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Combating sexist stereotypes in the media

Reply to Recommendation[1]: Recommendation 1931 (2010)
Committee of Ministers

1. The Committee of Ministers has examined with interest Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1931 (2010) on "Combating sexist stereotypes in the media". It has brought the recommendation to the attention of member states' governments and has also transmitted it to the Ad hoc Committee on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (CAHVIO) for information and to the Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men (CDEG) and the Steering Committee on the Media and New Communication Services (CDMC), the comments of which have been taken into account in this reply.

2. Respect for human dignity and equality are fundamental principles of a genuine democratic society. They comprise also a sound basis for the operation of socially effective and responsible media. The Committee of Ministers shares the view that gender stereotyping in the media is still prevalent, with examples still being found of degrading or humiliating images of both men and women, especially in entertainment and advertising, and which are contrary to these fundamental values. It therefore welcomes the attention given to this question by the Assembly. Dealing with gender stereotypes will contribute to reducing inequality, including gender violence which is one of its most unacceptable expressions.

3. The Committee of Ministers shares the opinion that avoiding stereotypes and an objective presentation of facts and images should be fundamental objectives for any type of media and journalistic work. In this respect, it would highlight the important contribution of public service media (PSM) to combating sexist stereotypes in the media. It recalls Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)3 on the remit of public service media in the information society, which underlines the fact that PSM should serve social integration and should respect different identities and needs "paying due attention to gender equality issue".

4. The Committee of Ministers would also draw attention to the importance, particularly with regard to the proliferation of the new communication services, of a creative media environment on the Internet which respects the dignity of all persons and especially of children. The broad availability of pornography on the Internet and the existing sexist stereotypes in the video material and advertisements carry risk of harm for younger people and may impair their proper understanding of the contribution and role of individuals of different gender. It would refer in this respect to relevant provisions of the European Convention on Transfrontier Television and to the 2004 Recommendation of the Convention's Standing Committee,[2] which address comparable issues, and also to the Committee of Ministers' Recommendation Rec(89)7 concerning principles on the distribution of videograms having a violent, brutal or pornographic content and, as regards online games, to the human rights guidelines for online games providers developed by the CDMC in co-operation with the Interactive Software Federation of Europe (2008).

5. In this context, the Committee of Ministers would encourage member states, civil organisations and the media to pay due attention to media literacy as a fundamental competence for citizens of all ages. In particular, media education and training can enable media consumers to recognise and deal with gender

1. adopted at the 1110th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (30-31 March 2011)
2. Recommendation on the Protection of Minors from Pornographic Programmes, adopted by the Standing Committee on Transfrontier Television, at its 37th meeting on 11 to 12 October 2004.

stereotypes and discrimination in all media formats. In the online environment, it can help Internet users and young people in particular to comprehend better the complexities of the virtual reality and its risks, especially those connected to gender equality.

6. Whilst underlining the importance of combating sexist stereotypes, the Committee of Ministers would also highlight the need, when doing so, to guarantee freedom of expression and information and editorial independence. In this respect it would express some reservations as to certain elements of the approach taken by the Assembly in the underlying Resolution 1751 (2010), in particular when calling on national Parliaments to combat sexist stereotypes in the media by penalising sexist remarks or insults. This may not be consistent with the right to freedom of expression requirements set out in Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights and related case law.

7. As the fundamental principle of media's independence will need to be taken into account to address this issue effectively, the Committee of Ministers is aware that purely regulatory measures may not provide a satisfactory response. The task therefore falls largely to the media themselves which should incorporate the principle of equal presentation and fair treatment of various persons with their specific identities in their professional codes and self-regulatory mechanisms and to combat stereotypes as an everyday practice. Solutions may also be found through governance models and approaches. In this respect, the Committee of Ministers has noted that work is already underway on the question of public service media governance which may provide some elements of response in this connection.

8. The Committee of Ministers has taken due note of the Assembly's call for the implementation of Recommendation Rec(90)4. It would urge member states, together with its subordinate bodies, to take it into account wherever appropriate.

9. Finally, with regard to paragraph 4 of the recommendation, the Committee of Ministers maintains its position that a new protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights establishing gender equality as a fundamental human right is not presently required as it considers that the existing set of legal standards, in particular those relating to non-discrimination, are sufficient if effectively implemented.