



# Violence against women politicians in Serbia: women in politics at the tripoint of gender, power and political culture

BRIEF REPORT



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# Violence against women politicians in Serbia: women in politics at the tripoint of gender, power and political culture

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# |. Issue of violence against women politicians

Gender-based violence against women politicians is grounded in unequal power relations between women and men. It differs from other forms of violence against women, which tend to remain hidden, as it often takes place in public, whereby the involvement of women in politics is collectively discouraged, as well as their participation in decision-making about important social questions and conditions of life of their female and male fellow citizens. In this way, gender-based violence against women politicians deepens broader social problems of violence against women and inequalities in society.

Violence against women politicians is highly complex as it rests on a trifold basis: gender inequalities (grounded in the unequal power of women and men), political inequalities (inequalities of different political parties and movements) and political culture. Over the past years, political culture in Serbia has been marked by an increasing presence of gender stereotypes, sexism, misogyny and hate speech, which is conducive to the increase in violence against women politicians.

It is highly important to research and follow violence against women politicians so as to indicate its detrimental effect not only on individual women and their wellbeing, but also the overall motivation of women to get actively involved in political life. Based on such knowledge, it is necessary to design measures to ensure that such violence is prevented, combated and sanctioned.

# II. Forms of violence against women politicians

According to findings of the research carried out in 2020, women politicians in Serbia are exposed to various forms of violence, which can be grouped into three categories: **structural, cultural and direct.**

## 1. Structural violence

*Structural violence* is grounded in social structures featuring inequality, contrary to direct violence, which is most often perceived through some forms of behaviour. It is manifested through unequal chances, limited access to particular resources or posts for individual actors, and is reproduced through long-standing institutions, norms and practices.

- » **Segregation of duties and labour exploitation of women in parties.** The parties from which the female respondents come (some have changed several parties) are highly centralised. The party male leaders decide on the most important questions, including promotion. There is clear segregation of duties of women and men, manifested in assigning auxiliary, administrative duties to women, while the decision-making positions are most often reserved for men. In addition, women are exploited through excessive volunteer work or tasks considered “female duties” (organising catering, making coffees, taking minutes etc.).
- » **Unequal distribution of posts within political parties and barriers to women’s promotion to higher posts in the party or to government office.** Women often fare worse in the distribution of posts simply because they hold less intraparty power, which is associated with their generally weaker power – due to a weaker economic position, weaker social networking (which is an important form

of capital for political participation), i.e. integration in those social circles and milieux that are perceived by party strongmen as an important resource and enable intraparty promotion. The candidacy and nomination of women for particular posts often take place in narrow circles of male party leaders, which is something women cannot influence, and they are therefore instrumentalised even during the filling of legally envisaged quotas.

- » **Trading in the mandates of women** without their knowledge and participation is another form of structural violence as women do not have influence on the posts they will take, i.e. their legitimate right to perform particular duties is taken away from them in intraparty and interparty haggling processes.
- » **Marginalisation and removal of women from parties.** The experiences of women politicians show that when women demonstrate autonomy and integrity, achieve greater power or reach a position higher than it could be expected based on traditional divisions of roles, they often become marginalised within a party or even removed.

*“They traded in my mandate as they understood that no one strong and big stood behind me.”*

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Former woman MP, National Assembly of Serbia

*“The first shock was the fact that I appeared in the Serbian Assembly. Nothing was expected from me but to sit and be silent. I well remember the time when I was to have my first speech. XX (the party’s president – authors’ note) squandered my time and I cried later. When you’re a woman, you must work much harder... It’s terribly exhausting.”*

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Woman MP

*“I always had a harder time than my male colleagues. I always had to work more, to prove myself. I was imposed a tutor to oversee and check me... I belong to the smallest group of party activists who work a lot for the party. To me, the party was my 24-hour life... When it showed*

*there was no more place for me (she was removed from the party, authors' note), it felt awful... I earned everything I got from the party, I received nothing out of favour."*

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Former woman MP, National Assembly of Serbia

## 2. Cultural violence

*Cultural violence* includes those aspects of culture, symbolic sphere, such as ideology, religion, language, art, science, which can be used to justify and legitimise direct or structural violence. Neither direct nor structural violence can be maintained without cultural norms and values that legitimise them.

There are numerous ways in which cultural violence is committed against women. It is sometimes a part of direct interpersonal, physical violence, manifested through verbal attacks, labelling, denigration and discrediting of women politicians, and sometimes it is manifested through rather generalised discourses and content marked with sexism and misogyny in the media.

- » **The use of gender stereotypes, sexism, misogyny in direct interpersonal violence against women. This type of violence** is most often manifested through the use of pejorative expressions, sexist and misogynist labels, whereby female respondents are classified into categories which, along with gender labels, carry other connotations, such as age, ethnicity, various types of capacities etc. One of the functions of symbolic violence is to show to a woman politician that she, with her actions, attitudes and patterns of behaviour, does not conform to the role that a woman should play. The aim is to denigrate a woman and instil in her the feeling of inadequacy and lower value.

*"A 'bitch', 'tart', 'hooker'... many labels relating to sexual life, and that I was 'insufficiently fucked'. There were placards across XX (the name of the city, authors' note) indicating I was immoral. There were no comments that I was stupid and that I was there only for the*

*sake of the quota, but I know that many female colleagues are exposed to that. And that I am an Ustasha.”*

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Former woman MP, National Assembly of Serbia

*“There are two labels reserved for women. One is, pardon the expression, a hooker, prostitute, tart. I was not labelled in such way because I’m an older woman. This refers to younger women, aged up to around 50. After the age of 50, you are an old, stupid woman, whore... desiring shagging. As for stupidity, the same can be said for a man, but no one would say to a man that he is a turkey, while they say the same thing to a woman with pleasure.”*

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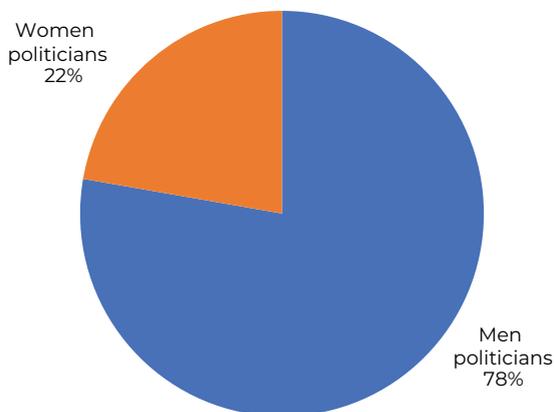
Former woman MP, National Assembly of Serbia

» **Spreading the culture of sexism and misogyny, reproduction of violent, political discourse in the media.**

The media analysis carried out within the present research shows that women politicians are marginalised compared to men politicians. Women are less present in the media, and women politicians at the provincial and local levels are completely invisible. The media content is replete with sexism, misogyny, hate speech. The media follow the attitudes and vocabulary of the key male politicians in the country, and base on them their reporting on women politicians.

- » **By accepting subordinate roles, many women politicians contribute to cultural violence against themselves.** The public appearances of women politicians are marked by the lack of autonomy and integrity. They often reproduce the political agendas of their male leaders, are subordinate to their male colleagues even when they are not hierarchically subordinate to them in their party or in government office.

Gender representation in articles



### 3. Direct violence

Women politicians experience various forms of direct violence: psychological violence, sexual harassment, sometimes even physical violence, and there were also serious forms of stalking. Such violence sometimes takes place in direct contact, and sometimes through the digital media or other intermediaries.

**Psychological violence** experienced by female respondents is manifested in several ways: as intimidation, denigration, verbal insults, threats, blackmailing and discrediting in public. Each form of psychological violence is aimed at diminishing the power of female respondents, their self-confidence and integrity, and at discrediting them in public, whereby not only is the women's reputation diminished, but also their credibility and legitimacy. Such violence is used to attack women from opposing parties in order to discredit them as political opponents and their parties, as well as to attack women from the same party who are seen as competition or threat to entrenched party practices and relations.

*“There were unpleasant situations of verbal violence. You could clearly see when someone is angry with you and your male colleague, and how he shouts differently and expresses his anger towards a woman and towards a man. This is the experience of women politicians, it is what they experienced at different meetings. I can divide verbal violence into three types.*

*Shouting, which is very uncouth. Denigration, which is the most prevalent; and ignorance, which comes at the third place. These are the jobs you can do as a woman, and these are the jobs for men because they know how to tackle them.”*

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Former woman MP, Assembly of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina

**Sexual harassment** involves various forms of undesired, verbal, non-verbal or physical behaviour of sexual nature, aimed at violating the dignity of a woman and creating a threatening, inimical and degrading atmosphere. It is often highly tolerated and is part of everyday treatment of women.

*“I experienced verbal violence with messages with sexual content from high-level politicians from other parties.... I was on an official trip and a male colleague knocked on the door of my hotel room, holding a bottle of wine and two glasses... I almost got into a physical fight with a male colleague from another party who began to grab me in the middle of the corridor at the entrance into the Assembly. It was more awful when the male colleague knocked on the door of my hotel room. I could somehow handle the male colleague in the Assembly – everyone is in one’s own department, you don’t mind it so much. But the male colleague who knocked became a very important person, I didn’t know how to handle the situation. I had to solve some things with him and I was messaging him. It all stopped with an unpleasant message with sexual content.”*

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Woman MP

**Physical violence** against women politicians is relatively rare, but is not absent. The experiences of women politicians from the research concern conflicts with some institutions’ security officers who block entrance or passage, throwing of objects or witnessing physical conflicts of male members of opposing parties in a vehement atmosphere of a pre-election campaign.

*“...A male colleague physically assaulted me once. At the pinnacle or at the beginning of the end. He threw an object at me, in my office. I was scared because I had never been exposed to physical violence before that. I first felt fear, and it paralysed me. Later, I continued to feel unease in his presence, although the same situation was never repeated. Until you expe-*

*rience something personally, you can't understand other persons in such situations. He kept apologising to me later, justifying himself by saying that I drove him mad."*

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Former woman MP, Assembly of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina

**Stalking** is the gravest form of violence. It lasts continuously over a longer period and various forms of psychological torture are used, through different channels, from direct verbal and almost physical aggression ("they surrounded me"), use of means of cultural violence, with content representing extreme examples of misogyny and sexism, to hate speech. Stalking is sometimes hidden from public and it is sometimes open, with a significant role of the media. When it takes place stealthily, it reminds of spying with the aim to make the victim feel unsafe.

*"There was a situation with XX (the male leader of another party, authors' note) and all XX (members of that party, authors' note) in the Assembly. It lasted continuously for two years – in the Assembly hall, in corridors, foyers, toilets. I was stalked by a group of people led by XX. They were offending me in the worst possible way. They would even rub my shoulder and follow me to the toilet. At one moment, they surrounded me in the Assembly hall, took documents from my table and wrote on them... At one moment, there was an open call to violence. My whole family was involved and labelled as 'a well-known Ustasha family'... Those were all people whose words carry weight and I did not know whether a madman would attack in the street my father as "a well-known Ustasha", because XX used those words. I got afraid in terms of safety, but I was not afraid to such an extent that I could not talk about it... There were several unknown people who were writing to me letters that were very hard to read. For instance, for some time, I was receiving the same letter every day. Then someone molested me on the phone for two–three years. He would call me ten times within an hour. He once sent the message: 'I'm in front.'"*

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Former woman MP, National Assembly of Serbia

## **Digital violence and the media as a means of direct violence.**

Digital violence represents, in fact, psychological violence or stalking which take place through the digital media, social networks, web portals. Some media are the

means of stalking of some women politicians. In this context, female respondents most often mention the tabloid media, some media whose editorial policy is under strong control of parties, and different web portals controlled by some political circles. Social networks are also an important channel of communication used for the purpose of stalking and physical abuse of some female respondents.

*“If stalking is considered stalking on social networks by bots, which implies organised stalking, then yes... depending on the phase of my political activity. When I was in XX (the first party where she began her political career, authors’ note)..., I was stalked by the bots of XX (the opposing party, authors’ note). When I left XX (the first party where she began her political career, authors’ note), I was stalked by the bots of that party because this undermined the concept, i.e. the financial plans at that moment, and the plan of the leader of the political organisation was revealed to the smallest detail, which is when he directed those bots at me. At the moment when we refused to acquiesce in some phase of organisation of XX (a new political formation, authors’ note), I was stalked by bots from XX (the party that participated in the negotiations on the new formation, authors’ note). Depending on when particular things were taking place, I had different experiences with bots on social networks.”*

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Former woman MP, National Assembly of Serbia

## **Who are the perpetrators of violence?**

The perpetrators are very diverse. They can be male party colleagues, those superior in party structures or at government office, male party leaders, political opponents, persons from other areas of public activity, such as editors and journalists, who use the media as a means of violence against concrete women politicians. Perpetrators are sometimes individuals, and sometimes groups, or even political parties.

*“I cannot single out anyone concrete (as a perpetrator, in the period when she was exposed to relentless media attacks, authors’ note), but it was the entire XX party. I’m also sure that all those people do know that what they say about me is false, but they are requested in the party to do so and they’re just doing it. They even told me that in per-*

*son... They do not have a great political experience, they were simply told to do so, and they're just listening."*

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Former councilwoman in the City Assembly

Many media outlets are instrumentalised by politicians, which is shown in the media analysis of several cases – it is clearly seen that the media change their attitude towards a concrete woman politician in accordance with the change of attitude of high-ranking male political leaders. Male and female citizens also get involved in violence against women politicians through their comments in the media, on web portals or social networks. The perpetrators are most often men, in different roles, but it also often happens that women perpetrate violence as well.

# III. Protection and struggle against violence against women politicians

## 1. Institutional protection mechanisms

Protection arises from obligations that Serbia assumed by ratifying the key international conventions and other legal instruments and policies, including:

- » ***Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) – General Recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women*** – The Fourth periodic report was submitted in 2017.
- » ***Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence*** (Istanbul Convention). Particularly important is Article 5, which reads that “parties shall refrain from engaging in any act of violence against women and ensure that State authorities, officials, agents, institutions and other actors acting on behalf of the State act in conformity with this obligation”. The first report under the Convention was submitted in 2018.
- » ***Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*** – the national report was submitted in 2019, on the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration.
- » ***UN Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security***, which improves the protection of women against violence in conditions of conflicts and encourages their participation in political decision-making and peace processes – the second national action plan for its implementation expired in 2020.

However, the legal framework and policies do not provide the basis for adequate protection from violence against women politicians as a specific group. As we have seen, violence can take very different forms, which are not always sufficiently recognised in legal norms.

**The umbrella legal framework** on the prohibition of discrimination and introduction of gender equality is enshrined in the Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination<sup>1</sup> and the Law on Gender Equality<sup>2</sup>, but both Laws must be improved (replaced) and mutually harmonised, as emphasised for years by the domestic professional public and women's organisations, and as recommended by both the CEDAW Committee and GREVIO.

As suggested by its name, **the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence** pertains exclusively to partner and domestic violence, while the **Criminal Code** covers various forms of gender-based violence, but is still not fully aligned with the Istanbul Convention. There are no special legal norms to protect against gender-based violence those women who discharge various public duties, such as women politicians, women journalists, women experts, women scientists. Such protection is not recognized in gender equality policies either. Moreover, at the time of preparation of this Report, the **National Gender Equality Strategy** expired and the new one has not been adopted, whereas we have been waiting for the **Strategy for the Prevention and Combating of Gender-Based Violence** for five years already.

Based on the experiences of women politicians, it can be concluded that the existing protection mechanisms are inadequate – the institutional protection is inadequate either because laws and regulations do not allow for clear identification of those forms of violence which are not physical and sexual, either because of poor application of regulations which already provide some kind of protection.

There are no **intraparty mechanisms of protection** against gender-based violence. As in other cases, what happens with someone's complaint or lawsuit depends on the

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1 *RS Official Gazette*, No 22/2009.

2 *RS Official Gazette*, No 104/2009.

decision of a party leader or, in the best case, the top management. The political parties of female respondents do not have specific gender equality policies or these policies are adopted only formally, without being effectively implemented, at least in the domain of violence against women.

There are no **mechanisms of protection against gender-based violence in the National Assembly or in the provincial and local assemblies**. The assemblies' rules of procedure that could provide basic protection are not adequately applied. For instance, the Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly of Serbia define how MPs should behave towards each other, but various forms of verbal violence still take place in the Assembly. As emphasised by several female respondents, whether the Rules of Procedure are applied depends on the person presiding over sessions. As in the case of party reaction, this opens room for voluntaristic reaction of persons who, according to the word of the law, must safeguard the institutional procedures of the highest legislative body in the country.

Female respondents shared different experiences concerning the reporting of violence to **the police and prosecutor's office**, the institution of civil lawsuits, and the work of courts. They gave up in several instances, sometimes even following the advice of lawyers, who judged that chances for success were small as witnesses gave up. A female respondent who was exposed to years-long stalking by a male leader of the opposing party and his associates pressed criminal charges and filed a civil lawsuit – both procedures are still underway. She pointed out that the procedures are slow in cases when the accused persons are MPs because they enjoy parliamentary immunity.

On several occasions, female respondents sought the aid of **independent mechanisms**, but in vain. According to them, the representatives of these bodies indicated they did not have efficient instruments at their disposal, particularly when violence takes place through the media.

## 2. Solidarity and support mechanisms

Solidarity mechanisms are weak. When it comes to violence perpetrated against a woman politician by members of opposing political parties, protection can be found in one's own party. However, if the party even decides to protect its female member who was exposed to violence, this does not mean that the party will not commit the same or even worse violence against a woman from another party or even its own party if she shows disloyalty towards the management. It is therefore hard to talk about party protection as a reliable mechanism against violence and discrimination of women in politics.

In several cases, female respondents sought protection or engaged themselves to provide protection to their women colleagues through the **Women's Parliamentary Network**, but a number of problems appeared there as well, caused by the insufficiently defined decision-making procedures and conflicts between the principles of gender solidarity and party loyalty.

*“As regards the Women's Parliamentary Network, I must say that women have dual loyalty – one to their party, the other to their gender. When the party and gender loyalties clash, gender loyalty always loses. Party loyalty is always dominant – I have seen in the faces of some women that they feel bad about not reacting, but they did not dare to react because XX (the party's leader, authors' note) has the final say in the XX party... So... they did not dare.”*

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Former woman MP, National Assembly of Serbia

## 3. Self-protection mechanisms

Female respondents either try to fight violence on their own or they share information about it with persons closest to them, their family members, friends or closest male and female colleagues. Such strategies are often unsuccessful and lead to a number of undesired consequences. Some women politicians who are exposed to violence

withdraw, have emotional problems and are afraid about their family members. Others, however, become more belligerent and ready to conflict openly with perpetrators, not accepting the role of victims.

*“I didn’t have qualms about what I was saying; on the contrary, all my attitudes were strengthened. Of course, it didn’t feel pleasant, particularly as at one point it turned into an open call to violence.”*

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Former woman MP, National Assembly of Serbia

*“We entered the hall and they (security officers of a local assembly, authors’ note) pushed me a bit and stood in front of us. It did not go further than pushing. To tell you the truth, I somehow hoped it would turn into something more than pushing. I was ready. Then I understood how much anger I had in me, accumulated due to years-long violence.”*

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Former councilwoman in the City Assembly

*“In my case it was related to the personality structure. For others, such exposure to media insults was too much, and they often met the demands placed before them. In my case, however, this encouraged me even more to fight and resist. Had they not ‘pestered’ me through that portal, I would not have written an article for XX (a newspaper, authors’ note), which in fact gave me wider popularity. I practically used XX (a newspaper, authors’ note) as a defence mechanism or to vent myself. The more XX (members of a party, authors’ note) attack you, the better you do your job.”*

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Former councilwoman in the City Assembly

However, violence in the political sphere is so prevalent that even in the gravest cases of violence, when it lasts long, there is “getting used” to violence, the “normalisation” of violence, because female respondents stop perceiving elements of such violence and it also stops producing the desired consequences. Unfortunately, such “normalisation” of violence is not conducive to building the mechanisms to combat and pre-

vent violence, although it helps the persons exposed to it to endure without further victimisation and traumatisation.

*“A great problem is the normalisation of such coarseness and rudeness, not only in the Assembly, but in entire society. When it comes to politics, it is considered completely normal that you are so much exposed to attacks and criticism. Not only the criticism of what you’re doing, but overall criticism – of your appearance, your family etc.”*

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Former councilwoman in the City Assembly

#### 4. Need for solutions

*“She (a woman in politics, authors’ note) is looked at as if she was trying to take away from them a part of power. Because power lies in politics.”*

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Former woman MP, National Assembly of Serbia

*“I believe that all this is grounded in some men’s fear of strong, influential women. The fear that we, women, will take away from them those positions of power. As time goes by, it seems to me that women are better capable of tackling political life than men.”*

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Former councilwoman in the City Assembly

*“This is the attitude about women in general. Here, women in politics are seen as an embellishment, a silent plant... A woman is not allowed to be independent, authentic – this is not forgiven in politics.”*

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Former woman MP, National Assembly of Serbia

Female respondents share a general impression that violence against women politicians has been on an increase in the past years. They associate it with the increased participation of women in politics and indications of gender redistribution of power in the sphere of political decision-making. Despite the increased number of women in the legislative and executive bodies, the candidacy and promotion mechanisms have not fundamentally changed, i.e. they remained centralised, authoritarian, clientelistic and nepotistic. Some female respondents with very long political careers state that despite the increase in the number of women in politics, the situation has not changed – women do not get the key political positions and even if they do obtain them, they implement the decisions made by political leaders.

*“I believe the democratisation of society is the key thing because you can’t solve it with any rules of procedure. There simply has to be a democratic culture of expression and behaviour, the culture of confronting attitudes, which is perceived peacefully and where you fight with arguments and not with insults, lies, falsehoods and denigration. This is the essence. Our society is deeply undemocratic.”*

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Former woman MP, National Assembly of Serbia

*“Public discourse is utterly vulgarized, everything is allowed, everything is made crude. Everyone can address anyone in the most banal way. A line must be drawn and a restart done. There must be the will of the state to grapple with such form of violence.”*

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Former woman MP, Assembly of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina

*“I think the lack of political culture in Serbia is the cause of all forms of violence, which is inflicted primarily on those male and female individuals who are perceived as weaker. The general atmosphere of a vehement struggle for the word and public space, which reflects the absence of the freedom of the media and the possibility to say anything, anywhere and with a public outreach, led the assembly hall to a boiling point.”*

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Former woman MP, Assembly of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina

**Namely, changes in numbers did not affect changes in gender power relations in politics.** Women holding the highest positions implement the political agendas of male political leaders. They also often reproduce the hegemonic masculine political culture, featuring aggressive discourses, discrediting of political opponents instead of opening the dialogue about important issues, and promoting the political culture of clientelism based on loyalty, instead of cooperation and solidarity, which are often considered a rather female style of political leadership.

## IV. Recommendations

- » **Raising awareness about the obligation of due diligence of government officials and bodies in the prevention of violence against women.** It is necessary to raise awareness of all politicians, particularly those who hold office in the legislative and executive bodies at the local, provincial and national levels, about the due diligence principle, defined by the Istanbul Convention. This means they must not engage in any act of violence against women and must ensure that state authorities, agents, institutions and other actors acting on behalf of the state act in conformity with this principle.
- » **Implementation of the due diligence principle by improving secondary legislation and institutional rules of procedure.** The prevention and sanctioning of violence against women politicians should be regulated either by separate regulations within assemblies' rules of procedure at all levels or as part of the existing rules of procedure.
- » **Prohibition of all forms of gender-based violence against women, including sexism and misogyny, should be part of the Code of Conduct of members of the National Assembly of Serbia.** The current version of the MPs' Code of Conduct does not regulate in an adequate way the prohibition of sexism, misogyny or other forms of gender-based violence against women politicians, including direct forms of violence, such as verbal violence and sexual harassment, and indirect forms of violence, such as digital violence and use of the media for violent campaigns against women politicians. It is highly necessary to precisely and adequately define the legal norms in this regard and to effectively apply them. At the same time, the language of the Code should be made gender-sensitive.

- » **Independent monitoring and reporting on violence against women politicians should be supported, particularly the oversight of civil society organisations over legislative and executive bodies at all levels.** For the time being, there are only several initiatives of regular monitoring of Assembly's work, at the national level, but these initiatives do not focus on violence against women politicians. It would be necessary to ensure that international donors support regular monitoring of gender-based violence against women politicians, which could be carried out by civil society feminist and women's civil society organisations or their networks. For the time being, monitoring and reacting depend on the capacities of these organisations and take place mainly occasionally, focusing on more serious cases of violence against women politicians.
- » **The journalists' Code of Ethics should also contain specific provisions on gender-based violence, including specific violence against women politicians and women holding public office.** The current version of the Code does not contain the provisions that would be an adequate basis for improving the standards on reporting on women holding public office or women politicians, although not even the improvement of the Code would change the situation in the media, which not even now adhere to standards defined by the Code. In addition, the language of the Code should be made gender-sensitive.
- » **The Press Council and the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media should have a more responsible role in sanctioning of the media that contribute to gender-based violence against women and women politicians in particular.** This should also include the media content that directly attacks women politicians, and the content that generally promotes sexism and misogyny, contributing to the overall increase in violence against women.

*This brief Report was compiled based on the research into violence against women politicians carried out by a group of women experts in late 2020 with the support of the OSCE Mission to Serbia and the ODIHR. The aim of the research was to gain insight into the most important patterns and characteristics of violence against women in politics and examine the degree to which the media contribute to such violence. The research was carried out through two components: qualitative exploratory research of experiences of nine women from seven different political parties, who held or hold office in the assemblies of municipalities or cities, the provincial parliament or the National Assembly of Serbia, and the research of media content about women holding political office.*

