviality”, this periodical was named “GEMC journal”. Since academic year 2009, we have published two GEMC journals, English and Japanese volumes every, 24.

Fifth Parliament	6.43%	5.6%	14
Six Parliament	7.3%	4.4%	13
Seventh Parliament	9.89%	4.4%	13
Eighth Parliament			8

Source: Ministry of Interior, Election Report, 2009.<sup>48</sup>

Based on Iranian law, any restriction on accessibility of Iranian women's right to participate in elections, as well as reachment to high position in the governments, cannot be found. As much as Turkey has, also Iran has the male-dominated culture, therefore, even any restriction cannot be found in Iranian constitution, in reality, it is hard to change a male-dominated culture. As might seen in the table 2, it can be said that both the percentage of women who is elected into the parliament and stood as candidates has been increasing.

Human Rights Watch, World Report 2019 Book says that "Iranian women face discrimination in personal status matters related to marriage, divorce, inheritance, and child custody. Iranian women cannot pass on their nationality to their foreign-born spouses or their children like men. A married woman may not obtain a passport or travel outside the country without the written permission of her husband. Under the civil code, a husband is accorded the right to choose the place of living and can prevent his wife from having certain occupations if he deems them against family values. In December 2017 and January 2018, several women took their headscarves off while standing on electric utility boxes across the country to protest Iran's compulsory hijab law. Court have sentenced several of these women to imprisonment ranging from a few months to 20 years (18 years of which is suspended). Authorities have filed a complaint against Nasrin Sotoudeh for her work in defending Shaparak Shajarizadeh, a woman arrested for protesting these discriminatory laws. In June, authorities opened Azadi stadium's doors to women and men to watch alive screening of the last two games of Iran's national football team at the 2018 World Cup. Despite authorities' promise to allow women to watch the games however, women are still banned from attending several men's sports tournaments, such as Iran's football league matches. Iranian law vaguely defines what constitutes acts against morality, and authorities have long censored art, music, and other forms of cultural expression, as well as prosecuted hundreds of people for such acts. These laws often disproportionately target

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<sup>48</sup> See in Moinifar, H. S. (2011).

women and sexual minorities. On July 9, Iranian state television broadcasted several women's apologies briefly detained in May for posting videos of themselves dancing on their popular Instagram accounts."<sup>49</sup> When these elements and claims are considered, actually number of women candidates in the parliament are surprisingly high. Here, the problem is that how it can be solved by using its Constitution. The answer is that normally its Constitution allows to apply all these sanctions and punishments. But based on international law it is not acceptable. Especially CEDAW, The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, is prohibiting that kind of implementation, however, Iran is not part of CEDAW. In Iran, women's rights are not given enough importance. Despite the positive response of women to the expectations of the regime in the Iranian Revolution and Iraqi War, the importance given to women / women's rights in the following years has not been maintained.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> World Report 2019 Book - Human Rights Watch. Available on: [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/world\\_report\\_download/hrw\\_world\\_report\\_2019.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/world_report_download/hrw_world_report_2019.pdf) (11.02.2019).

<sup>50</sup> See Shojaei, S. N., Samsu, K. H. K., & Asayeseh, H. (2010).

## **2. COMPARISON**

Comparison the selected countries, Estonia, Turkey and Iran, will help to understand differentiations in the traditional perceptions about women's participation in elections and the right to have freedom of expression. Estonia is a member of the European Union, Turkey is in the position of a candidate country of the European Union, Iran is neither member nor candidate country of the European Union. The political system is parliamentary in Estonia, in Turkey, it was parliamentary but recently changed to the presidential system and in Iran, the situation is different because both Estonia and Turkey are secular countries, however, Iran has the 'Supreme Leader' who is responsible for the policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In the legal context, it is going to try to find the gaps, differentiations, variations and contradistinctions in the selected countries, in order to see whether secularism or hierocracy generate a difference or whether being a member of the European Union create an opportunity to protect and promote women's right to participate in elections and right to freedom of expression.

### **2.1. Countries' Constitutions**

In examining process of the constitutions of the selected countries, firstly, it should be looked that the proper rights' existence, secondly, whether the rights are for all persons equally without any religion, race and gender discrimination.

The Constitution of the Republic of Estonia states that "Everyone is equal before the law. No one may be discriminated against on the basis of nationality, race, colour, sex, language, origin, religion, political or other views, property or social status, or on other grounds. Incitement to ethnic, racial, religious or political hatred, violence or discrimination is prohibited and punishable by law. Incitement to hatred and violence between social classes or to discrimination against a social class is also prohibited and punishable by law." (Chapter II, Section 12)

The Constitution of the Republic of Turkey gives that in article 10 “Everyone is equal before the law without distinction as to language, race, colour, sex, political opinion, philosophical belief, religion and sect, or any such grounds.” In the same article, “(Paragraph added on May 7, 2004; Act No. 5170) Men and women have equal rights. The State has the obligation to ensure that this equality exists in practice. (Sentence added on September 12, 2010; Act No. 5982) Measures taken for this purpose shall not be interpreted as contrary to the principle of equality.”

The Islamic Republic of Iran’s Constitution makes it clear in article 19 “All people of Iran, whatever the ethnic group or tribe to which they belong, enjoy equal rights; and colour, race, language, and the like, do not bestow any privilege.” In addition, article 20 says “All citizens of the country, both men and women, equally enjoy the protection of the law and enjoy all human, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, in conformity with Islamic criteria.” Moreover, in article 21, it is said that “The government must ensure the rights of women in all respects...”

As in the selected countries’ constitutions, the fundamental rights’ existence can be observed. When all citizens enjoy equal rights, then no one is discriminated because of his or her race, colour, religion and sex. These fundamental rights are vital to maintain the remaining rights. If a person is discriminated just because of his or her religious preferences, there will be no consistency in other rights’ implementations. It is clear in the selected countries’ constitutions, fundamental rights are given to citizens, at least, existence of fundamental rights can be seen in constitutions. It can also be said that these constitutions almost have similar legal language, therefore that, it is proved that constitutions of all countries have inspired each other. Legal rules regulate social relations, as a result of that, citizens can easily enter into social relations, plan and predict certain results due to the certain rights provided by the rules of law. Constitutional rights not only regulate social life, but also bring some guarantees for individuals.

In this context, the Constitution guarantees fundamental rights and freedoms; it serves as a legal shield that protects individuals and individuals against the state. The right to life, to freedom of thought, the right to life, the right to work, the dignity of citizens is guaranteed by the constitutions. The constitution is important not only for individuals but also for the state. The document establishing the basic structure of the countries is the constitution. The principles of the three basic bodies of a state, namely the establishment and functioning of the legislative, executive and judiciary, take place in the Constitution. The relations of these bodies with each other are regulated according to the Constitution. Beyond all this, the authority that the state

must use to fulfill the duties imposed on it is also the Constitution. It should be also mentioned that separation of the three basic bodies of a state is important. It is called separation of powers, and within the separation of powers, human rights are protected better.

The fundamental rights, which are set economic, social and cultural, civil and political, in the selected countries constitutions are brought into implementation to protect and promote citizens rights. Now, it can be evaluated that whether women's right to participate in election is given by the selected three countries' constitutions. In the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia, the right to vote is explained as "Any citizen of Estonia who has attained eighteen years of age is eligible to vote. A citizen of Estonia who has been declared by a court to lack legal capacity is ineligible to vote" in the chapter III section 57. In the case of Estonia, it is sure that women is given right to participate in elections actively. In the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, the right is explained as "In conformity with the conditions set forth in the law, citizens have the right to vote, to be elected, to engage in political activities independently or in a political party, and to take part in a referendum." in article 67. In the case of Turkey, it is a proof that the Constitution gives women the right to participate in elections effectively. However, besides fundamental rights, there is no exact article that defines women's right to participate in elections in the Islamic Republic of Iran's Constitution. In articles 23 and 24 of The Islamic Republic of Iran's Constitution, the right to freedom of press is mentioned but the right to freedom of expression of women is not mentioned exactly. In Iran, women have the right to vote in all kinds of elections, however, they are not allowed to participate all sections in the government, for instance, they cannot stand for presidential elections.<sup>51</sup> The current President of the Republic of Estonia, Kersti Kaljulaid, is a woman who used her right to participate in elections. In Turkey's political history, only one female prime minister, Tansu Çiller, was elected and she ruled the government between 1993 and 1996. Also, in the last presidential election in Turkey, a male candidate, Meral Akşener, tried to reach the position of the President of the Republic of Turkey.

Women's right to participation in elections is indispensable element of democratic societies. In cases of Estonia and Turkey, according to their Constitutions, they shall aim to promote and protect women's right to participate in elections and the right to freedom of expression.

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<sup>51</sup> Kar, M. (2007). Political Participation in Iran from the Constitutional Revolution to the Present. Accessible: [http://www.sssup.it/UploadDocs/4524\\_6\\_Political\\_Participation\\_in\\_Iran\\_from\\_the\\_Constitutional\\_Revolution\\_to\\_the\\_Present\\_Forum\\_HRs\\_Democracy\\_in\\_Iran\\_02.pdf](http://www.sssup.it/UploadDocs/4524_6_Political_Participation_in_Iran_from_the_Constitutional_Revolution_to_the_Present_Forum_HRs_Democracy_in_Iran_02.pdf) (15.02.2019)



Constitutions which are the set of rules governing the governance, the basic organs and the relations between these organs and the rights and freedoms of a state; it is shaped according to the traditions, historical, cultural and political history and democratic ideals of each country. The constitutions, which are shaped by the specific conditions of each country, show the vision of the country, and impose and guide obligations to the state and citizens towards the future goal planned for them. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), one of the fundamental human rights conventions within the United Nations, was adopted in 1979 and entered into force in 1981. As the first international document to define discrimination, CEDAW aims to ensure that the rights contained in other human rights documents are also realized for women. CEDAW is the first to deal extensively on the role and place of women in areas such as politics, economy, social and cultural life, law, health and family that affect women's lives. In the constitutions of European countries, many of which were prepared in the pre-CEDAW period, the provisions on equality between women and men are briefly mentioned, and this area is regulated by laws and administrative practices. On the other hand, the effects of CEDAW on recent constitutions are observed more clearly.<sup>52</sup> The language of the Constitution is important in terms of demonstrating the commitment to ensure full equality of women and men in that country. The use of a male-specific language, the use of male-specific pronouns and expressions in the articles referred to individuals or groups may create problems in terms of gender equality. The recent constitutions are equal to men and women in the context of the language used, while the constitution is prepared in neutral language to avoid masculine expressions. A gender-neutral language is used in the constitutions of Fiji, South Africa, Switzerland and Uganda.<sup>53</sup> In many constitutions, regulations on equal rights guarantee the equal application of rights to all, including women, and equality before the law. Such equality may include the prohibition of discrimination and the implementation of positive measures, as well as arrangements for the equal treatment of women and men in various areas such as the acquisition and loss of citizenship, marriage, family, education, health, employment, ownership, use of natural resources. The prohibition of discrimination on the basis of identity, including gender, can also be accompanied by equality arrangements. In some constitutions, the equality clause is generally regulated or special emphasis is given to women while referring to family and working rights.<sup>54</sup> In the light of the political, economic and social philosophy on which they are based, the

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<sup>52</sup> Overview of the CEDAW. Accessible: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/> (19.02.2019).

<sup>53</sup> International IDEA. "A Practical Guide to Constitution Building". Available on: <http://www.idea.int/publications/pgcb/index.cfm> (20.02.2019).

<sup>54</sup> Kar, M. (2007).

constitutions that regulate the rights and freedoms of the people, the organization of the state organs and the relationship between the state and the citizen, aim at revealing the philosophy in which the system is built on 'the initial texts'. therefore, the objectives, values and ideals listed and differentiated differ from state to state.

## **2.2. The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**

CEDAW, as it can be understood from its name of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination, has been in implementation since 1979. With its almost 200 members, CEDAW has been the focus of a growing interest and support in the international environment since its adoption. The most important characteristic of CEDAW is that it is legally binding at the international level. CEDAW, which many people today define as the most legally binding International Declaration on Women's Rights, is the only international legal tool to bring together the legal standards for eliminating all forms of gender discrimination against women and protecting the human rights of women. The CEDAW convention is a multi-faceted and comprehensive text with respect to its content as a natural consequence of the prevalence and diversity of discrimination against women throughout history. The Convention goes beyond the equality of women against the law in countries, adopting the principle that women should be in equal position with men in political, social, economic and cultural life, irrespective of their marital status, directing states to take specific interim measures to achieve these objectives and it is forcing to take measures to transform traditional and cultural behavior patterns and attitudes. In this context, the CEDAW Convention envisages the elimination of discrimination in both laws and in real life, as well as in private life and in particular family relations, as well as in public life, through discriminatory stereotypes and behavior. Since its adoption, the implementation of the CEDAW by the Contracting States has been made by the CEDAW Committee, which consists of independent experts established to supervise the implementation of this Convention by means of reports submitted every four years. In these reports, States parties inform the Committee of the measures they have taken to implement the Convention and to eliminate legal or culturally based discriminatory practices for women in their countries, in other words, the distance they have met and the obstacles they face in the implementation of the report in the CEDAW countries. In order to make the implementation of the agreement more effective and to

eliminate all kinds of discrimination against the women in the spirit and text of CEDAW, it has been established with the aim of taking faster and stronger steps in the world. <sup>55</sup>

Estonia has been a member of CEDAW since 1991. In ‘the consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against women’ on Estonia, the report says that Article 1. “For the purposes of the present Convention, the term ‘discrimination against women’ shall mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.”<sup>56</sup>

Turkey has been a member of CEDAW since 1985. The Republic of Turkey has been taking into account international obligations serious, as well as the recognition of women's human rights, protection and advancement towards a healthy working with civil society organizations in the women's movement and women's rights and the sample has been in a qualified solidarity. Such an infrastructure asset of the Country Reports after the entry into force of this international instrument in Turkey in a relatively short period of time has become a tool that can be used by women.

Although CEDAW’s importance has been understood by many countries, Iran is not a member of CEDAW. Unfortunately, in accordance with enjoyment of CEDAW’s useful implementations, Iran has proved a huge disappointment.

### **2.3. Women Participation in Elections**

The women’s right to participation in elections in the selected countries has been explained in detail, however, in this part, especially after the discussion and comparison of the three selected countries’ constitutions, it will be useful to elaborate and also underline and some facts and

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<sup>55</sup> Overview of the CEDAW. Accessible: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/> (19.02.2019).

<sup>56</sup> CEDAW ESTONIA’S REPORT. <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N01/516/53/IMG/N0151653.pdf?OpenElement> (19.02.2019).

numbers. All around the world, women are being elected to parliaments, however, in most countries, parliaments still are male-dominated. It can be seen as an improvement, it is partly true because the current progress is rather slow.

### **2.3.1. In Estonia**

In 1991, the number of women in the national parliament Riigikogu was approximately 13% that number has been growing since then, in 2003, it was observed as almost 19% despite the proportion looks low if compare men about gender equal and balanced approachment in decision-making processes. Since the first parliamentary elections, there has always been less amount of women speaker in Riigikogu, basically, women are rarely chair or vice-chair in the parliamentary committees.<sup>57</sup> Despite it was said that Estonia seems to protect and promote women's right to participate in elections and the right to freedom of expression better than Turkey and Iran, especially as mentioned in the Table 1, the proportion of seats in the Parliament of Estonia, Riigikogu, held by women is 0.19 but it was in the Riigikogu (parliamentary) elections 2015, in the last Riigikogu elections in 2019, participation is not satisfactory. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 2015, in the Riigikogu (parliamentary) elections, amongst 101 MPs 29 was female which shows the proportion of 28.7%<sup>58</sup> In the Riigikogu elections 2019, there were 1099 candidates in total. 561141 Estonian citizens have voted in the elections. Normally there were 887420 eligible voters, 565045 people voted and 561141 people's votes were valid. Participation to elections is 63.7% of 887420 eligible voters.<sup>59</sup> It can be observed that there are 28 female MPs which equals 27.7%

Estonia might be expected to have more female MPs in the Riigikogu, especially as a result of that being a member of the European Union. Despite it was said that Estonia seems to protect and promote women's right to participate in elections and the right to freedom of expression better than Turkey and Iran, it can be seen that the number of female MPs in the parliament has been decreased. That is unfortunate for a country that claims gender equality.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Estonian National Electoral Committee: <https://www.valimised.ee/en>

<sup>58</sup> Women in National Parliament. Accessible: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm> (01.03.2019)

<sup>59</sup> <https://www.valimised.ee/en>

<sup>60</sup> Marling, R. (2017). Gender Equality in Estonia. In Gender Equality in a Global Perspective (Vol. 246, No. 260, pp. 246-260). ROUTLEDGE in association with GSE Research.

### 2.3.2. In Turkey

The proportion of seats in the Parliament of Turkey held by women is 0.04 based on the Table 1. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of June 2018, in the Turkish General Elections, amongst 596 MPs, 104 female MPs was elected, which shows the proportion of 17.4%<sup>61</sup> Turkey has more different condition than Estonia and Iran. In Estonia, total number of MPs is 101, in Iran it is almost 300 MPs. However in Turkey this number was 550 and now it is 600. Turkish women proportion in the parliament does not seem high but in Estonia this number is 29, in Iran this number is 17. If consider Estonia's and Iran's situation, 104 female MPs might be considered satisfying.

Turkey uses a simple majority system for all local elections. The election management body in Turkey is known as the Supreme Board of Elections. According to article 6 of law number 7062 regarding the Organization and Duties of the Supreme Board of Elections, the primary duties and powers of the Supreme Board of Elections include the following:

- To carry out all procedures related to the management and ethical conduct of elections, from the start to the end of the elections;
- To examine and make a decision on all charges of corruption or other complaints and objections related to election issues during and after the election;
- To determine the procedures and principles regarding the creation, update, management and supervision of the voter register;
- To inform citizens about the importance of and regulations surrounding voter registration and provide voter education programs about voters' duties and responsibilities;
- To prepare or arrange preparation of public education programs that explain the rights and obligations of voters and the election process. There is compulsory broadcasting of these programs on radio and television stations;
- To facilitate the voting of voters with disabilities;
- To facilitate the voting of voters abroad;
- To cooperate with domestic and foreign institutions on matters related to elections;
- To make any other determinations and issue regulations necessary to implement this law and matters falling within its scope, authority and responsibility;

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<sup>61</sup> See Women in National Parliament Information.

- To carry out other duties given by the Constitution and laws.<sup>62</sup>

Examining the last Presidential elections in Turkey in 2018, it is clearly obvious that female voters are more than male voters.

Table 3. Domestic and International Voter Gender Distribution published by the Supreme Board of Elections following the 2018 presidential election.

<b>Domestic and International Voter Gender Distribution</b>					
	<b>WOMEN</b>	<b>WOMEN</b>	<b>MEN</b>	<b>MEN</b>	
	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>DOMESTIC</b>	28,589,477	50.8	27,733,155	49.2	56,322,632
<b>OUT OF COUNTRY</b>	1,429,198	46.9	1,618,130	53.1	3,047,328
<b>TOTAL</b>	30,018,675		29,351,285		59,369,960

Source: The Supreme Board of Elections.<sup>63</sup>

Table 3 shows that domestic women voters in Turkey's last presidential elections were higher than men voters. That is the matter of protection of the women's right to vote in elections.

<sup>62</sup> Elections in Turkey, 2019 Local Elections, Frequently Asked Questions. Available: [https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/2019\\_ifes\\_turkey\\_local\\_elections\\_faqs\\_final.pdf](https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/2019_ifes_turkey_local_elections_faqs_final.pdf) (26.03.2019).

<sup>63</sup> Domestic and International Voter Gender Distribution published by the Supreme Board of Elections following the 2018 presidential election. Available on: <http://www.ysk.gov.tr/tr/2018-cumhurbaskani-ve-milletvekili-secimi-CC%87statistikleri/78032> (01.04.2019).

Examining the last local elections in Turkey in March 2019, it is also clearly obvious that still female voters are more than male voters.

Table 4. Voter Gender Distribution published by the Supreme Board of Elections following the 2019 local elections.

<b>Voter Gender Distribution</b>				
<b>WOMEN</b>	<b>WOMEN</b>	<b>MEN</b>	<b>MEN</b>	
<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
28.929.732	50,7	28.128.904	49,3	57.058.636

Source: The Supreme Board of Elections.<sup>64</sup>

As it can be observed that women's right to vote in Turkey is protected and promoted, still main problem is in process that participation in elections is lower than expected. Only 43 female candidates were elected as a mayor amongst almost 2000 mayors.<sup>65</sup> gender equality is a prerequisite for protecting women's rights. The gender equality gap is primarily social problem. In a society, if there is 50.7% female voters but there is only 43 female mayors out of 2000, can it be said that there is no gender gap in Turkey? The selected countries' constitutions give the right to freedom of expression, in the implementation of women's rights equally with men is depending on the traditional perceptions. The Republic of Turkey has been taking into account international obligations serious, as well as the recognition of women's human rights, protection and advancement towards a healthy working with civil society organizations in the women's movement and women's rights and the sample has been in a qualified solidarity. However,

<sup>64</sup> Voter Gender Distribution published by the Supreme Board of Elections following the 2019 local election. Available on: <http://www.ysk.gov.tr/tr/istatistik/5644> (01.04.2019).

<sup>65</sup> KA.DER, a women's organization which advocates equal representation of women and men in all fields of life. Available on: <http://ka-der.org.tr/en/> (01.04.2019).

because of effects of the traditional perceptions, even though number of female voters are more than male voters, there is a non-equal system in parliaments as well.

### **2.3.3. In Iran**

The proportion of seats in the Parliament of Islamic Republic of Iran held by women is 0.04 according to Table 1, just same as Turkey's proportion. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of February 2016, in the elections, amongst 289 MPs, 17 female MPs was elected, which indicates the proportion of 5.9%<sup>66</sup>

As seen in the Table 2, it is definite that Iranian women have increased their power in elections. That can be seen in the table that the proportion of women in the parliament have been increasing gradually. However, as mentioned before, it is not satisfying. Especially, as agreed on emerging technologies have helped women to enjoy the right to freedom of expression through the internet, it should be anticipated that proportion of women in parliament could have been more than normally it has been.

The superiority of the institutions appointed in the structure of male-dominated political power is very clear. The separation of powers in the Iranian state structure is not well defined, and everything is ultimately tied to the religious leader. In practice, the religious leader is able to obstruct the executive president and the government wing and this is often the case. Even so, the legal presence of the Assembly is possible only with the formation of the 12-member Council of the Council of Protectors, which is set by the Assembly with the proposal of the head of the judiciary, half of the members directly. In the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran determined in the Constitution of 1979 and the amended Constitution of 1989, there is no separation of powers with the form of law in practice even if the Constitution is envisaged in the separation of powers. The structure of the Iranian political system carries not only the

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<sup>66</sup> See Women in National Parliament Information.



contradictions between the chosen and appointed elements but also the contradiction between the divine and non-divine sources of power and the male-dominated qualities of power.<sup>67</sup>

According to the World Economic Forum's 2006 Global Gender Inequality Report, Iran has ranked 108th among 115 countries as one of the countries with the highest level of gender discrimination. It was ranked 113 th in the list of participation in economy and equality of opportunity among men and women, 80 th in access to education, 52 th in health and survival and 109 th in political participation. The rate of female lawmakers, senior officials and managers is 13%. 33% of professional and technical employees are women. 4% of the members of the parliament and 7% of the ministerial positions are women. In Iran, post-revolutionary education policies were abolished, mandatory headscarves were introduced, and the gender-based division of labor was dominated by family and public spheres by incorporating explicit and unequal gender stereotypes in textbooks. Political power requires that women participate in socio-economic and political affairs to be complementary and not prevent them from fulfilling their responsibilities for the household.

On the one hand, after the Islamic Revolution, the politics of isolation of the genders, on the one hand, imposed significant limitations on the working life of women, on the other hand, they also created a new wage-work area that is entirely women-specific. Due to the necessity of isolation, women need specialized women in order to provide education, health and medical treatment and safety of women. As part of the gender-based division of labor, some of the jobs in areas such as health and education, which are called feminized sectors, have been mandatory for women.<sup>68</sup> With the new regime, the strict application of the Shari'a in the Civil Code was adopted. This meant that women had to go back to their status in the Shah's monarchy regime. Women's right to participate in political life and working life is limited but not completely eliminated. Women have the right to be elected and elected in regular elections but cannot be elected president. The common belief among past and present lawyers is that according to Shariah, women cannot be the head of the state. The dominant position in Iran is that women's decisions are unacceptable. Some do not tolerate women's decision-making and decisions / rules, from a sharia viewpoint, some emphasizing on the basis of customs and habits, or on their biological characteristics, and the gender roles required by the gender-based division of labor imposed by gender inequality. In

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<sup>67</sup> Article 93 of Iran Constitution.

<sup>68</sup> World Economic Forum 2006 "The Global Gender Gap Report 2006" Available on: [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GenderGap\\_Report\\_2006.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GenderGap_Report_2006.pdf) (20.03.2018)

Islamic societies, according to Sharia, women's rights are still determined according to the mentality of the current policymakers. This is a very serious problem in terms of women's participation in the political field and their effectiveness. Although the Meritocracy slogan has become popular at various stages of government; The majority of intellectual and expert women are excluded from access to government management positions / decision makers. Women were banned from being judges and their entry to the university was limited to certain areas. The mother and spouse have the right to participate in the labor force as long as they do not affect their fulfillment of their responsibilities.

However, women's use of these very limited rights is bound to a very serious condition, such as women's dressing / dressing in accordance with the Islamic regime, which is a situation that women do not expect at all. This situation of women exposed to wide range of restrictions and prohibitions in terms of rights and freedoms continued until the period of Hashemi Rafsanjani, who was elected president by the death of Khomeini in 1989. It can be said that during Rafsanjani who adopted a pragmatist policy politically, there were efforts to adapt Islam to a more modern and flexible understanding of Islam. The number of students and academicians increased with the education institutions. From the door opened by Rafsanjani, who approached the west more moderately, women tried to make as much use as possible, and some partial improvements were seen in the case of women, from clothing to education, from restrictions on public space to employment.

Furthermore, these prohibitions were so banned and against the limitation that these gains were very low. For this reason, Khatami, who promised more rights and freedom for more radical and comprehensive transformations, was elected President in 1997 with the votes of women with intense demand. After Khatami, for all the Iranian women, progress has been stopped in all respects and steps have been taken. Ahmadinejad, who was elected President in 2005 and 2009, destroyed all the reforms Hatemi had attempted to establish and ground, and Iran, which Khatami tried to democratize, became the homeland of nightmares especially for women. There have been many impositions for women under the name of Islamic Principle. In December 2013, a Sunni female mayor was elected for the first time in Iran. Samiyeh Belochzehi, a 26-year-old engineer with a master's degree in natural resource management at the Islamic Azad University Science and Research Unit in Tehran, was elected Mayor of the town of Kalat in the southern

Sistan-Balochistan region in southern Iran. It is stated that the sister of Baloçzehi, who came from a rich and influential family, was also in the city council.<sup>69</sup>

## **2.4. Freedom of Expression of Women's**

As discussed before, unless someone defames, attacks and blames other people, the right to freedom of expression is one of the oldest and also necessary preserved rights. In the democratic societies, all citizens shall enjoy the right to freedom of expression that allows people to write, speak, publish and organize opportunities. This is also why in the title of this thesis right to freedom of expression is given together with the right to participate in elections. As mentioned before, even the selected countries' constitutions give the right to freedom of expression, in the implementation of women's rights equally with men is depending on the traditional perceptions. The right to freedom of expression is compilation sets of rights that cover opinions, beliefs, attitudes and emotions. This right is easy to explain because it reveals itself in every area of every society. It might cover thoughts and opinions, also art, science, fashion and so on. Although right to freedom expression cover many areas, it should not be limitless.<sup>70</sup>

Whenever the notions about the right to freedom expression is discussed, the European Convention on Human Rights, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights are accepted the most crucial and vital instances, in order to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression.

International actors, such as organizations and covenants mentioned above, are important all around the world to ensure women's rights, naturally human rights. However, nowadays, with the emerging technologies, women can enjoy their right to speak especially in social media. In that sense, women can explain opinions, arrange meetings, talk other female activists, and make

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<sup>69</sup> Shojaei, S. N., Samsu, K. H. K., & Asayeseh, H. (2010). Women in politics: A case study of Iran. *J. Pol. & L.*, 3, 257.

<sup>70</sup> Ulusoy, D. Ç. (2013). A Comparative Study of the Freedom of Expression in Turkey and EU. *Turkish Yearbook of International Relations*, 44.

their political statements. The selected countries' constitutions and international agreements have been blocking any kind of abuse of the women's rights to freedom of expression. In Iran, even in Saudi Arabia, women can use the right freely through social media. Moreover, the women of the world has been influenced by powerful technological empowerment of the internet. Since the information technologies have started to develop, the right to freedom of expression has been absolutely crucial right for women. For instance, a hundred year ago, women had struggled to obtain the fundamental right to freedom of expression, when they share ideas and express their opinions in public about religion or politics. In a way, it could be said that the emerging technologies have helped women to enjoy the right to freedom of expression. At the international level, based on constitutional arrangements, the right to freedom of expression is recognized and specified.

The concept of human rights has emerged to protect the individual from the actions and practices of the state which are not lawful. Therefore, the subject of the struggle brought by the concept of human rights is the fundamental rights and freedoms. The most basic and indispensable of fundamental rights and freedoms is freedom of thought. Freedom of thought is based on human dignity and the fundamental right to develop the material and spiritual existence of man and is one of the most important elements of being a free individual and having a free society. Because it is not possible for a society of individuals deprived of explaining their ideas freely in the social, cultural, political and economic spheres. In a society where freedom is not allowed, to be experienced, to be explained, it is possible to talk about the machines that are programmed in one type and state, not individuals. Such a system, in the form of a vicious circle, will not lead to a state that does not interrogate, cannot be corrected, and therefore operates within the framework of a group. Anxiety of the freedom of thought would lead to chaos and the threat to order; it is frequently expressed by individuals and the judiciary. In essence, the boundaries of the freedom of thought should be united.

At the point of drawing the border, the law comes into play. Freedom of expression is among the first generation rights in human rights law documents and constitutions, personal and political rights category and historical development. In addition, it is not only necessary to protect itself from interventions for the realization of freedom of thought, but also for the state to have some positive actions. For this reason, freedom of thought is both a positive and a negative one. There is a relationship of interaction and dependence between fundamental rights and freedoms. Freedom of thought has a special place in this context. This freedom is a prerequisite for the use

of many other freedoms. The lack of freedom of thought is an indication that other freedoms are also under threat. Freedom of thought itself can also be meaningful if there are other freedoms. These freedoms that we can call structural elements of freedom of thought; the freedoms necessary for the formation of thought can be classified as freedom of opinion and freedom of expression. The right of people to access information and documents that meet the need for knowledge and knowledge can be achieved through the free exchange of opinions and opinions. For this, freedom of mass communication and special communication should be ensured. Because, when the flow of thought and opinion is prevented, the form of freedom of expression cannot go beyond being a freedom. Persons to create a healthy idea about events, facts and concepts, to make the right choices; they should have access to the necessary information and documents, to receive news, to learn freely and to communicate. Since there are no healthy, independent and free thoughts in an environment where these rights are not present, the existence of freedom of thought cannot be mentioned.

The distinction between criticism and the criminal record is directly related to the legal regime and the democratization of the system. As a system, the scope of the declaration which constitutes a crime in democratized states is broader and the right to criticism is considered narrow. In authoritarian states, the criticism of the functioning of the state, in particular, is regulated as a crime, which causes the state to be questionable and, if necessary, to change from a flexible flexibility and therefore to democratization. In a democratic system, criticism must be free and encouraged. Regardless of how many people agree on it, people should be able to voice their criticism on every subject. It should be more open to criticism, especially when the state administration is the representative of the people and the responsibilities that this power of attorney imposes on public officials. However, in this way, the public needs to be corrected and a real democracy can be mentioned. The political system must establish the conditions for individuals to express their criticism in a safe and comfortable manner. Otherwise, people who cannot express their problems through a democratic way of criticism may feel the need to appear more rigidly. Accordingly, the freedom of thought and the right to criticism will lead to greater stability and less violence. The most important and influential spokesperson for citizens is the press. Therefore, in libertarian democracies, it is accepted that the most important public duty of the press is to serve for the control and criticism of all public life. As with all fundamental rights and freedoms, there is a limit to the use of the right to criticism. However, when this limit is exceeded, a crime occurs and criminal law comes into play. The broader and narrower the

border; It differs according to the relationship between criminal law and policy. As states become authoritarian, the area of restriction will be expanded.<sup>71</sup>

International human rights law supplies women to enjoy the right to freedom of expression on equal terms and without gender-based discrimination. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, mentioned many times, protect women's right to equal enjoyment of the right to freedom of expression. In that sense, protection of the right to freedom of expression is crucial to practice and enjoy the right to vote and participate in elections.

## **2.5. Problems in General**

Firstly, gender equality is a prerequisite for protecting women's rights. The gender equality gap is primarily social problem. Women do not have to compete with men, because women's competitor is not men, but the systems, regimes, perceptions and cultural burdens that provide all the important roles to men. It is not sensible to ask a country to change its culture as soon as possible, however, if cultural perceptions create barriers between men and women, then to protect equality, cultural amendments should be crucial. Especially, in Turkey and Iran, unless women liberated from needing a father, husband or brother, and some sense needing to government, women's rights cannot solve any struggle. Women's problem is primarily a problem of inequality. The problem of inequality is primarily the class problem. One is the solution of the other before the solution is temporary, relative and rootless. As long as people are in need of them, they make other people trivial and devalue. It is a matter of eliminate the idea of women are in need all the time. In this context, the basis of the women's problem is primarily a problem of equality with a class content and it is based on exiting the needy as a class. Other equality problems specific to women can be solved permanently.

Based on a survey, there are key findings that can explain women's problems in parliaments. For instance it says "women face greater obstacles entering politics. Prejudice and cultural perceptions about the role of women, together with a lack of financial resources, are among the

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

greatest obstacles to women entering politics. For male respondents, perceived lack of support from the electorate is the most important deterrent. Women parliamentarians cite domestic responsibilities as the greatest impediment to a life in politics, which is a far less significant challenge for men.”<sup>72</sup> As deterrents for women, it underlines: domestic responsibilities, prevailing cultural attitudes regarding the roles of women in society, lack of support from family, lack of confidence, lack of finances. Another finding says that “parliaments are not gender-sensitive institutions More than half the respondents believe that gender equality is only occasionally or rarely mainstreamed in parliament. While there have been sporadic attempts to modernize some parliaments, by and large much more needs to be done to improve the gender sensitivity of parliaments by changing cultural mores and modernizing working arrangements to accommodate the specific needs of parliamentarians. Gender equality should be one of the measures of institutional performance of parliaments.”<sup>73</sup> In that survey, people think there is no sufficient number of women serve in the parliamentary committees: “Two thirds of respondents say there are not enough women serving on their parliament’s committees. Fewer women means less influence by women and less progress on gender equality within parliament, and on incorporating their perspective in the work of all committees, whether they are dedicated to issues of gender equality and the status of women, or other concerns, such as finance, national security and foreign affairs.”<sup>74</sup> Moreover, it can be said that based on that survey political parties define everything: “Political parties are important arenas for policy development and for setting political priorities, and are therefore one of key institutions through which gender equality should be promoted. However, far from all political parties that promote gender equality uphold their manifesto pledges in practice, and women are not sufficiently represented in the policymaking bodies of political parties. This research found the support of the ruling party to be the most important factor in introducing and enacting gender-related legislation, making change at this level is vital.”<sup>75</sup> Another finding says that “women bring different views, perspectives and talents to politics. More than 90 percent of all respondents, male and female, agree that women bring different views, perspectives and talents to politics. Women lead efforts to combat gender-based violence and to ensure that issues such as parental leave, childcare, pensions, gender-equity laws and electoral reforms that enhance women’s access to parliament appear on the legislative agenda. While most women feel that they have a responsibility to represent women,

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<sup>72</sup> Equality in Politics. A Survey of Women and Men in Parliaments. Available on: <http://archive.ipu.org/PDF/publications/equality08-chart-e.pdf> (15.02.2019).

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

some emphasize that they also advocate on behalf of the wider community, moving beyond what is perceived as a women's agenda to contribute to a broad range of political discussions."<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, it says women and men observe differently: "Male and female respondents who participated in the survey identify themselves as engaged in different policy areas. Men claim to be most active in foreign affairs, economic and trade issues, education and constitutional affairs, while they report low levels of activity in gender equality, labour and women's issues. Among women, the reverse is true: nearly half of all women respondents note that they are very active on women's issues and gender-equality matters, but less active in economic and trade matters, finance and defence."<sup>77</sup>

In fact, the statement of women's rights even reveals women's inequality. Because, especially in this age, it sounds sexist to say women's or men's rights, at the end of the day, it must be human rights. Today, unfortunately, women are not sufficiently concerned with the political and social rights granted to them through the constitution, and they do not stand on the inequalities in the field of civil rights. It is sure that the main reason for this is the lack of education or lack of education. For a right to be used, it is necessary to know that the right exists. This happens only through training. Therefore, we have to give importance to the education of our women. Researches have shown that the education levels of women in rural areas and urban slum areas are very low and they do not even see the compulsory primary education. Adequate training; political, social and civil rights are considered as the reasons why they can not deal with too early marriage, giving birth, unbalanced nutrition, not to deal with health problems such as self-analysis and women will have full access to the place in politics and other areas, where the founder of the modern Republic of Turkey Atatürk dreamed. As stated Atatürk in the one of his speech, "as a partner, friend, assistant and supporter of men in life, women will fulfill their duty in the best way in the rise of this country." And "everything we see in the world is the creative work of women."<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> Mustafa Kemal Atatürk quotes,

Accessible: [https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/2793859.Mustafa\\_Kemal\\_Ataturk](https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/2793859.Mustafa_Kemal_Ataturk) (15.02.2019).



### **3. PROPOSALS**

As it is mentioned above, women's participation in elections involves much more than the enjoyment of the right to vote because being effective in political participation derives from other rights but mainly from right to freedom of expression. In the selected countries, it can be observed that Estonia's, Turkey's and Iran's constitutions supply the particular rights to men as much as women. However, basically because of the traditional perceptions, even well-established political parties fail to include women in the political processes such as peace negotiations and conflicts. International organizations, United Nations, European Union and other actors may create an crucial contribution to demolish barriers to women's right to participate in election.

In order to elaborate the proposals on the topic, how to protect and promote women's right to participate in elections and right to freedom of expression should be examined.

#### **3.1. Protection and Promotion of Women's Right to Participate in Elections**

Although some countries do not have any legislation that is about women's existence in party lists, political parties have the right to arrange quotas for women and men candidates. It might help to protect and promote to protect the right to women's participation in elections and quota strategy has been successful in many areas.<sup>79</sup> In order to ensure women's existence in politic parties, candidate lists should be gender balanced and include a certain number of women. Besides that existence legal obligations, these kinds of methods depend and change on the implementation of their details. Even if the parties follow and obey the defined legal obligations when they create the candidate lists, women cannot expect to succeed because they are mostly placed at the end of the candidate lists. To provide better options for women who desire to be

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<sup>79</sup> Galligan, Y. (2010). Women in politics. Politics in the Republic of Ireland, 263-91.

elected, there is a list that is called ‘zippered’. As an example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina’s assessment of the Election Law for the 5 October 2002 elections, about legal requirements for gender balance on party lists:

*“The election law of Bosnia and Herzegovina includes a provision requiring that men and women each constitute at least a third of the candidates listed, and that both occupy positions high enough on the lists to ensure balanced representation if the party wins seats in the parliament. Since the provision is written in a gender-neutral manner, it should not be regarded as a temporary special measure as set out in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, but may constitute a permanent part of the law. Other countries have similar requirements.*

*Article 4, paragraph 19, of the election law requires that every candidate list include male and female candidates. According to the relevant provision, “the minority gender candidates shall be distributed on the candidate list in the following manner: at least one (1) minority gender candidate amongst the first two (2) candidates; two (2) minority gender candidates amongst the first five (5) candidates; and three (3) minority gender candidates amongst the first eight (8) candidates et seq. The number of minority gender candidates shall be at least equal to the total number of candidates on the list, divided by three (3) rounded to the closest integer.”<sup>80</sup>*

For the empowerment of women’s participation, political parties should stipulate that women have to have a certain number of seats in the parliament. To ensure that, for example, such platforms that address gender equality in election might be used to encourage women voters to involve in the political processes actively. Of course, when platforms are mentioned, social media comes to mind immediately, so, the internet is also a vital tool to protect and promote women’s right to participate in elections and right to freedom of expression. The media, especially social media, has been shaping people’s interest in participation in elections. In the social media, how women deal with problems about women is a major impact; how they reflect proper messages to potential voters is also to have effect on women’s participation in elections.<sup>81</sup> Based on election laws and media laws, a special framework should be created and implemented for the role of the

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<sup>80</sup> UNIES, N. (2006). Women and Elections: Guide to promoting the participation of women in elections, pp. 37-38.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p.41.

social media in elections. However, unfortunately, social media regulations and practices affect women in a bad way. To break the social media's negative effects on women, specific defamations, which mainly aim at women, should be blocked, without violating other people's right to freedom of expression.

### **3.2. Enhancing Women's Role in Democratic Society**

It is not the only option to promote non-governmental organizations but it is highly effective to enhancing women's role in democratic societies. Non-governmental organizations might put a perfect effort to the advancement of women's political participation. How non-governmental organizations do that is to help women to stand as candidates, to provide them usage of social media effectively about politics, to show them solve the problems, to advance them in politics in the context of joining parties' activities and services, to assist them to be gender-sensitive civic and to provide them the credentials to become a party leader or a candidate. It is absolute that in Estonia, Turkey and Iran, the women's rights are respected if a comparison would be done 100 years ago. Still these selected countries put considerably much more effort to ensure human rights. It cannot be said that selected countries do not have women's rights, however, lack of implementation of women rights law and international covenants properly can be given as an example. As compared Constitution of the selected countries, women's right to participate in elections, the right to vote as well as the right to freedom of expression are protected by law. It has not been, and is never going to be, easy to protect human rights, especially the world population like that it is difficult to ensure that. That does not mean nothing can be done. Political parties should adopt international democratic structures in order to provide support to ensure the election of women candidates, make a certain that women are fully represented in party leadership and identify the advancement of women and issues of special concern to women as priorities in their platforms. In democratic societies, citizens should provide training and other types of support for women candidates and to persuade international donors to support projects aimed at advancing women's political participation in elections, especially in the least developed countries.

### 3.3. Recommendation in Legal Perspective

In Turkey, political parties must be organized and registered based on a law regulation systems to show that the operational provisions of the political parties' law are absolutely vital to establish a framework for women's right to participate in elections.<sup>82</sup> When the political parties have to underline to practise internal democracy and supply transparent nomination procedures in the proces of primary elecetions, then in certain circumstances women will be able to have a better opportunity to act in political elections as candidates.<sup>83</sup> On the basis of centralized parties, which are mostly ruled and controlled by men, might be reluctant to selecting women as candidates. Also, in connection with traditional perceptions, political parties' law should cover such provisions which aim to enchancing women's right to participate in elections. It can be given as an example that political parties should be expected to approve their position on gender equality in the parties' establishing constitutions. In the ruling processes, political parties should mandate that, in order to be gender balanced, party's organs and agencies has to be more enthusiastic to accept women existence. Election laws also should audit that political parties prepare a gender balanced canditade list. To assure that, political party laws or election laws might suggest political parties opportunities, for instance, additional public funding. It is surely going to fortify women's right to participate in election.

Political party law and other election-related legislations should not be disadvantaging women's right to participate in elections and right to freedom expression. Moreover, political parties should bring into force democratic procedures for their internal and external activities. Only governments can define such legislations to provide women to act in the parties' internal and external activities as much as men can do. Furthermore, political parties should include a certain proportion of women quantity on their candidate list. In addition, governments should provide incentives for political parties to promote women candidates. Lastly, poltical parties should develop lobies and wings for legislative changes to advance women's empowerment in the legal context. When a women have problem, political parties should address this problem in the party platform in order to solve it.

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<sup>82</sup> Arat, Y. (1989). *The patriarchal paradox: Women politicians in Turkey*. Fairleigh Dickinson Univ Press. p.49

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p.62

## SUMMARY

Today, population of women all around the world is equal to men's population. But why in the context of human rights changes might be seen all the time? In this master thesis, as research questions, "to what extent women's right to participate in elections differ in Estonia, Turkey and Iran?" and "how the political participation and freedom of expression of women can be strengthened?" are tried to explained. It has indicated that women's right to participate in elections and freedom of expression differ around the world. Although most of the population is Muslim in Turkey, it is indicated also in the Constitution that Turkey is a secular country. Opposite of Turkey, Iran has been ruled by Islamic Rules, also indicated its name as the Islamic Republic of Iran. Therefore, can it be said that secularism provide more human rights than Islam? If we compare Iran and Turkey, the answer will be no.<sup>84</sup>

Same problems might occur in Turkey, as well as in Iran about the women's rights, in this master thesis as two different dimensions of the women's capabilities, the right to participate in elections and the right to freedom of expression. International actors effect has been discussed. For instance, the EU's enormous and important role was indicated. But there might be an issue about the international actors. In order to promote and protect the women's right to participate in elections and freedom of expression, international actors have always been necessary, however, "There has been and probably always remains tension between the sovereignty of states and international concern."<sup>85</sup> For instance, the EU gives directions in order to promote and protect human rights but some countries, especially non-EU countries, might be sensitive because of the idea of that the EU interferes other countries' internal affairs. That is why there always will be tension between the sovereignty of states and international concern.<sup>86</sup> When the selected

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<sup>84</sup> Freeman, M. (2004). The problem of secularism in human rights theory. *Hum. Rts. Q.*, 26, 375.

<sup>85</sup> Kerikmäe, T., Hamulak, O., & Chochia, A. (2016). A historical study of contemporary human rights: deviation or extinction. *Acta Baltica Historiae et Philosophiae Scientiarum*, 4(2), 98-115.

<sup>86</sup> Hathaway, O. A. (2017). Do human rights treaties make a difference?. In *International Law and Society* (pp. 3-110). Routledge.

countries' constitution compared, it might be said that about women's rights implementation: Amongst Estonia, Turkey and Iran, there is no gigantic difference on women's right to participate in elections and the right to freedom of expression. Basically all the Constitutions (the Constitutions of Estonia, Turkey and Iran) supply citizens to enjoy the right to vote and the right to free speech. In fact, if immense difference between secular Turkey and Islamic Iran cannot be observed, also if the selected three countries' constitutions can supply women's rights, then there might be other factors, such as traditional perceptions.

As mentioned, maybe Islamic Iran's constitution does not confine women's right but its male citizens' perception on women might be blocking women's rights. Same issue can be said for Turkey as well. In order to protect and promote effectively women's right to participation in elections and the right to freedom of expression, using the benefits of internet has been mentioned above. An effective usage of internet's benefit might be perfectly useful to make an awareness to protect and promote women's rights. In the technological way, the selected countries seem to have similar facilities, however, Estonia has have a rightful reputation about technological developments. It can be said that Estonia's e-vote implementation has been followed jealously by other countries.<sup>87</sup>

The world's population have been increasing each passing day. As a result of that, sadly, people may abuse the right to freedom of expression as a defamation tool. In such that situtaion, governments may restrict some people's the right to freedom of expression, but that kind of restrictions have the justified reasons. In the sense of women's rights, governments must not use that power to abuse women's rights. Unfortunately, in politics, that kind of abusements might be seen. To prevent that kind of abusement, separation of powers is definitely perfect tool. When there is separation of powers, governments cannot interfere the Judiciary's decision. So, governments cannot abuse women's rights to protect its own role of governance rulling. It is hard for women to participate in both civil society organizations and political parties and to participate in political processes at a level that represents their social problems. Non-governmental organizations, in which women participate, are usually the ones that carry out voluntary assistance activities. Women's work in social assistance associations is in parallel with their roles in their homes. In addition to these activities, women should look for ways of political

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<sup>87</sup> What the U.S. Can Learn About Electronic Voting From This Tiny Eastern European Nation. Available on: <http://time.com/5541876/estonia-elections-electronic-voting/> (10.02.2019).

empowerment and turn to political organizations. Political life in the world is determined by men; rules of the game, good-bad definitions, life values and habits are formed within the framework of these determinations. In order to be successful in the political race, women should do it like men, and they should work day and night and compete with men on equal terms. In this case, there are few strong women who can play this game according to the rule. A large part of women remain outside politics.

Moreover the structure of political parties and the weakness of women's branches are also important factors preventing women's participation in political processes. In elections, one of the most important reasons that prevent women from being candidates is lack of knowledge and lack of self-confidence. Since women do not have sufficient knowledge and experience, they believe that they cannot overcome the obstacles arising from the political and cultural environment and they stay away from politics. Since the parties generally do not have a pre-prepared work on female candidates during the election periods and the female candidates are determined at the last moment, the trust in these candidates decreases and their representation abilities decrease. One reason why women candidates are not successful in the elections is the general opinion in the society that women cannot succeed in the political arena. That explained above as the problem of traditional perceptions.<sup>88</sup>

Women are estimated to be almost half of the global population, but only have 24.3% of parliamentary positions globally.<sup>89</sup> To eliminate this gap is hard and heavily depending on international agreements. These agreements should give competency to women. Some training programs prepare women for political work. It might also develop their political skills. Also, building platforms and networks for women might be helpful. Consistency is key for every skill about life, so, consistent and methodical trainings for female candidates show better result than offering just standing alone during the electoral processes. Leadership skills give women to opportunity to influence people, as well as, if a women newly elected, she can have governance, network skills. International agreements are made by international level, therefore, governments should support women in all political processes. State funding is a sufficient tool to promote women's participation in political parties. With a state fund, women can give seminars, training events and have lobby to obtain more experience to compete with male opponents. Governments

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<sup>88</sup> Ulusoy, D. Ç. (2013). A Comparative Study of the Freedom of Expression in Turkey and EU. Turkish Yearbook of International Relations, 44.

<sup>89</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union database. Available on: <http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm> (12.02.2019).

should establish proportional representation electoral systems. In that kind of proportional representation system, the electoral processes are designed for holding certain amount of seats in any parliament. Traditional perceptions are mentioned many times in this thesis. Men in the parliament do not desire too many women in the parliament. In order to eliminate that issue and increase political party support for women, party meetings should be taken place at friendly places and times whenever women can attend. For women who have child should be given financial support for caring her family. Women also have to deal with sexist language. In order to prevent it that should be a punishment for sexist languages or practices. That can be supplied by making gender sensitive training programs. In that sense, violence against women in politics might be reduced. Women should not be afraid of violence in politics, therefore, legal efforts should be supported to eliminate violence against women. Establishing an emergency telephone system for women candidates, voters, as well as MPs to call if they are threatened, so police response to calls in order to prevent some kind of dangers.

As a fundamental right, the right to freedom of expression is inevitably amongst the most violated rights. If the women basis right to freedom of expression is examined, it can be also said that a woman's right to freedom of expression is inevitably amongst the most violated rights. In this thesis, the women's right to participate in elections and right to freedom of expression are given together, because, especially in the Comparison part, it is indicated that if the women's right to freedom of expression is given equally with men, then women shall enjoy the right to participate in election more effectively. The parties, which are mostly ruled and controlled by men, might be reluctant to selecting women as candidates. In order to change that reluctance, men's traditional perceptions should be aimed to change. The best way of course, doing it with legally binding implementations. But when doing that, men's rights also must not be violated.

The other way, as mentioned before, is to use social media platforms effectively. Also, it is mentioned that about traditional perceptions, political parties' law should cover such provisions which aim to enchancing women's right to participate in elections. Today, the female population across the world is equal to the male population. But why do changes in the context of human rights always appear? Women's right to participate in elections and freedom of expression are different across the globe. The impact of international actors was discussed. Compared selected the constitution of the country, it said the following about the implementation of the rights of women in Estonia, Turkey and women's participation in elections is not a big difference between Iran and freedom of expression rights. Basically, all the Constitutions (Estonia, Turkey and Iran



Constitution) allow the use and benefit of the citizens to vote on free speech. In fact, not a big difference between secular Turkey and Iran Islamic observed, would ensure the country's constitution three selected women's rights, then there may be other factors, such as traditional perceptions. As mentioned earlier, perhaps the constitution of Islamic Iran does not restrict women's rights, but the perceptions of men towards women may be blocking women's rights. The same can be said for Turkey issue. The world population is increasing day by day. As a result, unfortunately, people can abuse the right to freedom of expression as a means of expression. In such a case, governments may restrict the right to freedom of expression of some people, but such restrictions are justified.

In terms of women's rights, governments should not use this power to abuse women's rights. Unfortunately, such abuses can be seen in politics. In order to prevent such fun, the separation of powers is absolutely perfect. In case of separation of powers, governments cannot interfere with the decision of the judiciary. For this reason, governments cannot abuse women's rights to protect their own role of governance problems. It is difficult for women to join both non-governmental organizations and political parties and to participate in political processes to represent their social problems. Non-governmental organizations that women participate in are usually engaged in voluntary aid activities. Women's work in social welfare associations is parallel to their role in their homes. In addition to these activities, women should seek ways of political empowerment and turn to political organizations. Political life in the world is determined by men; The rules of the game, good-bad definitions, life values and habits were created within the framework of these findings. In order to be successful in the political race, women should do it like men, work day and night and compete on equal terms with men.

That should be underlined that in Estonia, Turkey and Iran, the women's right are respected if a comparison would be done 100 years ago. It cannot be said that there is no women's rights, however, lack of implementation of women rights law and international covenants properly can be given as an example. It has not been, and is never going to be, easy to protect human rights, especially the world population like that it is difficult to ensure that. There will always be violation of human rights, in this master thesis's context women's rights, it cannot be stop. Lastly, it must be kept in mind that only law, maybe cannot stop, but confines the problems with implementing sanctions.



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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1. Proportion of seats in parliament held by women.

Country	Proportion	Country	Proportion
Rwanda	0.47	France	0.13
Sweden	0.45	Azerbaijan	0.12
Finland	0.38	Colombia	0.11
Cuba	0.36	Slovenia	0.11
Spain	0.29	Japan	0.09
Australia	0.27	Albania	0.07
Turkmenistan	0.21	Ukraine	0.06
Latvia	0.21	Armenia	0.05
Belarus	0.20	<i>Turkey</i>	0.04
Croatia	0.20	Sri Lanka	0.04
<i>Estonia</i>	0.19	Bahrain	0.04
United Kingdom	0.18	<i>Iran, Islamic Republic</i>	0.04
Lithuania	0.17	Kuwait	0.01
Czech Republic	0.16	Saudi Arabia	0.00
Georgia	0.08	United Arab Emirates	0.00

Source: Women's political leadership participation around the world: An institutional analysis.

### Appendix 2. Proportionate distribution of women candidates in the parliament.

Parliament	% of Women Parliamentary Candidates	% of Women elected into the Parliament	Number of Women Deputies
First Parliament	3.02%	1.66%	4
Second Parliament	1.98%	1.66%	4
Third Parliament	1.99%	1.66%	4
Fourth Parliament	3%	3.6%	9
Fifth Parliament	6.43%	5.6%	14
Six Parliament	7.3%	4.4%	13
Seventh Parliament	9.89%	4.4%	13
Eighth Parliament			8

Source: Ministry of Interior, Election Report, 2009.



**Appendix 3. Domestic and International Voter Gender Distribution published by the Supreme Board of Elections following the 2018 presidential election.**

<b>Domestic and International Voter Gender Distribution</b>					
	<b>WOMEN</b>	<b>WOMEN</b>	<b>MEN</b>	<b>MEN</b>	
	Number	%	Number	%	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>DOMESTIC</b>	28,589,477	50.8	27,733,155	49.2	56,322,632
<b>OUT OF COUNTRY</b>	1,429,198	46.9	1,618,130	53.1	3,047,328
<b>TOTAL</b>	30,018,675		29,351,285		59,369,960

Source: The Supreme Board of Elections.

**Appendix 4. Voter Gender Distribution published by the Supreme Board of Elections following the 2019 local elections.**

<b>Voter Gender Distribution</b>				
<b>WOMEN</b>	<b>WOMEN</b>	<b>MEN</b>	<b>MEN</b>	
<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
28.929.732	50,7	28.128.904	49,3	57.058.636

Source: The Supreme Board of Elections.

