



DOKTORI MŰHELYEKBŐL

# Female quotas for women in academia, or natural but slow change that might take decades?

## Between Scylla and Charybdis

TAKÁCS IZOLDA<sup>1</sup>

*„Hark away great goddess,  
tell us with your true word:  
how could I flee from dreadful Charybdis as well as  
conquering over the Scylla, when he shall come upon  
my people.” (Homer 1986: 194)*

### ABSTRACT

*This present study aims to provide a comprehensive representation of the Hungarian aspects of academic membership for women, based on the contribution of valuable insight from researchers and academics while also listing the possible opportunities and tools that might be of help for raising the proportion of female academics in our country. The study summarizes their voices articulated on the pages of Magyar Tudomány [Hungarian Science].*

**KEYWORDS:** *Women, Academy, Hungarian Science, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, gender, female scientist*

### ABSZTRAKT

**Női kvóta vagy az évtizedeket igénylő, lassú változás  
a női akadémikusok arányában?** – Szkülla és Kharübdisz között

*A jelen tanulmány arra vállalkozik, hogy egy átfogó képet adjon a nők akadémiai tagságával kapcsolatos magyarországi helyzetről, továbbá, hogy felsorolja azokat a lehetőségeket és eszközöket, melyek segítséget jelenthetnek abban, hogy a női akadémikusok aránya emelkedjen hazánkban is. Legfőképpen a témában megszólaló kutatók és akadémikusok 2016-os akadémiai választást követő, Magyar Tudomány hasábjain artikulált vitaindító vélekedéseit foglalja össze.*

**KULCSSZAVAK:** *Nők, Akadémia, Magyar Tudomány, Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, gender, női tudósok*

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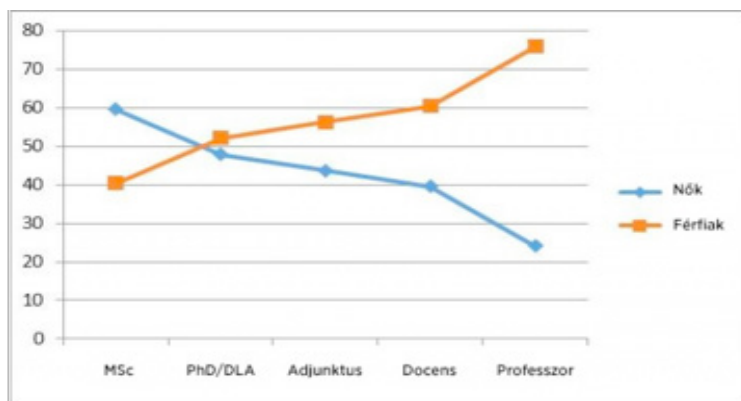
## DOKTORI MŰHELYEKBŐL

### Introduction

When the researcher's attention is brought to the membership of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA), it is first and foremost the unusually high degree of disproportion of the sexes that attracts one's attention. While in 2004 among the regular and correspondent members the percentage of men was 96%, in 2014 it is 93,2%. Therefore - as in other spheres - the ratio of women in leading positions in science and academia, compared to their educational performance is changing at a snail's pace. (Illésné Lukács et al. 2011: 94.; Grébics 2015: 60 quoted by Hadas 2017: 1391), even though today it is obvious that men are not any more competent in fulfilling these roles than women. (Hadas 2017: 1391). We can conclude that among the academics of the MTA the qualification of women has for a long time widely exceeded the requirements of becoming a member. This present study aims to provide a comprehensive representation of the Hungarian aspects of academic membership for women, based on the contribution of valuable insight from researchers and academics while also listing the possible opportunities and tools that might be of help for raising the proportion of female academics in our country.

The indicators chiseled by facts and the graphs give us reason for alarm, not only when we take the model years, but even more if we take a look to the West. In Hungary the ratio of women in higher education represents over 50% of university degree holders and 35% of doctorates. It is an indisputable fact that if this is not only not reflected in Academy membership, but women's membership proportion does not rise to more than a meagre 7%, there are clearly some serious social and other reasons behind the phenomenon.

Chart 1. The rate of women and men at particular stages of the scientific course in Hungary (2014)

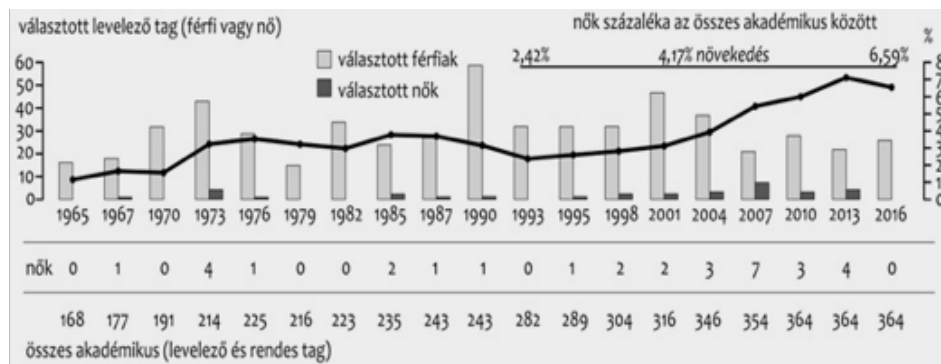


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## DOKTORI MŰHELYEKBŐL

Chart 2. Women in the perspective of the past 50 years at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. In the term of 24 years, since 1993, the ratio of women has grown from 2,42% with a pace of 0,17%/year. The overall number of women grew in this period by 4,17% to the the current 6,6%. (Data by Diána Hay 2016)



Because „[...] it would be hard to debate that to exclude 50% of a country’s brain capacity from the highest recognition, and the accompanying financial acknowledgement as well, would serve the disadvantage of the country’s science and its advancement.” (Somogyi, 2016: 862).<sup>2</sup> Nóra Séllei in her study titled *Professzornők a Debreceni Egyetemen [Female professors at the University of Debrecen]*, in an exceptionally consequent manner proposed a question to consider in this topic, an aspect we need to be prioritise, for reasons she outlines: “...are we so wealthy that we can allow ourselves that the intellectual potential of the women making up more than a half of all the students in our current higher education system can be left unutilized when it comes to their making steps towards an academic career?” (Séllei 2015: 262). We may considering other European countries. The British Royal Society elected a membership 30% of which were women in 2015. The same figure was 26% this year. At the German National Academy, the Leopoldina (Halle), that represents every scientific field, in 2014 and also in 2015, 33% of elected candidates were women. They have a properly functioning and anti-discriminative system. (Somogyi 2016: 862). In the Academy of Sciences of the United States, out of the nine elected Stanford professors, no less than five were women. (Soltész 2016: 1130).

If we were to make evaluations based on this data, the latest academic election in Hungary where 26 men were elected and not a single woman, appears to be a somewhat tragic situation. With this turn of events, even the previous meagre 7% ratio of women decreased. Among others, this was one of the reasons for which,

<sup>2</sup> “By the way, the year 2007 was »the year of women« at the Academy, when 7 women became correspondent members of MTA at once. That time the Chairman of MTA, Szilveszter E. Vizi aimed at raising the number of female academics, and he succeeded in it.” (Lamm 2016).



## DOKTORI MŰHELYEKBŐL

after the elections of 2016, several researchers set their pens to paper and articulated their opinions regarding the distressing events. Predominantly these articles stated the results as “unacceptable”, “impermissible” and „woeful”. The voices articulated on the pages of Magyar Tudomány [Hungarian Science] blamed mainly our academic election system for the situation. Péter Somogyi, a full member of the MTA shared his hypothesis that the Academy’s voting system is the main issue, and that the proportion of representation of the sexes did not develop because Hungarian women would have been less qualified for academic roles than their western counterparts. „At the general meeting we voted in the twenty-six exceptional associate male scholars to be taken in as correspondents, besides external members as well as honorary members, as a contribution to their academic advancement. I am ashamed that no woman was admitted; this is unequivocally discrimination and it needs to be changed. This wailsome fact is that it is a reflection of our electoral system.” (Somogyi 2016: 862).

Most of the academics who made a stand in this matter believe that changing the obsolete voting system might be an adequate way to give women more access to the highest level of the academic hierarchy. The Western academies provide very clear models for it.

Because of the ossified traditions, habits and public opinion driving the logic behind the elections however, it seems that more radical modifications are needed. The unreasonable neglect of qualified and available female post-doctoral researchers will remain just as it is for decades if we just keep waiting to see female academic participation becoming natural instead of taking them into scientific circulation with the help of regulations from above, for example with a quota system based on equal accomplishments. Because „women often say that they made it to the academic field “almost accidentally”, they were lacking the confidence to believe that they could befit such a place” (Caplan, P. J. 1993, quoted by Papp 2017). The main reason for this is that the identities of female scholars and their scientific self-articulation became problematic because of their lack of a solid rooting in the academic ground, their lack of reassuring models and their fragmentation. The vocational self-defining process in this scientific environment, which has been unknown to women because of the strong walls of male dominance within the Academy so far, means extra challenges for them in addition to their achievements. From this perspective, the quota would be an affirmative model and would ease the unnecessary difficulties, but in no way would it affect the accomplishments and merits required for entry.

„To summarize: we can not evade the immediate action the Academy needs to take in order to grow the numbers of its female members in the short-term” – writes Péter Csermely, correspondent member of the Academy (Csermely 2017: 624).



## DOKTORI MŰHELYEKBŐL

### **Informatory fragments to give guidance with some mistaken preconceptions<sup>3</sup>**

– *about the election system of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences*

*„Oh, would an age might once dawn that should melt  
This cold indifferent world, and with new strength  
Confront the outworn lumber of the past...[...]"*

(Imre Madách: *The Tragedy of Man*<sup>4</sup>)

Before I unpack further my commentaries on the quota system, I believe it is important to take a closer look at the extant election system of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences - a system that has been referred to as outdated, even incorrect by some members of the Academy - and I will also outline how the Academy works.

During its long existence, the Academy has become the most important institution of the Hungarian Sciences. István Széchenyi's well-known statement in the Hungarian Parliament on the 3rd of November 1825. – „[...] and if an institution shall come forth to unfold the Hungarian language, helping our fellow countryman in their Hungarian education, I am willing to expend the proceeds of one year of my earnings on that” – began the Academy's own journey, named the Scientist Society at that time which eventually held its first directory meeting in Pozsony (Bratislava) in November 1830.

In February 1831 it was followed by the first general meeting of the organization, based on whose measures the Scientist Society started to function to enrich and nurture Hungarian culture, science and language. There were 6 classes in it – 42 full members and 24 complimentary members. The Hungarian Scientist Society changed its name to Academy in 1840 and - luckily - it started its undiminished advancement in spite of the storms of the Hungarian history of the 19th century.<sup>5</sup>

After looking at this history in retrospect, we can see that almost two hundred years after its founding, the internal process of the member selection shows that there have hardly been any changes in the gender proportions (today the female ratio is below 7% among academics), so we can take cognizance of its uninterrupted operation indeed.<sup>6</sup> The elections are held based on peremptory laws, which are de iure democratic, but are de facto reflections of conserved habits. They do not allow the enforcement of new approaches of shifting demands. „Non omnium, quae a maioribus constituta sunt, ratio reddi potest” (Iul. D. 1, 3, 20 [55 dig.]) – writes the latin. Today this way of thinking is still considered valid, leads public opinion, and consi-

<sup>3</sup> Based on the title of István Széchenyi' book *Világ [World]*

<sup>4</sup> Imre Madách (1977): *Az ember tragédiája [The tragedy of Man]*, Móra Publishing, 104 pp.

<sup>5</sup> Tamás Tarján M.: 3rd of November 1825. | *István Széchenyi offering his earnings of one year for the Scientist Society* [http://www.rubicon.hu/magyar/nyomtathato\\_verzio/1825\\_november\\_3\\_szechenyi\\_istva\\_n\\_felajanlja\\_egy\\_evi\\_jovedelmet\\_a\\_tudos\\_tarsasag\\_szamara/](http://www.rubicon.hu/magyar/nyomtathato_verzio/1825_november_3_szechenyi_istva_n_felajanlja_egy_evi_jovedelmet_a_tudos_tarsasag_szamara/)

<sup>6</sup> Today there are 11 functioning classes, eight out of these are of natural sciences, three are of social sciences.



## DOKTORI MŰHELYEKBŐL

ders certain rules unalterable. Accordingly, it is not necessary to seek any order or system in the cast of the thought of the earlier generations and in the categories they have made, we should simply accept them, good as they are. We tend to forget that every rule based on an old habit was likely made out of an instantaneous necessity, so it was serving a certain need that surfaced at that given moment in time. But as of today these have become outdated and in the new eco-social context don't hold up anymore. „It is well-known that in the course of electing new members in a male-dominated organisation males are naturally chosen again.” (Hargittai 2016: 865). Since the same method of election has been in place for a longer period, and since men have been a majority for all this period, it is easy to think that its operation is only possible as it is, and that this is all well and natural.

„To the question of femininity of whether a female would be called to master and represent higher sciences and arts, as it is stated strongly by the knights of female emancipation, we say no without any hesitation before God and man after learning the times and observing the outstanding facts” (Herczeghy 1883: 121).

„Technology and science has been the territory of men since the XIX. century, because there is an existing preconception about women being naturally unfit for a scientific career, as they are not capable of rational thinking, understanding abstract ideas and unable to use this knowledge for technical purposes” (Mosconi 2001, quoted by Papp 2007).

This assessment was conserved by facts like those that Claudia Wagner and her colleagues studied in their work titled *Women through the glass ceiling: gender asymmetries in Wikipedia*. In the research quoted by the academic Péter Csermely among others, it was proven that “in the Wikipedia articles of women, the negative parts of their biographies are described with more specific phrases than the positive parts. In the biographies of men, it is the other way around (Csermely 2017: 624)<sup>7</sup>. Our assessment of reality is strongly affected by the media and the narratives by which they share information take the place of the whole truth. Along the arguments of the analysis, comparing female and male biographies, it becomes apparent that in

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<sup>7</sup> „A study by Yale University found that university professors working in a committee that evaluated applications – women as well as men – consistently overrated applications that had a man's name on them, compared to those applications which had a women's name. As the researchers conclude – and I can only agree with it – it is not about conscious misogyny, probably not even conscious discrimination, but the resulting effect of the stereotypes that society expects about women's roles. In other words, it is about the cultural subconscious, that is affected by the hidden curricula of our socialization. However, from this aspect, it might be less unambiguous to declare that scientific career and advancement would be solely based on the principles of meritocracy.” (Séllei 2015: 261).



## DOKTORI MŰHELYEKBŐL

the case of women, a biography is more likely to include themes in connection with family, relationships and sexuality, as well as putting any mistakes and failings they made on display more than in the case of men. This is one of the causes of the so-called glass-ceiling effect as understood by the cited authors. (Wagner – Graells-Garri-do – Garcia and Mercer 2016).

This labelling regarding women puts the female scientist figure in the unsolicited position of a priori provisionality. While the man imbues himself with self-sufficient essentiality, the female subject-construct achieves this by resembling others and come to be seen as such in the view of males. Because of this, as in other fields, the fading career of female scientists eventually ends in their disappearing in uneventfulness. Unfortunately the set frames of this present essay don't leave sufficient room to unfold in detail the philosophical and social traditions behind the phenomenon, but mentioning them at least in passing is indispensable among reviewing the facts and data.

The member election of 2016 took place by the rules of procedure that were approved by the 183th general assembly of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The 6th paragraph of the approved document, "Rules of electing academics" contains the fundamental principles of electing academics, its order of procedures and the formal and compendary requirements of the process of giving recommendations, as well as the rules of nominating.<sup>8</sup>

The first paragraph is about the number of the members, giving a taxative list regarding the frame numbers of the full members, the fellow members and the honorary members.

The Principles 1. § states: (1) In the XL-th law of 1994 about the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, paragraph 6 states that the academic members are made up of full and correspondent members (henceforth "regular members" as a summary), and external and honorary members. (2) Academics are elected by the regular members to become members of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (henceforth Academy). (3) The number of the members under the age of 70 can not exceed 200, and the total number of regular members can not exceed 365. (4) During the election of external members it should be taken into consideration that the total number of external members under the age of 70 should stay below 70 persons. (5) The overall number of the electable candidates to become honorary members at the Academy's election meeting should not exceed 11 persons.<sup>9</sup>

On the Academy's 186th general meeting, by the guiding principles established by the Assembly of Academics, the most important aspects of the election of new

<sup>8</sup> [http://mta.hu/data/dokumentumok/hatteranyagok/akademikusvalasztas/2016\\_evi\\_akademikusvalasztas\\_elj\\_szab.pdf](http://mta.hu/data/dokumentumok/hatteranyagok/akademikusvalasztas/2016_evi_akademikusvalasztas_elj_szab.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> [http://mta.hu/data/dokumentumok/hatteranyagok/akademikusvalasztas/2016\\_evi\\_akademikusvalasztas\\_elj\\_szab.pdf](http://mta.hu/data/dokumentumok/hatteranyagok/akademikusvalasztas/2016_evi_akademikusvalasztas_elj_szab.pdf)



## DOKTORI MŰHELYEKBŐL

members are the academic achievement and the traditional academical values like international recognition, school establishing activities, and long-term outstanding professional efficiency.<sup>10</sup> These principles specially define the detailed requirements of achieving different classes and taxatively list the conditions of earning the titles of full, correspondent, external and honorary membership. Based on these, "full membership can be given to a Hungarian citizen who has already been given the correspondent member title and who has achieved significant scientific results after receiving the correspondent status. An external member can be the scientist who habitually lives outside of the borders of Hungary, who is not or not only a Hungarian citizen but identifies himself or herself as Hungarian and masters his or her science at high standards in a constitutive and acknowledged way while also maintains a close relationship with the Hungarian scientific scene. Honorary member can be a foreigner (not Hungarian citizen or dual citizen, as well as Hungarian citizen living in a foreign country) scientist who is practicing his or her expertise in an internationally significant way at high standards so he or she can rightfully expect the special appreciation of the Hungarian academics."<sup>11</sup> The first step in the process of becoming a member of the Academy is a letter of recommendation. In fact „[...]a recommendation of written form of the members of the Academy is needed, and must be handed in before the deadline set by the members of the chairmanship, to the assigned scientific department.

Formal requirements of the recommendation:<sup>12</sup>

„4. § (1) Member candidates (full, correspondent, external and honorary member candidates) can be those who have at least three recommendations according to the detailed rules of the 4. §. (3) paragraph.”<sup>13</sup>

The problem is not to be found in the rules, but in the method of the election process and the traditions guiding it. Namely, the academic classes have a member assigning meeting and only those candidates can get on the joint academic list of candidates who have received more than half of the votes in the classes.<sup>14</sup> „It all depends on the success of the lobbying groups as it always was and always will be

<sup>10</sup> [http://mta.hu/mta\\_hirei/akademikusvalasztas-nyilvanosak-az-akademiai-tagajanlasok-105782](http://mta.hu/mta_hirei/akademikusvalasztas-nyilvanosak-az-akademiai-tagajanlasok-105782)

<sup>11</sup> [http://mta.hu/mta\\_hirei/akademikusvalasztas-nyilvanosak-az-akademiai-tagajanlasok-105782](http://mta.hu/mta_hirei/akademikusvalasztas-nyilvanosak-az-akademiai-tagajanlasok-105782)

<sup>12</sup> [http://mta.hu/data/dokumentumok/hatteranyagok/akademikusvalasztas/2016\\_evi\\_akademikusvalasztas\\_elj\\_szab.pdf](http://mta.hu/data/dokumentumok/hatteranyagok/akademikusvalasztas/2016_evi_akademikusvalasztas_elj_szab.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> [http://mta.hu/data/dokumentumok/hatteranyagok/akademikusvalasztas/2016\\_evi\\_akademikusvalasztas\\_elj\\_szab.pdf](http://mta.hu/data/dokumentumok/hatteranyagok/akademikusvalasztas/2016_evi_akademikusvalasztas_elj_szab.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Altogether only one woman received more than 50% of the votes of the Biology Department, following a campaign run by some members of the department in a manner unworthy of our Academy. Because of the amount of negative votes, she did not make it to the top three candidates despite receiving the same amount of positive votes as the male scientist who got in at the second place. Péter Somogyi (2016): *Alkalmasak-e a nők az Akadémiai tagságra? [Are women fit for being members of the Academy?]* *Hungarian Science* 2016/07/11 <http://www.matud.iif.hu/2016/07/11.htm>





## DOKTORI MŰHELYEKBŐL

this way - these are simply the characteristics wired in human minds and especially males'. As we have to live with it, what should we do to create a system that can one day hopefully give equal an chance to women?" (Somogyi 2016: 862).

Another approach emphasizes another root of this problem that lies even deeper, as currently there is no existing alignment of female candidates (post doctorates) to even choose from for the nomination of the academic membership. „There are very few women at the MTA and among the doctorates of science as well. The holders of these degrees, out of 2689 researchers there are 418 females (15,5%). Even though statistics prove that at the time of receiving the PhD, the ratio of the genders are close to equal.”<sup>15</sup> The reason for this is the fact that „we carry with ourselves the historical heritage of the prejudices from the previous system of the educational and academic progress. Most of our academic women are members of an age group where in certain disciplines at the time of achieving the university degree and then the academical degrees, the ratio of women was very low for a long time, so the amount of the nominable women was low as well. Therefore, it became commonplace that there was a small group to nominate and so only a few were nominated. This might be why it is such an unexpected event for women to receive the nomination, and being elected is experienced as some sort of miracle and despite their outstanding achievements, rejection is usually taken with silent resignation and recession. [...] The practise and the result of the election of 2016 also proved that discrimination among sexes is very prominent in the common conception, and the recognition and acknowledgement of women's academic quality can even be distorted because of that.” (Csépe 2017: 359).

We can assume that the critical evaluation of the election and the reasoning behind the initiative that aims to change it disturb the natural democratic progress as a result of the unchangeable mistakes of previous eras, that this way cannot respond to the challenges of modern ages and prohibits successful economic and social cohesion. „In the view of certain members, an element that needs to be changed during the voting process of some classes is for example the mechanism of using a confidential NO without explanation, replaced with only a YES or the option to leave a blank answer. Explanation: the NO vote without an explanation is one of the remaining traditions from the communist era, and it has no place in the 21st century.” (Somogyi 2016: 862).

The success of the change and the transformation of the academic election system depends on - as I have mentioned above - the fundamental change of attitude that is always a slow and time-consuming process. „[...]If we manage to shift the searching, nominating and electing practices to a better direction, we can generate a significant change in the approaches that evolved during recent decades. The former

<sup>15</sup> [http://mta.hu/mta\\_hirei/megalakult-a-nok-a-kutato-i-eletpalyan-elnoki-bizottsag-107348](http://mta.hu/mta_hirei/megalakult-a-nok-a-kutato-i-eletpalyan-elnoki-bizottsag-107348)



## DOKTORI MŰHELYEKBŐL

one is easier, the latter, because of its nature of being bound to inurement, is significantly harder.” (Csépe 2017: 359).

We should not dismiss the exceptions in the Principles of the election of members in 2016. At first sight it might look like a huge achievement, as it says „Academical classes - in cases of candidates with equal achievements - a. should be aware of the: i. ratio of men and women;”<sup>16</sup> Even though in the light of these facts it might seem like only a formal statement and remains in the shadows of the evolved habits and practices, it still appears democratic.

In other words, only changing some rules or applying new ones can not work because in addition „it requires the change of the whole Hungarian society and the public opinion which would be a long process. Furthermore, if these complex changes magically happened in a day, the results in the membership of female researchers and scientists would become apparent only two-three-four decades later. We can not wait that long.” (Csermely 2017: 624).

In light of this, I personally think that such transformation of the election system without a stronger regulation on the female quota would not be a sufficient condition to change the current absurd situation. Today out of the 760 full, correspondent, external and honorary members of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, only 36 are women (which means 4,73%). Among the 364 regular members of the Academy only 20 full and 4 correspondent members are women (6,59%).<sup>17</sup>

### Female quota versus slow change<sup>18</sup> – *quota pro and contra*

As we have mentioned previously, to facilitate the Academy’s function in a more democratic way, introducing the female quota could mean a possible solution. Miklós Hadas, a doctor of MTA brought up the idea of introducing the quota that applies in case of equal accomplishments, or a form of it that could - in his opinion - be a crucial instrument in creating an Academy that is free of discrimination. „[...] in the case of equal accomplishments - I think it would be worth to consider even applying positive discrimination with women. More than that, I am supporting the gradual implementation of a quota system, and by that I mean considering the different institutional levels and the time factors as well. On the level of academics it is apparent that

<sup>16</sup> [http://mta.hu/data/dokumentumok/hatteranyagok/akademikusvalasztas/2016evi\\_akademikusvalasztas\\_iranyelvek.pdf](http://mta.hu/data/dokumentumok/hatteranyagok/akademikusvalasztas/2016evi_akademikusvalasztas_iranyelvek.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> See the 2nd illustration at the end of the essay.

<sup>18</sup> „This has been like this so far; the 0,17% yearly growth in the ratio of women members during the past 25 years can not be considered fast... By the current mechanisms of electing women, if we could keep the pace of the past 25 years (for which we have no sure), the ratio of women at the Academy would reach 30% only in 2150. But even the proportion of 30% would not reflect the measure with which women assisted to the progress of sciences.” Source: Péter Somogyi (2017): A számok beszélnek [Numbers talk]. Hungarian Science 2017/5. 627–630. <http://www.matud.iif.hu/2017/05/17.htm>



## DOKTORI MŰHELYEKBŐL

applying the mandatory and immediate gender quotas would be impossible. At the same time, beginning to apply the one third gender quota would be a way to start on the level of corporate members and that of various academic committees so much more as this - fortunately - has already been prevailing in some panels in the present.” (Hadas 2016: 1391). Magdolna Hargittai, author of *Nők a tudományban határok nélkül [Women in science without borders]* suggested the same solution (Hargittai 2016). „I believe that among limited frames positive discrimination would be needed and possible. In cases where the classes have to decide between a female and a male candidate with roughly similar accomplishments, the Academy should recommend to support the female candidate as well as to consider the number of female candidates when determining the frame numbers of the classes. With this approach, the autonomy of the classes is left unharmed during electing their candidates, and the principle remains as well that the chairmanship can not change the sequence of the voting of the classes”. (Hargittai 2016: 865).

While some of them (including some doctors and members of the MTA) agree with the statements above and would support the installment of the quota to liberate the discrimination-burdened academical election system, then it would still be insulting - even to women - that the system is not “based on merits, but on a positively discriminative solution.<sup>19</sup> For example, Valéria Csépe, a correspondent member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences says that „it is hard to agree with applying positive discrimination as the solution for this issue. Positive discrimination is discrimination even if it is positive and it serves the desired outcome for a certain group. Positive discrimination is not a relevant criterion from the angle of achievements, it gives advantages to women and gives disadvantages to the men with similar or equal achievements.” (Csépe 2017: 359).

Thus many women make the case for risking the scientific achievements if any kind of quota were to be introduced, and so they are dismissive towards this. „I don't know any academic women who would want the quota system, as we believe that as members of the Academy, we are not representing women but ourselves. This might be one of the reasons why academic women are reluctant to speak on this topic, as they fear to risk the judgement of scientific merits”(Csépe 2017: 359). „[...] We would put those colleagues in an excessively unpleasant situation who were accepted to the Academy on the basis of consolation” (Kamarás; 2016: 866). Also Vanda Lamm (who was elected to be head of department for the next three years by the Department of Economical- and Legal Sciences of the MTA at their closed general

<sup>19</sup> Let there be more female academics, let their proportion grow among post doctorates and among the doctorates of the Academy - these are the highest aims of the newly formed committee led by the academic Vanda Lamm. See more of the uniform viewpoint of the *Nők a Kutatói Életpályán Elnöki Bizottság [Chairmanship of Females in Research Career]* on this subject: [http://mta.hu/mta\\_hirei/megalakult-a-nok-a-kutato-i-eletpalyan-elnoki-bizottsag-107348](http://mta.hu/mta_hirei/megalakult-a-nok-a-kutato-i-eletpalyan-elnoki-bizottsag-107348)



## DOKTORI MŰHELYEKBŐL

meeting in May),<sup>20</sup> a full member of the MTA suggests that a quota is not the right solution, and she is against the use of any instruments that would consider anything else apart from regular scientific achievements. Instead, she propounds that „[...]growing the numbers of female academics would be speeded up primarily by having more women receiving the title of Doctor of MTA since the academics of the future will come out of them. Sadly, it is a widespread practice that one can become a university teacher without achieving the titles of DSc/Doctor of MTA (that applies to men as well), and it goes against striving to earn the academic title” (Lamm 2016: 867).

Despite the facts above, it seems as if the female quota based on equal achievements would still be a good and necessary solution, even if as positive discrimination, it is being severely criticized. It would only on the surface result in unfair advantages for the women. In reality, it would only help those women who already have the adequate scientific achievements to get into the Academy, the ones who have similar merits to their male counterparts which qualify them as fit for such a position.

This way we could ensure a model and lay the foundations to a scientific tradition and experience for the next generation of women. That is, it would fill the role of a catalyst in the courses of equal opportunity and democratization in Hungary. Nota bene, the quota in itself would not be enough even if it could get rid of the weight of all revulsion against it, because in order to be able to operate well, it should be supported with measures that can help with combining family and work<sup>21</sup>, so that Hungarian women shouldn't have to make the choice between these. Only this way is it possible that women could partake of the academic life and research with the comprehensive utilization of their knowledge. „Reintegration after childbirth, forming and maintaining groups independently, engagement in leading roles with the support of corporate executives (+ a women- and family-friendly workplace + positive models of successful leading researcher careers of women) are all crucial elements of taking the research work of women to its rightful place, without which some separate measures will not work magic in themselves.” (Csermely; 2017: 624).

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<sup>20</sup> After one quarter of a century, once again a lawyer became the chairman of the Department of Economics and Law. She is Vanda Lamm. By her election, a female academic has become the chairman of a scientific department after a long time again. Besides her, six new chairmen were elected during the renewal of officers - Attila Zsoldos, Miklós Laczkovich, László Péter Kollár, Ferenc Fülöp, László Bozó and Zoltán Rác. Source: mta.hu: [http://mta.hu/mta\\_hirei/noi-elnok-is-van-a-tudomanyos-osztalyok-uj-vezetoi-kozott-az-akademian-107834](http://mta.hu/mta_hirei/noi-elnok-is-van-a-tudomanyos-osztalyok-uj-vezetoi-kozott-az-akademian-107834)

<sup>21</sup> “In the case of women with children choosing a career on the labour market, it can be problematic to uninterruptedly attend to their roles in the family. In their case the effective integration into society depends on solving the childcare issue in either a private or institutional setting.” (Koncz 2016)



## DOKTORI MŰHELYEKBŐL

### Conclusion

*„Here he wonders about the ‘what if’s [...] The many things that could have been, the chance of a chance as a chance – things that we don’t know – what was Achilles called when he lived among women.” (Joyce 1986: 249)*

Scylla and Charybdis, the horrors chosen in the title of this essay are phenomena of the 12th book of Homer’s *Odyssey*. These immense dangers stood before Odysseus when he reached a sea gate and had to enter it following his long and exhausting travels. On one part of the strait the beast Scylla, on the other one the whirlpool Charybdis threatened him. If he wanted to avoid one of them, he had to navigate closer to the other. In the tale, even though he managed to escape Charybdis (which was the more dangerous) Scylla still took six of his people. The phrase reduced from this tale implies the difficult choice in the case of two bad options, which can not be avoided. We are trying to choose the lesser evil to achieve the higher good.

But what might be the stand on this choice and problem of those who haven’t made it to the Academy yet? What are the obligations of those who have already made it? And how will those decide who have the chance to choose?

On the one side, we have the phantom of the female quota as positive discrimination. On the other side, there is a long and tiresome journey that would mean the slow and time consuming process of changing the public opinion during which many female researchers’ careers might suffer and sink. As Katalin Kamarás, a full member of the MTA wrote in her opinion-shaping article, *Nők az Akadémián [Women at the Academy]* to elect female researchers eligible for nomination can be solved only in the distance of long years by encouraging the younger generations. (Kamarás 2016: 866).

Anyway, in either case there will be severe damage done to the female academic sphere, because „the careers of many highly talented female researchers get stuck, and we will never find out what they might have been capable of. Others, who have extreme bearing capacity, who are enduring and maybe even fortunate in a sense that their surroundings, especially their partner is supportive, accepting and helpful towards them, can fulfill their purposes, although their career often slows down. They earn their academic degree later, and it might never unravel that they could have been just as competent as their male counterparts”. (Csépe 2017: 359).

Generally, it can be seen only afterwards whether the methods chosen to promote decisions and changes were good. As Hegel wrote: „*The owl of Minerva begins its volley only after dusk*”, meaning that in cases of practical matters, wisdom is posterior, because the theories reflecting current situations or problems are usually not capable of solving or refining the processes in the midst of which they come into existence. Anyhow, it is certainly sure that in order to achieve the requiem of male dominance at the Academy, the old voices of a ‘single disk of a barrel organ’, the cliché of the inadequacy of females in scientific careers should be quickly forgotten.



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