Committee of experts on Media Pluralism
and Transparency of Media Ownership
(MSI-MED)

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MSI-MED 1st MEETING
22-23 March 2016 (9:30-17:30)
Strasbourg, AGORA Building (Room G05)

Feasibility study on a standard-setting instrument on media coverage of elections, with a specific focus on gender equality, and the use of the Internet in elections

Issue mapping non-paper prepared by the Secretariat

This non-paper has been prepared by the Secretariat to facilitate discussions of the MSI-MED at its first meeting. The issues identified here are not exclusive and are open to further elaboration during meeting discussions. Together with references to documents and reading materials they are aimed at guiding reflections and preparing discussions.

The feasibility study will have two focuses: **a.** the use of Internet in elections and **b.** gender equality on the coverage of election campaigns. The articulation of these two focuses will be one of the points for reflexion.

On the second focus, "gender aspects of media coverage of electoral campaigns", a reflection at CDMSI level had started by an informal group[1] who met in Strasbourg on 27 September 2011. Their work, which was not followed-up by a specific standard-setting instrument, is the basis for the relevant part of this paper[2].

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[1] The following experts participated in the meeting: Margaret Gallagher (UK/IR), Joke Hermes (NL), Emir Povlakic (BiH), Bissera Zankova (BG).
[2] The existence of such a previous work is the only reason why that part is more detailed in this paper than the "use of internet" focus

A. General context

Media pluralism and diversity of media content are essential for the functioning of a democratic society and are the corollaries of the fundamental right to freedom of expression and information as guaranteed by Article 10 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

The demands which result from Article 10 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms will be fully satisfied only if each person is given the possibility to form his or her own opinion from diverse sources of information.[3]

B. Proposal

a. The first focus of the feasibility study, namely ***"the use of Internet in elections",*** could address the following issues:

-How does the internet affect the electoral process? (a research study may be needed)

-The role of Internet in electoral campaigns and its use by the political parties. How should the Internet be used to support better election processes and informed voting?

- What content and services must be online to ensure free and fair elections? How can we frame legally such an online environment?

- What is the democratic impact of online voting?

- Promoting technological access to the voters and providing information online: any issues on the compliance with Article 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights?

-Development of human rights and fundamental freedom standards set out by the Council of Europe with regard to the use of Internet in elections

-How do member States of the CoE use the Internet in elections? Identification of possible best practices amongst the CoE member States.

- What is the democratic impact of online voting?

b. The second aspect of the feasibility study, namely ***"gender equality on the coverage of election campaigns"*** is

Genuine democracy requires the equal participation of women and men in society. Democracy and gender equality are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. The inclusion of women and men, with respect for equal rights and opportunities, is an essential condition for democratic governance and sound decision making. Gender equality means equal

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[3] Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on media pluralism and diversity of media content

visibility, empowerment, responsibility and participation of both women and men in all spheres of public life, including the media. The achievement of gender equality is a prerequisite for the achievement of social justice. This is not of interest to women only, but it concerns society as a whole. The Council of Europe has accorded much importance to these matters over the last few decades, demonstrated, inter alia, by the 1988 Committee of Ministers' Declaration on equality of women and men and by the 2009 Committee of Ministers' Declaration on making gender equality a reality.

The media can either hinder or hasten structural change towards gender equality. Inequalities in society are reproduced in the media. This is true in respect of women's under-representation in media ownership, in information production and journalism, in newsrooms and management posts. It is even more blatant as regards women's low visibility, both in terms of quality and quantity, in media content, the rare use of women as experts and the relative absence of women's viewpoints and opinions in the media. Media coverage of political events and election campaigns is particularly telling in this respect, as are the persistence of sexist stereotypes and the scarcity of counter-stereotypes.[4]

Possible guidelines can be driven on three different levels:

1)   Regulatory level

Member states may be called on to consider the effectiveness of their legislative framework and concrete mechanisms for the implementation of strategies and policies to achieve gender equality in the media coverage of electoral campaigns:

- Legislative framework concerning electoral rules and mechanisms to promote women candidates.

- Mechanisms for the implementation of strategies and policies to achieve gender equality in the media coverage of electoral campaigns:

i. Electoral mechanisms and rules, such as quotas, incentives, campaign finance laws facilitating the necessary resource mobilization to achieve gender equality etc, can encourage women's participation in politics, with clear repercussions on their visibility in electoral campaigns reported by media;

ii. Mechanisms and rules for opinion poll organizations, on which media coverage largely depends;

iii. Mechanisms and rules in order to support awareness – raising initiatives and campaigns on combating gender stereotypes in the media, as well as to ensure an equal representation of women in political campaigns.

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[4] Recommendation CM/Rec(2013)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on gender equality and media

2)   Media level

Bearing in mind that equal representation of female candidates in the media coverage of electoral campaigns has an impact on the perception of voters and on the electoral procedure itself, media, off-line and on-line, could be encouraged to set up good practices aiming at:

i.   Ensuring an equal representation of women and men in political campaigns in respect of women's adequate presence on media;

ii.   Ensuring that the set-up of shows, selection of guests, time attributed to each guest, role of host, the way shots are framed, allow female candidates to give effective contribution to the debate and to avoid the stereotype which puts men at the centre and women at the margins of politics;

iii.   Avoiding the "tabloidisation" of media in terms of the representation of female candidates;

iv.   Avoiding that women candidates are identified in respect of their family status or their relationship with others ("mother", "wife", "daughter", etc.);

v.   Avoiding using gender stereotyping or biased language;

vi.   Making equal gender representation a matter of editorial policy;

vii.   Promoting broadcasting that is inclusive and capable of reaching out to women and that reflects gender-based differences of perspective on the issues at stake;

viii.   Promoting the training of journalists on gender aspects so that they are encouraged to publicly highlight issues faced by women candidates;

ix.   Monitoring gender commitments made by political parties and reporting on their progress;

x.   Monitoring regularly their own output setting targets for an equal gender representation.

3)   Political/cultural level

Political parties could be encouraged to develop internal policies mindful of a gender equality perspective and to ensure a balanced representation for men and women to off-line and on-line media in electoral campaigns, for example by:

i.   Addressing gender equality in the party's legal framework. This can include the adoption of a statement on gender equality in the party's founding documents;

ii.   Adopting measures, including internal quotas, that ensure women's participation on governing boards;

iii.	Setting targets for participation in party conventions. This can include holding separate forums for women delegates at the conventions;

iv.	Establishing women's wings and sections within parties, which should be formally integrated into the party structure, with defined roles and responsibilities and appropriate funding if needed;

v.	Ensuring that gender is mainstreamed into all the party's policies;

vi.	Ensuring women's visibility in electoral campaigns and access to the media by providing female candidates with the necessary (financial, etc.) support;

vii.	Promoting the participation of female candidates in public political debates;

viii.	Monitoring regularly their own output setting targets for an equal gender representation in media;

ix.	Conducting gender audits ensuring women's equal participation and representation on media;

x.	Ensuring that political communication does not give a gender-based stereotyped representation of candidates;

xi.	Ensuring that the language used in political communication does not reflect a stereotyped representation of sexes;

xii.	Building women's capacity to campaign and participate in media public debates;

xiii.	Sensitising party members about gender equality and work with men to promote gender issues in public debates.

Appendix

Selective list of resource documents from the Council of Europe

1. European Commission for democracy through law (Venice Commission) report on the impact of electoral systems on women's representation in politics
   http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD(2009)029-e
2. Council of Europe, Gender Equality Commission, "Handbook on the implementation of Recommendation CM/Rec(2013) of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on gender equality and media", prep. by Pamela Morinière, Strasbourg, February 2015
3. Recommendation CM/Rec(2013)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on gender equality and media
4. PACE, Report (doc. 13022) of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination on "Political parties and women's political representation", 18 September 2012
5. PACE, Resolution 1751 (2010), "Combating sexist stereotypes in the media"
6. Recommendation CM Rec(2007)16 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on measures to promote the public service value of the Internet
7. Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)15 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on measures concerning media coverage of election campaigns
8. Declaration of the Committee of Ministers on freedom of political debate in the media, adopted on 12 February 2004
9. PACE, Report (doc. 9394) of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men on "Image of women in the media", 25 March 2002
10. PACE, Recommendation 1555 (2002), "Image of women in the media"
11. Internet Voting in Estonia: A Comparative Analysis of Four Elections since 2005
    http://www.vvk.ee/public/dok/Report_-_E-voting_in_Estonia_2005-2009.pdf

Selective list of resource documents from other organisations

1. International Foundation of Electoral Systems (IFES), "Challenging the Norms and Standards of Election Administration", 2007
2. UN WOMEN, "Election Coverage from a gender perspective, a Media monitoring manual", February 2011
3. UNDP Primers in Gender and Democratic Governance, "Electoral Financing to Advance Women's Political Participation: A Guide for UNDP Support", 2007
4. UNDP "Empowering women for stronger political parties. A good practice guide to promote women's political participation", 2012