

„How to judge the women quota? A real chance to make a good career or just a kick and easy landing?“

At first sight the women quota do not look like a complicated problem. Should women have a quota or not? But in fact it is a more complicated problem. A first reaction can be: a person, who is adding value does not need that kind of support. Most opponents of the measures agree with the latter.

The Nobel Prize Laureate, Dr. Christiane Nüsslein-Volhard argued that, “the policy exerts such pressure on the institutions, that so and so much percent of the women will be appointed, that otherwise the funds will be cancelled”. She wished that the percentage of those women would grow in a natural way. Unfortunately there is more to it. The following arguments can be used to explain the low(er) participation of women in the highest echelons. In the article “Automatisch nach oben” the following has been discussed.

1) *Women do not make a brilliant career when they have children.* This is a very often used argument and in a way it is also true. But it is not the only reason why women do not or seldom rise in the company's structure. In the first 5 year after their graduation 40 % of the men ascend, while only 24 % of the women progress.

2) *A fixed, legal quota is bad because it is only good for elites.* In fact these quotas will only benefit a handful of women. It could attract other women and break the cliché by showing that they are not that cold-hearted. Another argument is even more important. The ruling class has the tendency to choose someone of their own ranks and those are mostly white, middle-aged men, preferably from the same university.

3) *There are „not enough qualified candidates“.* But then there are more than enough men, who are seated in a Supervisory Boards without adequate experience. Why should women have a qualified experience then?

4) *It has not been proven that companies with many women in leading positions have more success.* Yes, but there are studies who prove that homogeneous teams are less creative. A study from the Harvard University showed that investment bankers produce poorer results when they come from the same university and have a similar curriculum vitae.

5) *The quota promote the wrong women.* Well, yes the quota can help women, but the rest they have to do by themselves. It turns out not to be so black and white as it looks.

6) *Those women are not taken seriously.* Of course those women have to prove themselves and show their qualities. Also for men, background and networking are used as a tool to ascend in their career.

Legal arguments.

Another argument is: What happens, when national regulations conflict with the European regulation? For example The Netherlands failed by trying to stop the EU-women quota in 2013. The parliament in The Hague wanted to have the proposal from the table as soon as possible. But the Netherlands did not get enough support from other national parliaments. Until January 2013 five other countries agreed with the Netherlands. That was not enough to force the Commission to change their proposal. The deadline ended, but the spokeswoman of the Commission announced not to expect critical voices.

The point is that the Netherlands think that the European proposal crosses the national legislation concerning female quota. Dutch law (as of January 1st of 2013) did already regulate the number of women in the Boards of Directors. However, Brussels wants more equality in the Supervisory Boards of listed companies.

Objections

Apart from the Netherlands also the Czechs, Danes, Swedes, British and Polish had their objections. The European Commission received positive reactions from the Germans, French and Portuguese. The European Parliament has already voted on this topic. It has supported a proposal last Wednesday wherein it was called up that by 2020 the multinationals and companies should have at least 40 % of women in the Boards of those concerns. The Parliament voted in favour of this proposal with 459 votes, 148 against and 81 abstinences. The most difficult part has still to come when the proposal returns to the member states for further discussions.

Former Vice-president of the European Commission, Viviane Reding called this resolution as "a historic moment for gender equality in Europe". The Commission states that last year less than 15 percent of the Board members of the biggest European companies was female.

What are the results so far?

While in the Netherlands the amount of women at the top of the business world hardly grows, Great Britain has never seen so many women in their board rooms. The Guardian announced that the amount of female board members grow considerably. At the beginning of 2012 almost 15 percent of the board members at the 100 British listed companies, were women. A year before it was only 12, 5% according to Professional Boards Forum.

According to the Frankfurter Rundschau, in Frankfurt there are already 15 women in the executive boards of 30 companies listed by DAX-index. In 2010 it were only three. In the Netherlands there were only 5% or 9 women on the total of 176 Board members seated in the listed companies. However, what the results were some time ago, the result for example in Germany is not hopeful. Looking at the situation from December 1, 2014 the position of working women at the top of German companies, is not good.

According to "Die Zeit" women quit their job for "personal reasons", which in fact are not personal at all. They are fired. What is the explanation of this phenomenon? Could the legal women quota create negative unintended consequences? Or are the result the opposite? Could the quote be the cause of the failure of female managers? And another question: how did women experience this period at the top?

Very different reactions can be quoted. For example Heiner Thorborg claims that in the next 10 years there will be no female CEO's in DAX. Thomas Sattelberger on the other hand has totally different arguments. According to him these are all highly qualified female managers with very often enough experience with international companies. There is no lack of suitability. So what is the reason then of failing female top managers?

One explanation can be that for example when men and women start to work in a company, as cross-entrants (Quereinsteiger), they need to build up a network and unite allies around him/her. Perhaps that is the reason why women fail more often than men: because men prioritize the strategy of networking.

A second reason can be that according to "Strategy & Study" 35% of the female CEO's in the 2500 biggest listed-companies made a career. That means that women are more often cross-entrants. A third reason: Life at the top is like climbing the Himalayas. With competence and skill one can reach the snow line, but not the top. For the top one needs a network, the right kind of allies and

desire for power. This is why men who are cross-entrants bring their staff with them, giving them influential functions. Women are more lonely fighters. Fourth reason: Women almost always get the difficult and dirty jobs. They are most of the time managers, responsible for personnel matters and therefore have to fire a lot of them.

The German Women's minister Manuela Schwesig and her European colleagues will have a heavy job to do.

