Examining gender representation and pathways to equality within the Eurasian Economic Union's regulatory bodies

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Abstract.
This article aims at examining gender representation within the Eurasian Economic Union's regulatory bodies - the Eurasian Economic Commission and the Court of the Eurasian Economic Union (here-and-after - Commission and Court, respectively). While the Eurasian Union (EAEU) encourages economic cooperation among its member states, quite limited study has been performed since 2015 to investigate gender inclusion within its regulatory structures. As a result, the primary goal of this article is to assess the existing state of gender parity across these institutions and make recommendations to attain more balance. The study will look into the Commission and Court's current gender representation, including how many women occupy leadership roles and are members. Furthermore, it will investigate whether there are any existing policies or initiatives to promote gender equality inside the EAEU's regulatory framework. Generally, examining gender representation in the Union's regulatory bodies will help to gain a better picture of the EAEU's commitment to international legal principles.

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Introduction

The gender representation ratio within the Eurasian Economic Union's two regulatory bodies, the Eurasian Economic Commission and the Court of the Eurasian Economic Union reflects a historical influence, yet the current landscape shows signs of change. This shift provides an opportunity for scholars and policymakers to envision a new path for the Union's development. However, this discussion does not aim to address any specific gender-related issues or express any negative sentiments. Its focus is to highlight the current gender balance and its broader economic implications, as well as to propose potential transformations for the Union's future. This article does not intend to critique any gender-related policies but aims to shed light on the social aspects of gender representation within the Union and its impact on the labor market.

Looking back, we can observe that the shared historical past of the EAEU member states, stemming from the former USSR, has not only left a legacy of common infrastructure but also established shared social stereotypes among people. It is evident that, due to historical and political factors, certain gender representation patterns exist within the member states. However, in the current era of globalization, promoting gender diversity is crucial for unlocking new opportunities for the Union's future. This leads us to consider which strategies and policies should be adopted to enhance gender representation within the EAEU.

In the realm of international law, promoting gender representation within international organizations has become increasingly important. Gender representation refers to the proportional participation of women in leadership and decision-making positions. Achieving gender parity, or equal representation of both genders, is recognized as essential for ensuring diverse perspectives, fostering inclusivity, and strengthening the legitimacy and effectiveness of international institutions.

While some research explored gender representation within the Union's regulatory bodies prior to 2015, a comprehensive analysis of the current landscape and potential areas for improvement remains unavailable. Additionally, the existence
of specific policies or initiatives within the EAEU or its member states explicitly aimed at promoting gender equality within its regulatory framework has not been definitively established.

Gender equality, like language, history, culture, and tradition, serves as a cohesive element within communities. This paper offers a new perspective, suggesting that gender equality can emerge as a significant economic advantage for fostering competitiveness within the region. This research analyzes gender dynamics within the EAEU and supports the notion of ‘enhancing gender equality can benefit the entire Union’. It has a potential to enable (1) dynamic societal development, (2) enhanced communication and interaction, (3) access to additional resources, (4) growth in trade and economic ties, and (5) expanded regional market opportunities.

**The Current Landscape of Gender Representation (Existing Policies and Initiatives)**

The Eurasian Economic Union has recognized the importance of women's involvement in socio-economic processes. According to paragraph 1 of article 18 of the Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union, the Commission consists of two main decision-making bodies – the Council of the Commission and the Board of the Commission (here-and-after – Council and Board, respectively). The Council has five members (one per member state), with no female among them. And when it comes to the Board of the Commission the picture does not change much. Because, there is only 1 female who has been given the authority as a board-member. Hence, the rest of the Board (9 members) are males.

During the Eastern Economic Forum 2022, Gohar Barseghyan, the Director of the Eurasian Economic Commission's Department for Integration Development, highlighted this trend. Statistical data indicates a significant presence of women in leadership and employment roles within EAEU countries. For instance, in Belarus, 50% of the employed population are women, while in Russia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, the figures range from 38% to 49%. Additionally, 35% of leadership positions within the Eurasian Economic Commission (here-and-after – Commission) are held by women, while 57% of the
Commission's total workforce are female. In fact, if we take a closer look at the Commission's personnel structure, we will see that there are 25 departments. According to the official website of the Commission only 15% of leading positions are occupied by women.

Another essential body of the Union, established by the Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union - is Eurasian Economic Court (here-and-after - Court). Its primary function lies in ensuring the uniform application of the Treaty and guaranteeing that agreements adopted by member states comply with its provisions. The Court operates with a composition of two judges appointed by each member state, while each judge serves a nine-year term. Currently, the Court includes three female judges, which represents a 30% presence of women within the current ratio.

In addition, the progressive integration agenda of the EAEU is recognizing women's entrepreneurial potential. The freedom of movement of services and labor within the Union, coupled with a focus on labor mobility and social guarantees, is creating opportunities for women across various sectors such as business, education, healthcare, and tourism. Moreover, the Commission is actively studying the best integration practices related to the gender agenda from other international structures, such as ASEAN, MERCOSUR, the Andean Community, and the African Union, to further enhance its approach to gender equality within the region.

According to report “Women in Business and Management: The business case for change” of the Bureau for Employers’ Activities of the International Labour Organization (ILO), it is believed that the gender balance in the top management, as well as in the workforce as a whole, is evident with a percentage ratio of 40 to 60 in any direction. Beneficial effects of gender diversity begin to accrue when women hold 30 percent of senior management and leadership positions.

The EAEU monitors the achievement by member states of Sustainable Development Goals in the Eurasian Economic Union region, one of the main goals is to “ensure gender equality and empower all women and girls”. This goal aims to provide women and girls around the world with equal access to education, health care, decent work and participation in
political and economic decision-making processes, which will contribute to achieving economic sustainability and benefit society and humanity as a whole.


**Exploring the Impact of Gender Imbalance**

A lack of gender balance may result in a narrow variety of opinions and ideas being considered in decision-making processes. As a result, rules and regulations may fail to appropriately address all members' concerns, thereby leading to social and economic inequities. Furthermore, gender imbalance can have an impact on the efficacy of regulatory organizations in dealing with gender-related issues in the Union. This has long-term repercussions for EAEU member states' socioeconomic development, as gender equality is tied to economic sustainability.

Yet, a lack of gender parity may give rise to opinions that decision-making is biased or unfair, which could erode trust in institutions. Consequently, this may impair the regulatory bodies' overall effectiveness and capacity to meet their goals.

Apart from that, women's underrepresentation can reinforce gender norms and stereotypes, which can prevent women from fully engaging in the social and economic spheres. This may unintentionally discriminate or restrict women’s chances of promotion. Moreover, a "groupthink" mentality may result from a lack of gender diversity in decision-making bodies, where participants may be less inclined to question established beliefs or take into account different viewpoints. This may result in a decision-making process that is less robust.

Among the international community, gender equality is recognized as a fundamental principle of human rights. And
international organizations, including the EAEU, are expected to uphold these principles by promoting gender equality in their operations. Failure to do so can tarnish the reputation and weaken its standing in the global arena.

Addressing these biases requires increasing the representation of women in decision-making positions within the EAEU regulatory bodies. This can help ensure that policies and decisions are more reflective of the diverse experiences of all members of society. This can be accomplished by implementing focused initiatives to advance gender parity and raise the proportion of women in senior positions within the EAEU.

Research in the areas of international law and economic integration has highlighted the benefits of having a diverse representation in decision-making processes. For instance, a 2017 study by Elgammal and Selim on the effect of gender diversity on economic growth discovered a correlation between higher rates of economic growth and higher levels of gender diversity in positions of decision-making. Overall, academic literature and research findings consistently support the idea that diverse representation in decision-making is crucial for the success of economic integration efforts. By promoting gender diversity in decision-making bodies, international organizations can enhance their ability to make innovative, inclusive, and effective decisions, ultimately leading to greater economic integration and cooperation among member states.

**Recommendations for Achieving Gender Parity**

For the EAEU member states to take concrete steps towards achieving gender parity within its regulatory bodies, implementation of a complex series of recommendations are vital.

First and the most important step is to implement a blind recruitment and promotion procedures during candidate selection in order to eliminate unconscious gender bias. This may include anonymizing applications or using groups to conduct interviews with balanced gender representation.

Second and equally significant step is to publicly disclose data on the gender composition of EAEU regulatory bodies at all levels. Such transparency will serve as a basis
for understanding the current state of gender representation and will allow effective monitoring. By tracking changes over time, the EAEU can identify areas for improvement and adjust its policies as needed.

Taking into account women’s unpaid care and domestic responsibilities outside of the office, it's important to highlight the third key step - support work-life balance. For instance, by providing childcare services or subsidized child care options, the member states can remove a significant barrier for qualified women seeking participation in leadership and decision-making positions.

**Conclusion**

This gender representation research inside the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) demonstrates that women are significantly underrepresented in its primary regulatory organizations, the Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC) and the Court of the Eurasian Economic Union (CJEU). While the historical context of the member states provides insight into the current situation, the EAEU is at a crossroads. Globalization and international trends emphasize the relevance of gender diversity in economic growth and regional development.

Achieving gender parity within the EAEU's regulatory framework is about more than just fairness; it is about maximizing the Union's potential. A broader range of opinions at the decision-making table can result in more rigorous legislation, better communication with member states, and a stronger worldwide image. According to research, gender equality can help to boost economic growth, innovation, and social development.

As a result, this article urges the EAEU member states to take tangible actions toward achieving gender equality among its regulatory bodies. Implementing the recommendations indicated in this study, such as blind recruiting techniques, open data disclosure, and work-life balance support programs, will be critical to this quest. By adopting gender equality, the Eurasian Union can realize its potential for a more inclusive, inventive, and prosperous future.

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