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Combating sexist stereotypes in the media

Report¹
Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men
Rapporteur: Ms Doris STUMP, Switzerland, Socialist Group

Summary

When they are not under-represented or invisible, women are often represented in the media in roles traditionally assigned by society, portrayed as passive and lesser beings, mothers or sexual objects. These sexist stereotypes in the media perpetuate a simplistic, immutable and caricatured image of women and men, legitimising everyday sexism and discriminatory practices and establishing a barrier to gender equality.

Emphasizing the positive role that the media can play in promoting gender equality, the Parliamentary Assembly should invite member states to promote training, education and awareness-raising action and to strengthen women's visibility in the media. It should invite national parliaments to reinforce their legislation on combating sexist stereotypes and penalise sexist offences. Media should favour a more balanced and non-stereotyped representation of women and men in the media and promote the gender equality dimension in their regulatory and self-regulatory authorities and training programmes.

Furthermore, the Assembly should invite the Committee of Ministers to draft a European code of good practice for member states and a handbook for the media on strategies to combat gender stereotypes in the media and incorporate, in the future Council of Europe convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, the fight against gender stereotypes as a means to prevent gender-based violence. Finally, the Assembly could invite the Committee of Ministers to draft a new protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights, establishing gender equality as a fundamental human right.

¹ Reference to Committee : Doc. 11714, Reference 3492 of 3 October 2008.

A. Draft resolution²

1. The Parliamentary Assembly notes and deplores the fact that women are the victims of sexist stereotypes in the media. On the one hand, they are under-represented, if not invisible in the media. On the other hand, the persistence of sexist stereotypes in the media – confining women and men to the roles traditionally assigned by society, often portraying women as passive and lesser beings, mothers or sexual objects – is a barrier to gender equality.
2. The sexist stereotypes conveyed vary from humour and clichés in the traditional media to incitement to gender-based hatred and violence on the Internet. Sexist stereotypes are too frequently trivialised and tolerated under the banner of freedom of expression. Furthermore, these stereotypes are often subtly conveyed by the media which reproduce the attitudes and opinions seen as the norm by societies where gender equality is far from reality. Accordingly, all too often, court action cannot be taken against sexist stereotypes nor can they be penalised by regulatory or self-regulatory authorities, except in the case of the most serious violations of human dignity.
3. Nonetheless, the impact of sexist stereotypes in the media on the formation of public opinion, especially among young people, is disastrous: they perpetuate a simplistic, immutable and caricatured image of women and men, legitimising everyday sexism and discriminatory practices and may facilitate or legitimise the use of gender-based violence. As such, sexist stereotypes are a means of discrimination.
4. The media, a vital constituent of democracy, have a particular responsibility in this field to promote respect for human dignity, the fight against all forms of discrimination and equality between women and men. Sexism, like racism and other forms of discrimination, has no place in the media. The Assembly reasserts its commitment to upholding the principles of human dignity and non-discrimination guaranteed in the European Convention on Human Rights. It further highlights the positive role that the media can play in promoting gender equality, referring in this connection to Recommendation R(84)17 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on equality between women and men in the media.
5. Moreover, education and training are absolutely essential in order to learn how to recognise, be aware of and overcome stereotypes. It is therefore crucial to inform children, from an early age, about combating discrimination and promoting gender equality.
6. The Assembly calls on member states to strengthen training and education activities and to:
 - 6.1. promote and launch awareness-raising campaigns;
 - 6.2. include, in the gender equality legislation, provisions aimed at combating sexist stereotypes;
 - 6.3. promote the introduction and/or effective functioning of regulatory or self-regulatory media authorities to guarantee respect for human dignity, contribute to the fight against discrimination, including gender-based discrimination, and promote not only diversity but also equality between women and men;
 - 6.4. define, in dialogue and consultation with public and private partners in the profession, codes of good practice which proscribe sexist practices and images, promote the balanced presence of women and men in the media and include the gender perspective;
 - 6.5. introduce quotas or other positive measures in the public media together with objectives to improve the participation and representation of women;
 - 6.6. put in place structures to monitor and/or strengthen self-regulatory mechanisms for reporting on stereotyped portrayals, drawing, where such prove effective, on the mechanisms for denouncing sexist advertising;
 - 6.7. promote the introduction of a European system of monitoring and exchange of best practices;
 - 6.8. place an emphasis on programmes aimed at young people to combat the stereotyped images of women and men and the sexist attitudes found in society;

² Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 28 April 2010.

6.9. promote, in schools, the teaching of how to interpret the media and decode sexist stereotypes and learning about gender equality, in line with Recommendation CM/Rec (2007)13 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on gender mainstreaming in education, the Assembly's Resolutions 1557 (2007) on the image of women in advertising and 1669 (2009) on the rights of today's girls – the rights of tomorrow's women.

7. The Assembly furthermore calls on national parliaments to:

7.1. combat sexist stereotypes in the media by adopting legal measures to penalise sexist remarks or insults, incitement to gender-based hatred or violence and defamation of an individual or group of individuals on the ground of their sex;

7.2. enable individual victims of gender-based discrimination but also non-governmental organisations active in the field of gender-based violence and discrimination, to seize the courts or competent regulatory and self-regulatory authorities;

7.3. enable the public prosecution service to take action, *ex officio*, against the most serious sexist offences;

7.4. encourage members of parliament to adopt non-sexist language and not to resort to sexist stereotypes in the course of their parliamentary activities;

7.5. urge members of parliament to demand that female candidates and elected representatives have the same access to the media as their male counterparts.

8. The Assembly calls on member states to encourage measures to promote the visibility and importance of women in the media, including:

8.1. the systematic analysis, both quantitative and qualitative, of the status and role of women in the media;

8.2. the establishment of lists of female experts and consultants who could be called on by the media;

8.3. the creation of competitions and prizes to recompense those media which promote the balanced representation and participation of women and men;

8.4. the setting up of think-tanks focusing on the promotion of equality between women and men, whose activities may be taken into account by media regulation bodies.

9. The Assembly calls on the media to:

9.1. raise journalists' awareness and train them to include the gender equality dimension in journalism and in the media;

9.2. promote the gender equality dimension in regulatory and self-regulatory authorities and, where appropriate, implement the recommendations contained in codes of good practice;

9.3. favour a more balanced representation of women in the media and a non-stereotyped representation of women and men, thereby helping to overcome obstacles to gender equality.

B. Draft recommendation³

1. Referring to its Resolution (2010) on Combating sexist stereotypes in the media, the Parliamentary Assembly deplores the persistence of sexist stereotypes in the media which impedes the achievement of de facto gender equality.
2. The Assembly welcomes the fact that the question of “Combating stereotypes: the role of education and the media” was discussed at the 7th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Equality between women and men in Baku (Azerbaijan) on 24 and 25 May 2010. The Assembly believes that education and the media have a key role in combating sexist stereotypes. At the same time, the Assembly stresses that the promotion of equality between women and men is not limited to upholding the principle of non-discrimination but must involve positive obligations of states to guarantee the right to gender equality.
3. Accordingly, the Assembly invites the Committee of Ministers to:
 - 3.1. draw up, in conjunction with the relevant steering committees:
 - 3.1.1. a European code of good practice for member states to combat sexist stereotypes in the media;
 - 3.1.2. a handbook for the media on strategies to combat gender stereotypes in the media, drawing on existing best practices.
 - 3.2. incorporate, in the future Council of Europe convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, the fight against gender stereotypes as a means of preventing gender-based violence and promoting the effective achievement of equality between women and men;
 - 3.3. alert its subordinate bodies to the need to use non-sexist language, in accordance with Recommendation R(90)4 of the Committee of Ministers on the elimination of sexism from language.
4. Referring to its Recommendation 1798 (2007) on respect for the principle of gender equality in civil law, the Assembly reiterates its invitation to the Committee of Ministers to draft a new protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights, establishing gender equality as a fundamental human right.

³ Draft recommendation adopted unanimously by the committee on 28 April 2010.

C. Explanatory memorandum, by Ms Stump, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. The media are a vital part of democracy. Equality between women and men advocated by the Council of Europe is a democratic requirement. There is no doubt, however, that on television and in the print and electronic media, women are under-represented or victims of sexism. They are described or perceived as weak, vulnerable and dependent, confined to the role of mother, wife or sexual objects; women who succeed in the world of work are depicted as career-minded social climbers with “masculine” qualities.

2. The Parliamentary Assembly criticised the way women are portrayed in advertising in its Resolution 1557 (2007).⁴ Yet women are also absent from or represented in a stereotyped way in the media (radio, television, print and electronic media). Such portrayals entrench women and men in their traditional roles and impede the achievement of equality between women and men. It was for this reason that, together with a number of fellow parliamentarians, I proposed studying this question and reflecting on ways of combating sexist representations in the media.⁵ This report will look at sexist stereotypes found in all media (television, radio, Internet) with the exception of advertising, which was covered by a specific Assembly report in 2005.⁶

3. Stereotypes are a “preconceived, standardised and oversimplified impression of the characteristics which typify a person, situation, etc” (definition given by the Oxford English Dictionary) which may help us understand the world. But at the same time, they give rise to a cliché, a caricature, a generalisation, an immutable image of a group of persons which “more often than not is based on inaccurate, exaggerated and incomplete information, or information derived from a characteristic element often linked to a particular physical or mental attribute”.⁷ Sexist stereotypes have a discriminatory purpose and seek to maintain women and men in the traditional roles conferred upon them by society and, more specifically in the case of women, in an inferior position.

4. When speaking of the fight against sexist stereotypes in the media, reference is often made to journalists’ freedom of expression in order to avoid any action or interaction with the media. And yet, a violation of the dignity of human beings - including that of women - by the routine use of sexist stereotypes is not innocuous. It can, especially in the new media such as the Internet which escape the traditional forms of regulation, go so far as incitement to hatred of and violence against women. The fight against sexist stereotypes should be seen as a part of the fight against discrimination and the promotion of gender equality – all of which are fundamental values of the Council of Europe. Respect for human dignity – and as a corollary, the fight against incitement to hatred or violence [including where such is gender-based] and the elimination of discriminatory practices [including against women] – must take precedence over freedom of expression. Moreover, gender equality must be seen as a key component of freedom of expression, as recalled by the association Article 19 on the occasion of the celebration of the 2010 International Women's Day⁸.

5. The Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men appointed me as rapporteur on 5 December 2008. I suggested that the committee organise a hearing on this subject, which was duly held in Paris on 24 March 2009 and was attended by Dr Luise F. Pusch, linguist and writer (Germany), Lavinia Mohr, Deputy Secretary General and Programme Director of the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) (Canada), Marie-Thérèse Casman, Senior Lecturer, University of Liège (Belgium), Brigitte Grésy, rapporteur of the Committee on the Image of Women in the Media (France) and Pamela Morinière, programme officer for gender equality projects, International/European Federation of Journalists.⁹

⁴ Doc 11286 (Rapporteur: Ms Gülsün Bilgehan, Turkey, Socialist Group).

⁵ See Doc 11714.

⁶ See Resolution 1557 (2007), Recommendation 1799 (2007) and Doc. 11286 on the image of women in advertising (Rapporteur: Ms Gülsün BILGEHAN, Turkey, Socialist Group).

⁷ See the work of Claudine Lienard, “Analyse n°2/2006 : Les stéréotypes sexistes, outils de discriminations des femmes”, Université des femmes de Belgique.

⁸ “International Women's Day: ARTICLE 19 Affirms the Rights of Women with the Right to Free Expression”, Article 19, 8 March 2010.

⁹ See AS/EGA (2009) PV2 add, available on the Assembly website.

6. Sexist stereotypes have been criticised in many international forums.¹⁰ The Council of Europe devoted the 8th meeting of its “Informal Network on Gender Mainstreaming” to “gender mainstreaming in the media”.¹¹ One of the workshops of the next European ministerial conference on equality between women and men, to be held in Baku (Azerbaijan) in May 2010, will be devoted to the theme “Combating stereotypes: the role of education and the media”. The Assembly’s aim in producing this report is to contribute to the Council of Europe’s work and put forward the viewpoint of parliamentarians on this subject.

2. Women invisible or under-represented in the media

7. At the hearing organised by the committee, all the speakers emphasised the under-representation and even invisibility of women in the media.

7.1. In 1995, 2000 and 2005, the World Association for Christian Communication launched the “Global Media Monitoring Project”¹². On 16 February 2005, for one whole day, hundreds of volunteers in 76 countries analysed nearly 13,000 news stories on television and radio and in newspapers (9451 in Europe). These stories included over 25,000 news subjects (persons who were interviewed or whom the news was about). These stories were reported or presented by over 14,000 journalists and radio and television presenters. The results presented by Ms Mohr are eloquent:

- Only 21% of news subjects are female (compared with 17% in 1995). So for every woman who appears in the news, there are four men.
- In stories on politics and the government, only 14% of news subjects are women.
- In economic and business news the figure is only 20%.
- Proportionally, women involved in politics enjoy little media coverage: in Portugal women account for 25% of members of parliament and 2% of politicians in the news; in Italy they are 12% in parliament and 2% in the news. In Sweden, 46% of members of parliament are women, but only 28% of members of parliament who appear in the media are women.
- Expert opinion in the news is overwhelmingly male. Men dominate as spokespersons (86%) and as experts (83%).
- Lastly, gender (in)equality is not considered newsworthy: 96% of news stories worldwide do not highlight issues of gender equality or inequality that may be related to the topic of the story.

7.2. The same trends emerge from the recent report (2008) by the Committee on the Image of Women in the Media in France: women appear in 37% of the subject-matter handled on television, as against 63% for men; 17% of the photos in the weekly press with a male and female readership show women, whereas 53% show men¹³.

7.3. This under-representation can also be seen in countries with higher rates of female participation in public life: according to a survey of public television companies in northern Europe, only 32% of persons appearing on television are women. Women are usually portrayed in roles with a relatively low social status: 47% of “ordinary citizens” and 37% of victims are women, while the majority of political figures (72%) and experts (80%) are men¹⁴.

7.4. Worldwide, some progress has been made in the last 10 years: the representation of women in the “hard” news stories that are at the centre of the news agenda has doubled in politics and government from 7% to 14%, and in economic news from 10% to 20%. But at this rate, it would take 50 years for women to feature centrally in news about politics and government and 30 years in news about economic topics¹⁵.

¹⁰ Adopted texts include Recommendation R(84)17 to member states on *equality between women and men in the media*, Recommendation 1555 (2002) of the Assembly on the image of women in the media, adopted in 2002, and more recently the European Parliament Resolution on *how marketing and advertising affect equality between men and women* (3 September 2008).

¹¹ See CDEG-CM(2008) RAP 8.

¹² The World Association for Christian Communication began a new survey in November 2009, providing updated global information.

¹³ Report of the Committee on the Image of Women in the Media in France (2008), presented by Ms Grézy in Paris on 24 March 2009, AS/EGA (2009) PV 2 add.

¹⁴ “Who speaks in television?” study conducted from 1997 to 2000 as part of the “Screening gender” project, bringing together the public television companies of northern Europe countries: Yleisradio Oy (YLE), Sveriges Television (SVT), Norsk Rikskringkasting (NRK), Nederlandse Omroep Stichting (NOS) and Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF) Danmarks Radio (DR), see <http://yle.fi/gender/imart.html>.

¹⁵ Ms Mohr, AS/EGA (2009) PV 2 add.

3. Women portrayed as mothers, sex objects, or solely in terms of their physical appearance

8. When women are present, the media often give a distorted image of reality.

8.1. Ms Paseka, a university lecturer, emphasised the contradictory messages produced by articles about women and the photos illustrating their content. The example of Nataša Mičić, who became speaker of the Serbian Parliament in 2001, is striking: although she had been appointed to high political office, she was portrayed in photos as “Serbia’s Nicole Kidman”, in alluring and suggestive poses¹⁶.

8.2. Again, while the average stature of Frenchwomen is 1.63 m tall, 63 kg in weight and an average age of 41, in the women’s press 85.75% of women are young, 92.75% slim, and 92.65% white¹⁷. In the women’s press, 50% of women are blonde, although blondes account for only 10% of women in society as a whole¹⁸. The way the female body is represented can have a dramatic impact on young girls, whose attempts to conform to what is portrayed in the media as the norm can lead to eating disorders such as anorexia.

8.3. The study carried out by the University of Liège at the request of the Directorate of Equal Opportunities of the French Community of Belgium shows that men are presented as competitive or else brainless; rational, with a sense of humour; muscular, their physique shown to advantage, they are often spatially positioned higher than women. Women, for their part, focus their pronouncements on physical appearance or condition, are presented as emotional and family-centred, and are shown in prone positions, in passive, suggestive postures, and with a fragmented body (harking back to a fetishist image of women) or a body displayed so as to evoke sexuality¹⁹.

8.4. As regards violence against women, the use of toned-down or euphemistic language also leads to a distortion of reality and to the trivialisation of what constitutes a violation of human rights. In her 1989 essay “Wie man aus seiner Mördergrube ein Herz macht: Strategien männlicher Imagepolitik” (How to Avoid Speaking Frankly: Strategies of Male Image Politics), Dr Luise Pusch analysed the language used by newspapers in reporting violence against women and identified three levels of solutions to the problem of how to deal with this “awkward” phenomenon: ignore it, deny it or conceal it. Three main techniques are used: 1) erase the perpetrator(s) by use of a passive construction (eg “Children Sexually Abused”), 2) confusion by means of fusion: victim and perpetrator are lumped together and can no longer be differentiated (eg “youth violence” instead of “adolescent male violence”, “family violence” or “domestic violence”) and 3) trivialisation and distortion up to the point of asserting the opposite, using “spin” techniques which are constantly being refined by the “spin doctors”. Ms Pusch argues that the word “sex” as used in German articles on rape and sexual assault has titillating connotations of “pleasure” which reflect male experience and perspective, while denying or obliterating the victim’s experience and obscuring or trivialising the violent, often brutal nature of the crimes.

9. To conclude this section, I note that women are either under-represented, or represented in a caricatured and stereotyped way (with the emphasis on their physical, “feminine”, “maternal” or sexual qualities), or are virtually invisible – and I would like to lay particular emphasis on this aspect, which is perhaps the most elusive. As Ms Mohr explained, “women and their concerns, views, experiences, actions, knowledge and expertise are virtually invisible in the world’s media. Their invisibility suggests that they are not important. This is perhaps the most subtle and at the same time the worst form of sexist stereotyping in the news”.²⁰

4. The impact of sexist stereotypes: an impediment to gender equality

10. The under-representation and stereotyped portrayal of women in the media confine women to a passive and secondary role. Consciously or not, the media perpetuate a model of society based on inequality between women and men.

10.1. This vision of society is borne out by the use of language which, characterised by the “generic masculine form” (to refer to functions and professions, and portrayed as a norm transcending human

¹⁶ Ms Paseka, AS/EGA (2009) PV 2 add.

¹⁷ Ms Grésy, AS/EGA (2009) PV 2.

¹⁸ Report of the Committee on the Image of Women in the Media in France (2008), p 63.

¹⁹ Ms Casmans, AS/EGA (2009) PV 2 add.

²⁰ Ms Mohr, AS/EGA (2009) PV 2 add.

gender to describe a group comprising both men and women), is not neutral. Dr Pusch has devoted much research to sexism in language and shown “that the ‘generic masculine’ is by no means neutral, but evokes predominantly male images in people’s minds and does not allow the idea of woman to emerge in the first place”.²¹

10.2. This sexist representation has an obvious influence on the formation of the identity of girls and young women – and of men. It influences their life and career choices. Accordingly, women end up turning to the reputedly “feminine” professions which offer limited career opportunities, whereas men are steered towards research, science and the technical professions which offer better career opportunities. Little by little, we see emerging “everyday sexism”, made up of stereotypes and collective perceptions which, for Brigitte Grésy, “are reflected in words, gestures, behaviour or acts which exclude, marginalise or belittle women.”²²

10.3. For migrant women, having to deal with the twofold discrimination based on their gender and their origin, the impact of sexist stereotypes is even more striking and adversely affects their opportunities for independence and emancipation within their community of origin and in the host society.

10.4. More serious still, this everyday sexism, carried out excessively and repeatedly also trivialises the perception of women as objects and the violations of human dignity in the name of entertainment.²³ This, in turn, can trivialise violence (both psychological and physical) perpetrated against women. As underlined by the Assembly in its Recommendation 1882 (2009), “content depicting women and girls as objects, or limiting their depiction to nefarious gender stereotypes, can lead in certain cases to gender-based violence both in the virtual and the real world, including (cyber-)bullying, harassment, rape, and can even lead to committing massacres in schools”²⁴. I welcome the fact that the ad hoc Committee on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence has acknowledged that the fight against gender stereotypes is an instrument for the promotion and practical achievement of gender equality, and an instrument in which all measures to prevent violence against women should be framed.²⁵

10.5. Lastly, economic constraints add to this pattern: even though there is a growing number of female journalists, it is not enough to change the situation. In Russia for example, where 80% of journalists are women, most media owners are men and impose a gender-specific vision of reality. Women continue to be represented as housewives. Reports on gender equality are censored.²⁶

5. Combating sexist stereotypes in the media: avenues of approach

11. Firstly, therefore, it is essential to raise awareness and highlight the invisibility or under-representation of women in the media. This requires action to decode the media and have indicators which will make it possible to formulate recommendations and monitor the progress achieved. This sensitisation approach may be boosted by the existence of think-tanks which can be particularly effective in influencing policymakers and economic stakeholders.²⁷

12. Member states can also play a role in encouraging the players concerned (public authorities, control and regulation bodies, finance and business, associations and NGOs) to promote not only diversity, a high resonance topic at the moment but also *equality* between women and men.

5.1. Training, awareness-raising, education

13. It is imperative to raise public awareness, but above all we need to provide media education at school and from an early age to teach young people how to decode images and messages²⁸: studies have shown

²¹ See the presentation by Dr Pusch of 24 March 2009, Doc AS/EGA (2009) Inf 9.

²² www.sexismeordinaire.com, Brigitte Grésy, *Petit traité contre le sexisme ordinaire*, 2009.

²³ See, in this connection, the documentary by Lorella Zanardo on “women’s bodies” (www.ilcorpodelledonne.net) regarding the manipulative use of women’s bodies on television, the elimination of older faces, the use of cosmetic surgery and the social consequences of these trends.

²⁴ Rec 1882 (2009), para. 5 and Doc.11924 on The promotion of Internet and online media services appropriate for minors (Rapporteur: Mr Kozma, Hungary, Socialist Group).

²⁵ See the CAHVIO interim report of 27 May 2009, CAHVIO (2009) 4 FIN, p. 8.

²⁶ Ms Morinière, AS/EGA (2009) PV 2 add referring to the seminar “*Stop sexism in the media*” held in Moscow in 2008.

²⁷ For example, the neoliberal think-tanks were of considerable assistance in the election of George Bush in the United States, as pointed out by Dr Pusch, see AS/EGA (2009) PV 2 add.

²⁸ Of relevance here is the Assembly’s work on “The rights of today’s girls – the rights of tomorrow’s women”

that not only the volume, conditions and content of young people's television consumption, their self-esteem and what they appreciate in the other sex, but also their parents' cultural capital and gender-specific representations²⁹ are all factors making young people receptive to stereotyped messages. In this regard, the European Parliament has highlighted the impact of sexist stereotypes on children who are "a particularly vulnerable group that places its trust not just in authority but also in characters from myths, TV programmes, picture-books, including education material, TV games, toy advertising, etc."³⁰

13.1. The efforts made by journalism schools and professional federations must be sustained and stepped up. It is absolutely essential for the training given to journalists to nurture greater awareness of gender issues. Several tools have been developed:

13.1.1. The toolkit "Portraying politics" produced by the European/International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) is a means of raising journalists' awareness of the situation of women in politics, addressing issues such as the invisibility of women in the news media, the fact that womens' views were sought only on so-called "soft" topics, the question of reconciling their private and professional life, managing emotions in politics and the role of journalists and the choices they make in their selection of images, locations and music.

13.1.2. The "Screening Gender" toolkit available from the European Broadcasting Union³¹ focuses on good and bad practices in broadcasting.

13.1.3. A welcome development was the adoption, in November 2008, by the IFJ of a resolution on violence against women, a subject infrequently or poorly covered by the media. Emphasis was placed on the need to use appropriate and exact terms (not confusing trafficking and prostitution, for example), to give information on the context, to talk about the abusers, to interview the abused women (and preserve their anonymity), to use reliable sources and to give emergency telephone numbers³².

13.1.4. Lastly, allow me to draw attention to the publication in July 2009 of the guide "Getting the balance right – Gender equality in journalism"³³ co-produced by UNESCO, the International Federation of Journalists and the Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions and Professional Employees (LO-CTO). The guide is a practical tool dealing with the situation of women journalists in the media, stereotypes and women journalists in associations and trade unions, and also covers the IFJ's initiatives in the field of psychological harassment and gender equality.

13.2. Other incentives could be put in place, such as prizes to acknowledge good journalistic practices (as awarded by the German feminist magazine Emma). These prizes would alert journalists to the need to include a gender perspective in the topics they deal with.

13.3. Because they are underrepresented on television, or because being fewer in number they feel they are in a minority, the very few women invited to appear are reluctant to accept. Studies show that members of an under-represented group feel at ease only when they constitute at least 30% of the panel³⁴. At the hearing in Paris, several ways were mentioned to facilitate the identification and invitation of women experts in debates and news programmes, such as the drawing up of lists of female experts and consultants, following the example of Belgium.³⁵

(Rapporteur: Ms Ingrid Circene, Latvia, EPP/CD), Resolution 1669 (2009), Recommendation 1872 (2009) and Doc. 11910. The psychoanalyst Serge Tisseron, attending the hearing on "The image of women in advertising", also argued for the introduction of image education, see AS/EGA (2006) PV 5 add.

²⁹ Presentation by Ms Casman, AS/EGA (2009) PV 2 add.

³⁰ Recital Q to the European Parliament resolution of 3 September 2008 on how marketing and advertising affect equality between men and women (2008/2038(INI)), Rapporteur: Ms Eva-Britt Svensson (SE, EUL/NGL) on behalf of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality.

³¹ <http://www.yle.fi/gender/>.

³² Ms Morinière, AS/EGA (2009) PV 2 add.

³³ This guide is available in English, French and Spanish.

http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/files/28397/12435929903gender_booklet_en.pdf/gender_booklet_en.pdf.

³⁴ Ms Grézy, AS/EGA (2009) PV 2 add.

³⁵ Ms Morinière, AS/EGA (2009) PV 2 add.

5.2. The legal framework – in need of strengthening?

14. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) – to which all Council of Europe member states are party – calls, in Article 5, for the adoption of appropriate measures “to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudice and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women”.

15. It should be noted that Spain has enshrined efforts to combat sexist stereotypes in legislation: the 2007 Organic Law for effective equality between women and men includes a section on the media. It underlines the responsibility of the public media for conveying an egalitarian, plural and non-stereotyped image of women and men in society and promoting the principle of gender equality. It calls on the RTVE broadcasting corporation and the EFE news agency to properly reflect the presence of women in the various sectors of social life, to use non-sexist language, to adopt codes of conduct that foster equality and to cooperate with institutional campaigns aimed at promoting gender equality and eradicating violence against women. Private media outlets are required to avoid all forms of discrimination and advertising involving discriminatory conduct within the meaning of the law is declared illegal.³⁶

16. Particular attention should be focused on the new electronic media, which often fall outside all forms of regulation. These media represent a new field of expression for women who have embraced virtual space,³⁷ seeing there an opportunity to develop a different form of journalism.³⁸ However, there is a danger that media concentration and control will worsen existing constraints and reinforce the commercialisation and sexualisation of journalism content.³⁹ The re-sexualisation and hypersexualisation of women and young girls (who define their personality by their sexual attractiveness) seen today in the media, particularly on the Internet, give the impression that sexism is, alas, becoming ever more present there.⁴⁰

17. The adoption of codes of good practice or ethical codes applicable to all media sector players could help raise professionals’ awareness of the impact of sexist stereotypes in society, particularly among young people, and must include a gender dimension. A few examples may be given here:

17.1. Chapter 12 of the German Press Code stipulates that no-one may be discriminated against on the grounds of gender, disability or belonging to an ethnic, religious, social or national group. Complaints may be submitted to the Press Council (Presserat).⁴¹

17.2. The Maltese Broadcasting Authority has issued “Guidelines on gender equality and gender portrayal in the broadcasting media”⁴² to help producers “develop positive images of men and women and eliminate systematic discrimination.” These detailed recommendations offer an example which is of particular interest.

17.3. In France, the Conseil supérieur de l’audiovisuel (CSA), an independent administrative authority with powers of sanction ensures that radio and television programmes contain “no incitement to hatred or violence for reasons [...] of gender” and monitors “respect for human dignity in programmes made available to the public”.⁴³

³⁶ See Organic Law 3/2007 of Spain for effective equality between women and men, Part III.

³⁷ In France, almost 49% of women engage in instant messaging, 44% take part in discussion forums, 43% write e-mails and they are major contributors to social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook (report by the Committee on the Image of Women in the Media in France (2008), p. 43).

³⁸ See, for example, the site www.lesnouvellesnews.fr, which seeks to enable women to express themselves as much as men.

³⁹ Women and journalism by Deborah Chambers, Linda Steiner, Carole Fleming, Routledge, 2004, p.240.

⁴⁰ See the work of Professor Rosalind Gill, Professor of Social and Cultural Analysis, at King’s College, London.

⁴¹ www.presserat.info, see CDEG - GM (2008) 1 rev.

⁴² <http://www.ba-malta.org/codes-guidelines-polices>, quoted in CDEG-GM (2008)1 rev.

⁴³ Quoted by Gisèle Gautier in the *Activity Report for 2006-2007* on behalf of the Department for Women’s Rights and Gender Equality and report of the work of that department on “Women and Men in the Media”, presented on 11 July 2007 (ibid), p. 66: “With regard to the prohibition of discriminatory comments and conduct, the CSA took action to challenge the very principle of certain TV reality shows, which it felt failed to comply with the ethical obligations of a television channel on account of the image conveyed of women. (...) The CSA took action to bring to an end the violent utterances and behaviour against women in other TV reality shows, violating human dignity, in connection with supposedly humorous scenes of a gang rape of a mother under the eyes of her child, and a sequence in which a woman was treated on the same level as a horse. It also took action regarding extremely violent comments made against women; in 2001, it issued notices to comply to two radio stations following obscene comments made by some of their presenters regarding female participants in the TV reality show “Loft story”.

18. The revised European Union “Television Without Frontiers” Directive authorises member states, in respect of on-demand audiovisual media services, to take measures to derogate from the stipulated provisions where such is necessary in the interests of “public policy, in particular the prevention, investigation, detection and prosecution of criminal offences, including (...) on grounds of race, sex, religion or nationality, and violations of human dignity concerning individual persons”. In addition, member states “shall ensure by appropriate means that audiovisual media services provided by media service providers under their jurisdiction do not contain any incitement to hatred based on race, sex, religion or nationality” and that audiovisual commercial communications provided by media service providers under their jurisdiction shall not “include or promote any discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, nationality, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.”⁴⁴

19. The fight against sexist stereotypes must be strengthened by legal provisions which actually penalise the most serious instances. By way of example, the French law of 29 July 1881 (as amended in 2004⁴⁵) on the freedom of the press lays down penalties for sexist statements conveyed in the press, advertising, communication to the public by electronic or any other means of publication, in the same way as it already lay down penalties for racist remarks.⁴⁶ For all these offences, associations whose objectives include “combating gender-based violence or discrimination or assisting the victims of such discrimination” are able to join criminal proceedings as a civil party, subject to the agreement of the victims (Section 48-5). The law also provides that the public prosecution service may initiate proceedings *ex officio*, particularly in the event of defamation or sexist insults (Section 48).⁴⁷

20. This type of legislation is a welcome addition to the legal arsenal to address the issue of violations of women’s dignity and physical well-being (by penalising sexist insults, the dissemination of degrading images and incitement to sexist hatred). I also believe that education and the media have a key role to play in combating sexist stereotypes. However, given the subtle nature of sexist stereotypes, which perpetuate attitudes and opinions regarded as the “norm”, the legal provisions to penalise discrimination are not always effective. Member states, under their positive obligations, must take action to guarantee the right to gender equality, enforceable before the courts. This should also be reflected in the system for protecting the fundamental rights guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights, which is why, in its Recommendation 1798 (2007) on Respect for the principle of gender equality in civil law, the Assembly called on the Committee of Ministers to draw up a new protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights enshrining gender equality as a fundamental human right. I fully endorse the words of Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, who, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of International Woman’s Day, said on 8 March 2010: “We need a major leap, with new policies and strategies. In spite of our proud ideals, European democracies are missing a leg, and that leg is true equality between men and women”.⁴⁸

6. Conclusions

21. Improving the visibility and representation of women in the media is a democratic requirement. To this end, the Council of Europe member states should support strong measures to combat blatant sexist stereotypes and the under-representation of women which is a hidden and subtle form of the stereotype of the invisible, passive woman, confined to the traditional role of mother or reduced to the status of object. This representation of women in the media is out of phase with developments in society, the place which women actually occupy in society and their aspirations.

22. At a time when women are becoming more involved in politics, the media seem to be lagging behind. As pointed out by Susan Balducci (University of Exeter) at the European Parliament Conference of 2 March 2010 on women and the European elections, women accounted for 35% of candidates in the 2009 elections and 34% of elected MEPs. Despite that, they obtained only 19% of media coverage, which might explain

⁴⁴ Directive 2007/65/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Directive 89/552/EEC on the co-ordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in Member States concerning the pursuit of television broadcasting activities.

⁴⁵ Amended by Law No. 2004-1486 of 30 December 2004 establishing the National Authority for Combating Discrimination and Promoting Equality (HALDE).

⁴⁶ For example, the following are established as punishable offences: incitement to hatred via one of these means in respect of an individual or group of individuals on the ground of their gender (Section 24); defamation via one of these means in respect of an individual or group of individuals on the ground of their gender (Section 32); insults via one of these means in respect of an individual or group of individuals on the ground of their gender (Section 33).

⁴⁷ Gisèle Gautier, *ibid.*, p.65.

⁴⁸ www.coe.int.

women's lack of interest in European politics, and the less positive image they have of the European Union compared with men.⁴⁹ While electors are ready to vote for women, access to the media remains limited.

23. As Claudine Lienard said, language, the media, advertising and, in a lighter form, humour, produce and convey sexist stereotypes reinforcing the caricaturisation of female and male roles.⁵⁰ Sexist stereotypes, both explicit and implicit, conveyed by the media have an impact on the attribution of roles and functions, academic and vocational choices, the use and arrangement of space, the supply of goods and services, or indeed citizen participation. Sexist stereotypes are therefore "tools of sexist discrimination". By becoming aware not only of these stereotypes (and identifying and decoding the choice of words, themes and images) but also of the invisibility of women which gives rise to discrimination "on account of missing information",⁵¹ it will be possible to transform sexist stereotypes and use them as a means of combating gender discrimination.⁵² To this end, the Assembly could recommend the following approaches:

- acknowledging that sexist stereotypes which confine women to traditional roles, and the invisibility of women which gives rise to discrimination "on account of missing information" constitute an impediment to the promotion and practical achievement of gender equality;
- deconstructing stereotypes presupposes efforts focused on training and education, from an early age, to identify stereotyped images and the inclusion of gender equality in school curricula;
- adopting appropriate legal instruments to combat sexist stereotypes which lead to gender-based discrimination;
- involving media players in moves to include in co-ordination, regulation and self-regulation mechanisms, a gender perspective, sensitisation to the identification and elimination of sexist stereotypes in the media and media monitoring;
- introducing quotas and positive measures to improve the participation of women, in both quantitative and qualitative terms, in public media.

⁴⁹ See the file "Getting women more involved in European politics", www.europarl.europa.eu.

⁵⁰ Claudine Lienard, *ibid.*

⁵¹ See the UNESCO methodological guide "Promoting gender equality through textbooks" (2009).

⁵² Claudine Lienard, *Les stéréotypes sexistes, outils de discrimination des femmes*, Université des femmes de Belgique, 26 May 2009. See also "Analyse n°2/2006: Les stéréotypes sexistes, outils de discriminations des femmes".