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EUROPEAN WOMEN'S LOBBY FIRST CONTRIBUTION TO THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN AND MEN WORKING GROUP ON WOMEN AND THE MEDIA

1. How can we define stereotypical roles in media communications and in which way these 'clichés' have their influence on women in their professional as well as private life?

a. General observations:

This question is hard to answer as it raises several other questions. The first relates to the fact that 'media communication' is a very broad category and covers very different types of media – from written media, audiovisual media, online media to advertisement, fiction or entertainment – which function and are regulated in different ways. It is also necessary to make a distinction between public and private broadcasters / media enterprises.

Secondly, different categories of the population (depending on age, social status, economic means, etc.) use different types of media and are influenced by them in very different ways. More fundamentally, the category 'women' does not refer to a homogeneous group as there are different female roles.

Thirdly, different types of 'media communication' convey different types of stereotypes, clichés and gender stereotypes. These stem from and reproduce the gender stereotypes in the lived worlds, so a general point is that sexism and stereotypes need to be addressed not only in relation to the media but also in all walks of life, including in relation to education, employment, etc.

Finally, while sex-based discrimination should be forbidden no matter where it happens, it is difficult to define 'clichés' and 'stereotypes' too rigidly as they are cultural and changing over time. EU texts include notions of 'gender stereotypes', 'includ(ing) or promot(ing) any discrimination based on sex', 'balanced and realistic portrayal of women and men' and 'human dignity' – interpretation of which notions is largely left up to judges. Working on the content of media is delicate as a balance needs to be found between the fundamental right to freedom of speech/the press and the fundamental right to equality between women and men including the protection against sex-based discrimination.

However we can still highlight issues of gender stereotypes both in relation to the media profession and in relation to the content of different types of media:¹

b. Women media professionals:

In relation to the media profession, women are quite present in the profession in general with variations in countries, but they are seriously under-represented in decision-making in this sector as in most others: in 2000, there were 9.3% women in top management positions in the telecommunications industry in the EU and European Economic Area and only 3% of women journalists were in decision-making positions.² The obstacles

¹ See also European Women's Lobby Report, *From Beijing to Brussels, an Unfinished Journey*, 2010, see: http://www.womenlobby.org/SiteResources/data/MediaArchive/policies/beijing/PEKIN15full_EN.pdf

² Media Awareness Network; International Federation of Journalists, *Getting the balance right: gender equality in journalism*, 2009; International Federation of Journalists, *Equality and Quality: Setting Standards for Women in Journalism*, 2001.



women face in the media are similar to those they encounter in the labour market more generally and they are often aggravated by the growing privatisation of the media and the job insecurity in the sector: discrimination at the stage of recruitment, a pay gap averaging 18% in the EU, more precarious conditions of employment and the existence of a glass ceiling.

Among media news professionals, some figures show that women often are valued for their looks, being far more likely to be presenters than reporters, but only while young: whereas up to the age of 34 women represent 79% of presenters, in the 50-64 age-bracket their presence drops to just 7%. Underrepresented as reporters, especially in newspapers, they are more often assigned to local news as well as to social issues, health and education.³

c. Underrepresentation of women in media content:

In relation to the content of news items, women are also relatively invisible in the news media, as shown by the Global Media Monitoring Project 2005,⁴ which highlighted a slight rise in the number of female subjects in the news since 2000 (from 18% to 21%), but the fact remains that the European Union does not score well in relation to women's voices in the media. For example, in Europe women are central to a news story only 10% of the time, a figure that has not changed since 2000 and is half the US rate. This low representation of women goes beyond the news: only 32% of main TV characters are female;⁵ and women athletes only secure between 2-9% of television airtime devoted to sports.⁶ Certain groups of women receive even less attention than the average (migrant women, elderly women, disabled women, lesbian women, etc.).⁷

More worrying than the low coverage of women in mainstream media is that women most qualified for and in need of access are denied it and a number of recent studies have shown that the assumption that gender stereotypes reproduce stereotypes in the lived world does not necessarily hold true. Women make up only 16% of experts and 14% of spokespersons in the news. Furthermore, only 10% of European politicians in the news are female – this is actually below the global average of 12%! In Italy and Portugal, women represent only 2% of politicians in the news. This is not simply because men tend to be in higher positions: a 2003 study of politicians heading their party lists in parliamentary elections in the Netherlands found that the men received twice the coverage of the women.⁸ Recent German research has mirrored this analysis: In 2008, Jutta Röser analysed 23 different media (print newspapers and magazines, TV-news, TV-magazines) over six months focusing on top women in German politics, the economy and sciences.⁹ When this research was started in 2008, Germany had had a woman chancellor, Angela Merkel, for three years. The cabinet was formed of 8 men and 6 women (42.8%). The chancellor always gets the highest media attention, no matter whether female or male. Nonetheless, except for A. Merkel, all women ministers ranked lowest in media coverage. It was only due to the position of chancellor that the average percentage of top women politicians in print and TV news grew from 18% to 20%!

³ Global Media Monitoring Project 2005, p. 63. The Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) exclusively covers news and was done on **one day** in 1995, 2000, 2005 and will come out in summer 2010. Global Media Monitoring Project 2005, *Who makes the news?*, 2005, available at: http://www.whomakesthenews.org/images/stories/website/gmmp_reports/2005/gmmp-report-en-2005.pdf

⁴ Global Media Monitoring Project

⁵ Götz, M., *Girls and Boys and Television: A few reminders for more gender sensitivity in children's TV*, 2008, available at: http://www.br-online.de/jugend/izi/deutsch/forschung/IZI_Guidelines_WEB.pdf

⁶ Media Awareness Network, *Media Portrayals of Girls and Women: Media Coverage of Women and Women's Issues*, 2005, available at: www.media-awareness.ca

⁷ GMMP 2005.

⁸ Wierstra, R., *Borsten, Billen, Balkenende (Breasts, Butts, Balkenende)*, Hilversum, Bureau Beeldvorming en Diversiteit, 2003.

⁹ "Top women in the Media" is part of a larger project which runs until the end of this year (cofunded by ESF), see: www.spitzenfrauenindenmedien.de



The German research also looks at top women in the business sector. Women hold as few as 9-13% top positions but in business news they only make up for 5%. Interestingly enough so called Celebrity Magazines have 17%-19% stories on top women managers and entrepreneurs in word and photo.

d. Stereotyping in the portrayal of women in the media:

Besides lesser coverage, women politicians also suffer from stereotypical portrayals in the media. The Portraying Politics Project¹⁰ highlighted notably how:

- To a large extent television continues to depict public life as a male domain and women are sometimes permitted to speak - but usually on 'their' special subjects(social issues, health etc)
- Marriage and family are still regarded as the norm for people seeking elected office, this is true for both women and men but there are differences in the way this norm is perceived in relation to male and female politicians. The media image of the 'family man' is a reassuring one, suggesting stability and reliability. But there is no equivalent image of the 'family woman'. A man who says he is leaving office to 'spend more time with his family may be portrayed (albeit perhaps cynically) as human and caring - as having 'given up' something important. A woman who gives the same reason may be depicted (perhaps subtly) as a failure - or as having come to terms with her real role in life.
- 'Emotion and Politics': the 'humanisation' of politics and 'tabloidisation' have been observed in the media, but are women and men judged the same when it comes to the display of emotion?
- Framing the Message: Does the choice of images, language and questions frame female and male politicians in ways that accentuate gender differences?

e. Eroticisation/pornification of media and public space:

Over the years, many members of the European Women's Lobby have denounced the stereotypical representation of women in *traditional* and *male dependent* roles such as victim, sexual object, sacrificial wife and mother, as either victim or monster. According to a Belgian study on advertisements for example, women are more than twice as likely to be portrayed in (semi-) nudity as men.¹¹ Many EWL members have denounced the 'pornification of the public space' related to advertisement and to some communication campaigns in different countries whereby men, women and children are exposed to ads for car parts or alcoholic drinks displaying naked women and making it hard to avoid being exposed to discriminating, sexist and cliché portrayals of women. For example, in Denmark, 'women jumping up and down with bare breasts were used as eye candy in governmental campaigns just to catch people's attention on speeding'.¹² The fashion industry (including through magazines) is eroticising increasingly younger models, and adopting the visual images of vulnerability common in pornographic media.¹³ Children Now reports that 38% of the female characters in video games are scantily clad, 23% baring breasts or cleavage, 31% exposing thighs, another 31% exposing stomachs or midribs and 15% baring their behinds.¹⁴

f. Pornography:

Pornography is omnipresent, especially on the internet, and most pornographic production promotes damaging stereotypes in its portrayal of men and women. Studies have shown that many female victims of domestic violence report that their abuser views pornography.¹⁵ As highlighted by the UK-based organisation Eaves:

¹⁰ http://www.portrayingpolitics.net/downloads/PP_EN.pdf

¹¹ Van Hellemont & Van Den Bulk, *L'image des femmes et des hommes dans la publicité en Belgique*, 2009, p. 16.

¹² http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NPoOK7_2tts&feature=related

¹³ Media Awareness Network, *Media and Girls*.

¹⁴ Children Now, *From Sidekick to Superwoman: TV's Feminine Mystique, Report on the 1995 conference on Children and the Media*, 1995, available at: http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/resources/articles/gender_portrayal/sidekick.cfm

¹⁵ Utah Domestic Violence Coalition, 2009, available at: www.udvc.org



Highly sexualised images of young women and girls exist across all media, including mainstream television and public advertising. They are routinely presented as expressions of sexual liberation, rather than exploitation. The commodification of women and girls, which is central to the majority of pornographic material, fuels demand for commercial sex acts, which in turn increases sex trafficking.¹⁶ In this digital age, children may receive their earliest sex 'education' from hardcore pornography, viewed online either accidentally or intentionally. The effects of such early exposure are as yet unknown, but seem unlikely to lead to happy, healthy sex lives for all. Isn't watching porn just harmless fun? Various studies on prolonged consumption of pornography have found a range of sociopathic effects including violence, desensitisation, sexual dysfunction, social exclusion, exploitative behaviour and paedophilia.¹⁷ Convictions for child pornography offences quadrupled between 2002 and 2004 (Home Office, 2005).¹⁸

In 1997, the European Parliament adopted a Resolution calling for the prohibition of all forms of pornography in the media, as well as the advertising of sex tourism, this needs to be followed up.

2. How could women's equal participation in expression and decision-making in and through the media be promoted?

a. Anti-discrimination legislation and gender equality policies for media professionals:

In relation to all forms of inequality and sex-based discrimination in employment in the media sector, media enterprises should be treated as any other employer and implement legislation on gender equality at work including on pay, harassment, care leave and discrimination as well as use various strategies and best practices.

General gender equality policies in the media industry would also contribute to positive results including better care leave options for women and men, care services, gender equality plans, including on equal pay, etc.

b. Positive action for women media professionals:

Public broadcasters in the EU should all have positive action plans or quotas to redress the unequal representation of women and men in decision-making and / or in the profession where necessary. For example, it is the case in Germany, and during the last 20 years, it did help to enlarge the number of female employees and of women in decision-making-positions. Generally today there are 40% women producers and senior producers in public broadcasting in Germany, but the situation is not as good in newspapers and print magazines.

In relation to private industries also, real change could be brought about through legislation with binding quotas, which would require a lot of convincing and campaigning but is not an impossible task as shown by the example of quotas in company boards in Norway and other initiatives in this regard in other countries (Spain, France).

c. Monitoring and evaluation of gender equality performance for media professionals:

The gender gap in the media has to be monitored and criticised much more consistently wherever and whenever it occurs: at TV and radio discussion panels, at the highest levels of decision-making, at EU discussions on media

¹⁶ For discussion of the intersection between prostitution and pornography, refer to 'Prostitution Online' by Donna M. Hughes, published in '[Prostitution, Trafficking and Traumatic Stress](#)' (2003).

¹⁷ E.g. Zillmann, D. (1989). *Effects of Prolonged Consumption of Pornography in Pornography: Research Advances and Policy Considerations*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. Also, Layden, M.A. (1999).

¹⁸ Eaves information sheet – pornography, December 2008.



politics in the European Commission and the Parliament. This critique can come from civil society, from politicians or from media people (women and men) themselves. This would also require the more and gender sensitive media literacy training in schools, which is insufficient in many countries.

EU countries should fund regular consistent and comparable monitoring studies on the gender gap in the media.

d. Support and promotion of feminist or gender-sensitive media initiatives:

In all countries, feminist or gender-sensitive media initiatives exist – radios, magazines, websites, NGOs working specifically on this issue – which promote women's rights and gender equality. However, they need more resources to become more visible and improve their impact. To help changing the media landscape and raising awareness, public authorities including the EU, should support this type of media initiatives that specifically promote women's rights and gender equality.

3. How could balanced and diverse portrayals of women and men in the media be promoted?

a. Implementation of existing legislation:

The first way to ensure a more balanced portrayal of women and men in the media would be to fully implement existing national and EU legislation. In relation to the EU, the *Audiovisual Media Services Directive*¹⁹ prohibits discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, nationality, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation in commercial communications whether linear (broadcast) or non-linear (video-on-demand), and monitor implementation. Progressive interpretation should be made of the requirements not to 'prejudice respect for human dignity' and not to 'encourage behaviour prejudicial to health or safety' (Article 3e), in particular in relation to fighting sexism and images accepting or encouraging violence against women.

b. Promotion of gender-sensitivity among journalists and media audiences:

Concerning news media and documentaries, gender equality should be a compulsory module for trainings and university studies of journalism and communication with the aim that gender-sensitive and gender-balanced reporting is better reporting. Such training should also be part of re-training for all news media professional.

Another solution would be to improve media literacy in education programmes and schools with a strong gender equality perspective, in order to encourage the audience to protest or boycott print media, radio and TV programs and – much more difficult – websites. This could be done through the promotion of NGOs who do this kind of gender equality-focused media literacy activities.

c. Monitoring of media content:

At the European level, there should be European Media Monitoring Group with a specific gender equality branch and expertise including professionals and gender equality experts. This group should work on common European standards for defining degrading images and sexism. It should also be able to receive and consider complaints from the public, grant gender equality awards to media and advertising professionals, study and report on women in the media and carry out regular, systematic monitoring of gender images in media content.

¹⁹ Directive 2007/65/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2007 amending Council Directive 89/552/EEC on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in Member States concerning the pursuit of television broadcasting activities, available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32007L0065:en:NOT>



At the national level, it is necessary to develop safeguards (in the form of ombudspersons or media-watch authorities incorporating gender equality experts) to ensure that industrial codes of conduct exist and that they include a gender equality perspective and are being adhered to, and to ensure that the public can lodge complaints if necessary and that sanctions exist against the promotion of degrading images of women. In relation to advertising, where they do not exist, there should be national board of advertisers, who themselves could ban advertising from publication if deemed sexist.

d. Equal representation of women in news, news programmes and documentaries:

In terms of the equal appearance of women and men as experts in panels etc in television or radio, there should be parity rules for public broadcasters. Public authorities at the regional / national / European level could also support the creation and maintenance of thematic databases of women to be interviewed / used as experts by media professionals, so as to allow them to easily have access to other than 'usual suspects' for their sources, panels and interviews.

4. How could the media be an active partner in the promotion of gender equality?

a. Codes of conduct, best practices and incentives for gender-sensitive reporting:

Here again, we need to make a distinction between different types of 'media'. Public broadcasters should be funded and supported to be at the forefront of actively promoting women's rights and gender equality through strict codes of conduct and compulsory regular evaluation and review of content (e.g. representative coverage of women in decision-making, sports, etc.; gender balance in children's TV characters; advertising...

Privately-owned media would have to be approached differently because profit is their prior interest but this could be done through highlighting the importance of women as audience / consumers. This could also be done through highlighting good examples. Charters of principles for gender equality in the media or equality labels could also be created at country level for media enterprises. Owners and managers of media corporations could also be encouraged to promote codes for gender sensitive media communication, which would be more effective and sustainable than if the topic is promoted by individual journalists.

In relation to advertisement, prizes for non sexist or most sexist ads should be promoted.

b. Promotion of gender-awareness and sensitivity:

Gender equality-centred or feminist media – which are often local, low-scale and not-for-profit – should be supported by public authorities and more links and fora for cooperation created between the media profession and gender equality experts from the nongovernmental and the academic sector should be created.

Training and awareness raising of both media professional and of the audience (media literacy in schools needs to be developed), in order to open people's eyes to inequality between women and men in the media needs to be supported by Member States as it is crucial to make sure that the media industry willingly and increasingly contributes to more equality between women and men.



In relation to news media, professional training as well as codes of good practice and obligation for public broadcasters should include the use of gender sensitive language and the feminisation of language.²⁰

5. What is the current impact and future potential of new media technologies in terms of women and the media?

New media technology has both a negative and a positive impact. The negative impact is that new media are harder to control by public authorities and may expose vulnerable audience to content that might be harmful.²¹ Secondly, women are still not as active as men in ICTs and some groups of women have little access to new technologies. Thirdly there is not much information about the potential negative impact of social networks on young women and girls in terms of peer harassment, body images, spreading of personal data and images, etc.

The impact is nevertheless also positive as it allows for an additional free space for new (feminist or gender sensitive) media.

6. What could be the added value of EU action (for instance awareness raising, studies, statistics ...) given that its scope is limited to supportive actions?

a. EU legislation:

There are some European legislative texts regulating media services in the EU which mention discrimination based on sex, such as the 1998 *Recommendation on the protection of minors and human dignity in audio-visual and information services* (amended in 2006) in the framework of the *Community Programme for a Safer Internet 2005-2008 and the Audiovisual Media Services Directive*.²² This legislation needs to be better known and implemented.

Unlike the Race Directive²³ and the proposal for a new Directive to fight discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation,²⁴ the December 2004 Council Directive implementing the principle of equal treatment between men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services specifically excluded its application to the 'content of media or advertising'.²⁵ There is therefore a need to fill the existing gap in scope between European legislation on racial and on sex-based discrimination and to propose new legislation to ensure equality between women and men in education and media.

Secondly the gender mainstreaming obligation contained in the EU Treaty should also be fully implemented into all European policies and programmes related to the media and information society.

²⁰ Different books exist on the subject for different languages, for example the Czech Ministry of education has recently published a study by respected Czech linguists which also deals with media representations of women.

²¹ See above references on pornography, minors and violence against women.

²² Directive 2007/65/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2007 amending Council Directive 89/552/EEC on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in Member States concerning the pursuit of television broadcasting activities, available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32007L0065:en:NOT>

²³ Council Directive of 29 June 2000, implementing the principle of equal treatment on grounds of racial and ethnic origin.

²⁴ Proposal for a COUNCIL DIRECTIVE on implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation COM (2008) 426.

²⁵ Council Directive 2004/113/EC of 13 December 2004 implementing the principle of equal treatment between men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services, available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2004:373:0037:0043:EN:PDF>



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b. Research:

The EU should also support a European wide compilation of studies on women and the media of the last 10 years and promote new research and studies on the impact of new media technologies and content on women in the media including on the portrayal of women from specific groups such as women with disabilities or ethnic minority women. Any studies or statistics should contain national information and be regularly updated so as to allow for a monitoring of progress and to have an impact at the country level.

c. Experts databases:

The EU could support the creation and maintenance of thematic databases of women experts to be interviewed / used as experts by media professionals.

d. Training:

The EU could develop, fund and encourage training programmes on women's rights, anti-discrimination and gender stereotypes for media professionals to make understood that gender sensitive journalism is better journalism should be supported (see above).

e. Support and promotion of feminist or gender-sensitive media initiatives:

The EU should support media initiatives that specifically promote women's rights and gender equality, feminist initiatives (feminist websites, magazines, monitoring groups, training groups etc.), women's entrepreneurship in the sector and the promotion of women in ICT sector, etc.
