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## West also wary of women in power

AYSWARIA VENUGOPAL

**New Delhi, Jan. 15:** When it comes to letting women into politics, Indian males are not the only ones wary of the other sex. Europeans, too, have found it tough to share power, says an expert.

Dr Monique Leyenaar, who is part of a European Union committee on leading women in politics in the continent, says a woman who can attract voters 'is still a threat to the male leaders in parties'.

A specialist in gender issues, Leyenaar has just concluded a study on the political systems of the 15 EU member states.

'Neither in Europe nor in India is there an equal balance of power between men and women. There is still under-representation of women. It is only in eight or nine European countries where 30 per cent MPs are women. But in Greece, France and Italy, it is 10 per cent and (in) India it is 8 per cent,' she says.

Leyenaar, who is giving a series of lectures at Jawaharlal Nehru University and Delhi University, says Scandinavian countries have a better record in engaging women in politics.

As for India 'where the women's reservation bill that seeks more seats for them is still struggling to see the light of day' she says the change 'won't happen overnight'.

The Netherlands University lecturer says Europe responded to its 'crisis of representative politics' by bringing women into politics.

While the crisis is about low participation, declining memberships in parties and low voting percentages, new politics is about opening up and bringing women and young people in.

'It is this crisis of representative politics which is a window of opportunity for women,' she says.

'Europe is already implementing quota laws and party quotas,' she says and predicts that in a few years many more countries will implement reservations for women.

As a consultant with the EU, Leyenaar has devised a model for a 'women-friendly' electoral system.

'The system is based on proportional representation, preferential voting and even a limit on the number of years that you can serve as an MP. I think it is healthy and democratic if

politics is treated as a vocation and not a profession. If you place a limit of say 10 years in power, the system will allow others to participate,' she says.

Leyenaar feels the real challenge for India is convincing party leaders about the need to share power with women.

'It is a sign of a modern democracy, you can't have economic progress without social equality,' she says. 'In France, when they implemented the reservation for women, President Jacques Chirac and Prime Minister Jospin took a step together even though they belonged to different parties.'