

Recommendation 1555 (2002)[1]

The image of women in the media

1. The Parliamentary Assembly refers to its Resolution 1018 (1994) on equality of rights between men and women, in which it recommends that machinery be set up to "promote and supervise respect for the principle of equality of rights between women and men", and encourages the media "to promote equality".
2. The Assembly notes that, although progress has visibly been made in several European countries, women's image in the media all too frequently remains a negative one, and continues to be stereotyped and sexist. Women are associated with the private sphere, the household and family life. The media frequently present women as sex objects. While the contemporary world has undergone rapid changes, the image of women in the media has not really altered.
3. The Assembly welcomes the fact that certain European governments, women's groups and intergovernmental bodies have made progress where the depiction of women in the media is concerned. The appointment of an ombudsperson responsible for equality issues to apply national and European Community legislation constitutes a step towards respect for gender equality.
4. The Assembly notes with regret that certain European countries have regressed as far as women's image in the media is concerned. Following the world conference in Beijing, little has been done by governments and media to address the issue.
5. In certain countries of eastern Europe and in the Commonwealth of Independent States, the image of women in the media is relatively negative. The media describe men as reformers, whereas a limited role is attributed to women. This results from the social and cultural heritage of the countries concerned. These countries suffer from a lack of democratic experience and are encountering difficulties in their development process. The images of women which occur in their media are evidence of the dramatic situation of women's rights in these countries. Women's real problems, like women's movements, are ignored.
6. Certain countries have tried to set up a self-regulation machinery for media producers, but governments fail to allocate the necessary funds to these efforts.
7. The stereotyped image of women is a result of the inadequate training of journalists and other media managers and the small numbers of women holding decision-making posts. While the number of female journalists has risen considerably in the past ten years, there are still few women on media management bodies, and they are unable significantly to influence the policy pursued by the media.
8. The Assembly is concerned about the increasing exposure of children to sexist messages. The antisocial forces exerted by the repeated sending of this kind of message are particularly worrying at a time when society is attempting to curb violence against women.
9. The Assembly calls on the governments of Council of Europe member states to adopt and to implement a policy against sexist and stereotyped images and representations of women in the media. The Assembly invites governments to set up more bodies to monitor the media and supervise the audiovisual sector.
10. The Assembly therefore asks that the governments of member states:
 - i. introduce the concept of "sexism", which is to be defined as negating the equal dignity of human beings on the grounds of their male or female gender, into their legislation and condemn it to the same degree as racism;
 - ii. adopt a law on gender equality in the media;
 - iii. ask the ombudsperson responsible for issues relating to gender equality to create direct links between his or her office and the population as a whole;
 - iv. draw a distinction between the situation in the privately-owned and publicly-owned media;
 - v. give media associations the right to complain to the courts in the event of a violation of human rights;

- vi. finance and start new equality projects in the media;
- vii. encourage, within their national systems, the setting up and financing of centres to monitor national media, including the new information and communications technologies;
- viii. encourage advertisers to increase self-regulation through their own system of professional ethics, in so far as freedom of expression permits;
- ix. use positive discrimination measures or quota systems to guarantee a balance between women and men at every level of decision making;
- x. encourage women to participate at every level of decision making in the media and to take posts of responsibility in the technological sector and on public advisory bodies;
- xi. assign resources and implement programmes to increase women's access to communications resources and knowledge, particularly the new communications technologies;
- xii. make substantial efforts to release the necessary funds for the provision of equality training for women and men, at schools of journalism, for example;
- xiii. finance comparative studies with a view to ensuring that policy makers have a better image of gender equality.

11. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

- i. draw up international ethical standards based on equality between women and men;
- ii. help to develop international co-operation with a view to giving priority to the strengthening of communications networks and of women's media and to the principle of gender equality;
- iii. set up an observatory composed of female journalists under the aegis of the Council of Europe to study the way in which women are portrayed in the European media and to propose appropriate measures.

1. *Assembly debate* on 24 April 2002 (13th Sitting) (see Doc. 9394, report of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, rapporteur: Mrs López González).

Text adopted by the Assembly on 24 April 2002 (13th Sitting).