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**Feasibility study on a standard – setting instrument  
on media coverage of elections with a specific focus  
on gender equality**

**Second draft as of 9 March 2017**

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## Introduction

A few months before the election of Germany's Federal Chancellor in 2005, Reinhold Beckmann, host of popular Beckmann show on German public service broadcaster ARD presented CDU candidate Angela Merkel with a photograph of American actor Brad Pitt. He asked: *"What do you think of him? He is single now, he just got divorced from his wife"*. Surprised, Angela Merkel responded *"Do I really need to comment?"*

An equal and fair participation of women and men in political debate is a fundamental to democracy. At a time where many European legislations have adopted policies that directly promote women candidates, often through voluntary or mandatory quota systems, more women have decided to run for office. For instance, in the 2014 European Parliament elections, women won 37% seats, a 2% increase since 2009 elections, 6 points more than in 2004.

Elections are a period of intense media scrutiny. Voters will rely tremendously on the news to forge their opinion and vote. They must have enough information about candidates to make informed choices in the ballot booth. It is therefore essential that all candidates have equal access to the media. Media coverage of elections is thus crucial for the public, civil society, state institutions and political parties, but also for private, nongovernmental sector, and international community. By providing access to political candidates to convey their messages to the public, the media has an essential role as the primary source of information about politics and elections.

Traditional media tend to remain the main source of information during election. However, they are facing increasing competition from the new media, particularly social media, which provide a different and faster content. Online media of all sorts have enabled politicians to express themselves, without necessarily journalists' gate keeping.

A free press, delivered from bias reporting and respectful of society's diversity and equality between women and men has the capacity to deliver citizens knowledge to make informed decisions and fully participate in the public debate. On the contrary, a press that avoids portraying part of society or presents one part of the society in a stereotyped manner has the potential to damage not only the persons it portrays, but also viewers and readers' perception of that category of persons or group. For example, the growing influence of infotainment where sensationalism often wins over information means that political candidates will not only be confronted to traditional political debates and news reports but will also participate in programmes where political questions are mixed with entertaining ones.

The Platform for Action adopted at the fourth World conference on women held in Beijing in 1995 included specific provisions on the media and acknowledged the part that they can

play in promoting gender equality, in women's access to decision-making processes and in combating stereotyped portrayals of women<sup>1</sup>.

Numerous studies have highlighted the lack of equality and fairness in the media coverage of women and men. Globally, women only make 24% of the persons, read, seen or viewed in the news<sup>2</sup>. This constitutes a great deficit given that women represent approximately 49.6% of the world population<sup>3</sup>.

Research has shown that when a man enters public life, media usually don't pay attention to the fact that he is a man. When a woman runs for office, her gender is almost always a focus of debate<sup>4</sup>. Research has also highlighted that women politicians are proportionally less visible than men in news coverage, and that where they are present media tend to portray them in a biased way, using stereotypes or discriminating them<sup>5</sup>.

As a consequence, unbalanced and unfair media coverage of gender during elections can be expected to impact the public's understanding of electoral stakes and influence gender balance in the result of electoral competitions.

This study explores how male and female politicians are portrayed in the media during electoral campaigns and to what extent the representation of gender during elections influences voters' decisions. It consists of a review of existing research reports and an overview of current practices in Member States of the Council of Europe. The study provides an evidence-based approach to assessing whether existing legal instruments offer an appropriate framework to promoting gender equality in relation with media coverage of elections. It takes into account the evolution of media landscapes and adopts a broad definition of media that includes social media among other new actors, in conformity with Recommendation CM/Rec(2011)7 of the Committee of Ministers on a new notion of media. It covers mainly news and general affairs programmes, but will also look at entertainment programmes where relevant for electoral campaigns.

## **Part I – Legal instruments of the Council of Europe**

The topic of the study sits at the intersection of the right to freedom of expression guaranteed by Article 10 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (hereinafter "the Convention") and the prohibition of discrimination enshrined in Article 14 of the Convention.

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<sup>1</sup> Section J of the Beijing Platform for Action: "Increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication. Promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media"

<sup>2</sup> Global Media Monitoring Project, 2015

<sup>3</sup> The World's Women 2015 -Trends and Statistics, United Nations

<sup>4</sup> Portraying Politics, a Toolkit on gender and television

<sup>5</sup> Portraying Politics, a toolkit on gender and television

Gender equality in media content being strongly related with freedom of expression, there is little legislation regulating the subject. Moreover, most of the existing legislation regulating the media intends to protect diversity and pluralism rather than directly addressing gender equality; in addition, it is mainly aimed at audio-visual services<sup>6</sup>. Nevertheless, two recent instruments of the Council of Europe address certain aspects of the issue in question.

### **1. Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)15 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on measures concerning media coverage of election campaigns**

The Recommendation on measures concerning media coverage of election campaigns<sup>7</sup> includes guidelines enabling the media to provide for fair, balanced and impartial media coverage during electoral periods.

The general provisions envisage that the editorial independence of the media must be enshrined in the regulatory framework of all member states and should be fully respected. It is particularly important for the public service media to cover elections in an impartial manner and without discriminating against or supporting a specific political party or candidate.

Moreover, the media are encouraged to develop self-regulatory frameworks and incorporate self-regulatory professional and ethical standards regarding their coverage of election campaigns including respect of principles of human dignity and non-discrimination.

Furthermore, transparency is stressed as an important principle, especially when it comes to paid political advertising. Such advertising has to be readily recognisable as such and made transparent to the public.

In the case of opinion polls, the regulatory and self-regulatory frameworks should ensure that the media, when disseminating the results of opinion polls, provide the public with sufficient information in order to enable citizens to make a judgement on the value of the polls.

When it comes to measures concerning broadcast media, the CM encourages regulatory frameworks that foster the pluralistic expression of opinions. The three principles of fairness, balance and impartiality are especially stressed for news and current affairs programmes during campaign periods.

### **2. Recommendation CM/Rec (2013) 1 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to member states on gender equality and media**

The Recommendation on gender equality and media reaffirms the importance of gender dimension to media pluralism and diversity of media content, considering that media are a

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<sup>6</sup> Handbook on the implementation of Recommendation CM/Rec (2013) 1 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on gender equality in Media.

<sup>7</sup> Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)15 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on measures concerning media coverage of election campaigns

crucial factor in shaping society's perceptions and ideas and should thus "reflect the reality of women and men in all their diversity."

The guidelines first address the responsibility of States to adopt an appropriate legal framework to prohibit discrimination and ensure that it is implemented by media regulators. Secondly, they place on the media the responsibility for adopting self-regulatory measures and internal codes of conduct to promote equal representation of men and women in media work, in media management bodies and in regulatory and self-regulatory institutions, and to promote a non-stereotyped image, role and visibility of women and men.

The guidelines identify mechanisms that may support the promotion of gender equality. In particular, the adoption of indicators on gender equality in the media and a regular monitoring of the representation of men and women in the media are recommended. Additional research on gender equality, notably focused not only on women but also on the relationship between genders, should be supported and publicised. The exchange of information on good practices and the use of a large variety of accountability mechanisms are also encouraged. Finally, efforts in media literacy are necessary to promote gender equality for the young generations as well as for adults, including media professionals and media students.

### **3. Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)17 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on gender equality standards and mechanisms**

The Recommendation on gender equality standards and mechanisms calls for, among other steps, elimination of sexism from language and promotion of language that reflects the principle of gender equality. To this end, member states are invited to take action targeting the promotion of non-sexist language across all sectors, but particularly "in the public sector and in all forms of education and in media." As regards specifically the media, member states are encouraged to promote gender-based research into language used in the information sector, including media, and to devise initiatives for the elimination of discriminatory expressions which describe women and men in terms of their physical appearance or of the qualities and gender roles attributed to their sex.

## **Part II – Media and gender equality**

### **1. Data on media coverage of men and women politicians**

"*News erase one woman in two*" ("Les medias goment une femme sur deux") claimed the Belgian Association of professional journalists (AJP), when it publicised its Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP)'s results for Belgium in 2015.

The latest edition of the GMMP<sup>8</sup>, which assess every 5 years the place of women in the news media, whether in print, radio, TV or online, brought indeed alarming results. **Women made only 24% of people seen, read or heard** in the news of traditional media, a

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<sup>8</sup> [http://cdn.agilitycms.com/who-makes-the-news/Imported/reports\\_2015/highlights/highlights\\_en.pdf](http://cdn.agilitycms.com/who-makes-the-news/Imported/reports_2015/highlights/highlights_en.pdf)

similar result to the GMMP 2010 findings. The report warns that “*the rate of progress towards gender parity (in the news) has almost ground to a halt over the last 5 years*”.

Findings in the digital news were almost identical. Women make 26% of the people in Internet news stories and media news-tweets combined.

As regards **news about politics**, women only make 16% of the people appearing in the stories (19% in Europe and 17% in online and Twitter news in Europe).

Worryingly, while the presence of women sources in political stories has increased steadily since the first monitoring in 1995, it registered its first decrease in 2015.

	1995		2000		2005		2010		2015		%Change (Δ)
	%F	%M	%F	%M	%F	%M	%F	%M	%F	%M	
<b>Main Story Topics. Newspaper, Television, Radio</b>	<b>(%F)</b>										
Science & Health	27	73	21	79	22	78	32	68	35	65	▲ 8
Social & Legal	19	81	21	79	28	72	30	70	28	72	▲ 9
Crime & Violence	21	79	18	82	22	78	24	76	28	72	▲ 7
Celebrity, Arts & Sport	24	76	23	77	28	72	26	74	23	77	▼ 1
Economy	10	90	18	82	20	80	20	80	21	79	▲ 11
Politics & Government	7	93	12	88	14	86	19	81	16	84	▲ 9

Source: GMMP 2015

A number of studies on media coverage of female candidates revealed that even when there are a reasonable number of women candidates running for office they are often neglected by the media<sup>9</sup>.

During Ireland 2011 elections, a study<sup>10</sup> showed that women constituted around one third of appearances on the Irish current affairs show *Prime Time*, broadcast by the Irish public broadcaster RTE, but were given only 10% of the airtime.

Looking at the **occupations of the persons that appear in the news stories**, women make 18% of the category of government, politician, minister, spokesperson and 67% of the category of homemaker, parent, where no other occupation is given.

<sup>9</sup> The importance of the media to elections, ACE, the electoral knowledge network

<sup>10</sup> It's a man's world, A Qualitative Study of the (Non) Mediation of Women and Politics on Prime Time During the 2011 General Election Anne O'Brien 2014

Occupation										
Homemaker, parent (no other occupation is given)	81	19	75	25	72	28	67	33	▼	8
Health worker, social worker, childcare worker	n/a		n/a		n/a		47	53		
Office or service worker, non-management worker	35	65	40	60	45	55	35	65	▼	5
Unemployed no other occupation given	33	67	19	81	35	65	34	66	▲	15
Activist or worker in civil society org., NGO, trade union	24	76	23	77	34	66	33	67	▲	10
Doctor, dentist, health specialist	n/a		n/a		n/a		30	70		
Academic expert, lecturer, teacher	n/a		n/a		n/a		23	77		
Lawyer, judge, magistrate, legal advocate, etc.	n/a		18	82	17	83	22	78	▲	4
Media professional, journalist, film-maker, etc.	n/a		36	64	29	71	21	79	▼	15
Tradesperson, artisan, labourer, truck driver, etc.	15	85	23	77	22	78	21	79	▼	2
Government employee, public servant, etc.	12	88	17	83	17	83	20	80	▲	3
Government, politician, minister, spokesperson...	10	90	12	88	17	83	18	82	▲	6
Business person, exec, manager, stock broker...	n/a		12	88	14	86	16	84	▲	4
Agriculture, mining, fishing, forestry	15	85	13	87	13	87	14	86	▲	1
Science/ technology professional, engineer, etc.	12	88	10	90	10	90	10	90	■	0
Police, military, para-military, militia, fire officer	4	96	5	95	7	93	8	92	▲	3
Sportsperson, athlete, player, coach, referee	9	91	16	84	11	89	7	93	▼	9

Source: GMMP 2015

In the digital news, women are 2% points less likely to appear as spokespersons (18%) and two points more likely to appear as experts (21%).

When it comes to coverage of women and men in election times, i.e. in a period for which special rules are adopted by many states in order to provide fair and unbiased coverage to all candidates, the gap appears to be the same.

A study conducted by the Swiss Federal Office of Communications (OFCOM), the Federal commission on women issues and Swiss public broadcaster (SRG SSR)<sup>11</sup>, which was published in 2015, concluded that while women made 34.5% of candidates for election of the Swiss National Council (the lower house of the Federal Assembly) in 2015, they made 24% of audio and video stories, 23.5% of stories in print and online media and 25% of photos of candidates. Worryingly, there had been no progress in the presence of women candidates in the news since 2003 when women made 25% of candidates in the press while making 34.5% of candidates. The study also concluded that although there was no significant improvement in the percentage of representation of women candidates in media there was a significant improvement of their elections into functions. This fact brought out the question of correlation between percentage representation of women candidates in media and their election. Furthermore, the study showed that the way of representation of both gender was equal in terms of assigning them adjectives such as reasonable, active, strong, knowledgeable etc. These findings might be valuable to serve as a basis for other wider analysis in more member states.

In Belgium, a 2014 report conducted by the National Audiovisual Council (CSA)<sup>12</sup> shows some improvements with women making 30.38% of politicians appearing in pre-electoral debates on Belgium French speaking television. Findings show that women tend to be more

<sup>11</sup> Les élections dans les médias : les stéréotypes de genre disparaissent, mais les candidates restent sous-représentées, Commentaire de la DFCF sur l'étude « genre et médias au préalable des élections fédérales 2015 (Octobre 2016)

<sup>12</sup> La représentation des femmes dans les débats pré-électorales télévisés belges francophones, May 2014



present in local television's debates (32.05%) than in major public broadcaster (27.82%) and major private broadcaster (24.14%).

## 2. Reasons behind gender inequality in media coverage of women candidates

Such low representation of women can be partly explained by the low presence of women candidate and their low presence in countries' most leading political positions. In its 28 member states for instance, the EU has 4 women presidents (Croatia, Estonia, Malta and Lithuania) and 3 women prime ministers (Germany, Poland and UK).

However, data on women holding elected offices in European assemblies show that their presence in politics is much higher than their presence as sources in the news. Women represent 37% of EU Parliament, and have reached at least 35% representation in 8 EU member states (Sweden, Finland, Spain, Belgium, Germany, The Netherlands, Montenegro and Denmark). In the Council of Europe member States, approximately 23% of members of national parliaments are women<sup>13</sup>.

### European Parliament

	Members				
	President	Women (N)	Men (N)	Women (%)	Men (%)
European Parliament	M	279	469	37	63
- = not applicable, : = not available					
Data collected between 11/10/2016-11/10/2016					

Source: European Commission

Similar lack of gender balance is present also in the governmental structures. In the Government of Serbia formed in August 2016, out of 19 ministers, five are women (26%). The function of the Prime Minister carries out a man, out of the four vice-presidential slots one is held by a woman. In the National Assembly, women account for 34% (85 women out of 250 national MPs), which is an improvement since the democratic changes in 2000, when the percentage of women MPs was between 10% and 20%.

Another element is that heads of political parties are more likely to be interviewed and that 4/5 of those leaders are men.

As reliance on sources is fundamental to news gathering, the fact that most authoritative sources, including politicians and spokespersons are male means they are the "primary definers" of news. As pointed in the GMMP report, "*dependence on these sources also reinforces male dominance in the news as most of these sources tend to be men*".

<sup>13</sup> Political parties and women political representation, Council of Europe, 2012

### 3. Journalists' coverage of elections from a gender perspective

During election campaigns media have a duty to publicise candidates and their manifestoes as widely as possible, regardless of their gender, while seeking to treat them equally and impartially<sup>14</sup>.

Since most voters have no direct relations with election candidates, media and journalists have a role to play in conveying their concerns and making sure candidates address not only their own programme but also respond to the public's matters of concern. Journalists have a role to play in identifying what those issues are and encourage politicians to speak about them. Among these issues is gender equality.

The latest GMMP report lists government, accidents, sports, economics and crime as the five main news topics.<sup>15</sup> Most of these topics fall under the category of what is called "hard news". Government and domestic politics come first in the GMMP ranking of top topics. As GMMP results also show that women's presence significantly lags behind on politics coverage, the risk is that topics considered as "hard news" continue to be framed associated to men and perceived as such by public opinion and voters.

#### Top 10 news topics on the global monitoring day 25 March 2015

1. Other domestic politics, government...
2. Disaster, accident, famine, flood, plane crash...
3. Sports, events, players, facilities, training, funding
4. Economic policies, strategies, modules, indicators, stock markets...
5. Violent crime, murder, abduction, assault...
6. Non-violent crime, bribery, theft, drugs, corruption
7. Foreign/international politics, UN, peacekeeping
8. Education, childcare, nursery, university, literacy
9. Medicine, health, hygiene, safety, (not EBOLA or HIV/AIDS)
10. War, civil war, terrorism, other state-based violence

*Source: GMMP 2015*

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<sup>14</sup> Handbook on the implementation of Recommendation CM/Rec (2013) 1 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on gender equality in Media.

<sup>15</sup> The fact that the Germanwings plane crash was reported widely on the GMMP monitoring day is responsible for the high proportion of stories under the accident category.

### a. Who reports on politics?

Looking at **who reports and presents the news**, the GMMP 2015 shows that women outnumbered men in TV news presentation (57%) and are slightly below men in radio presentation (41%). While there is an overrepresentation of young women as anchors, the representation of women in the 50-64 age bracket is much lower (29%) and disappear beyond that age group.

B. Reporting and Presenting the News. Newspaper, Radio, Television											
<b>% Stories presented</b>	51	49	49	51	53	47	49	51	49	51	0
Television			56	44	57	43	52	48	57	43	▲ 1
Radio			41	59	49	51	45	55	41	59	0
<b>% Stories reported</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>63</b>	▲ 6
Television			36	64	42	58	44	56	38	62	▲ 2
Radio			28	72	45	55	37	63	41	59	▲ 13
Newspapers			26	74	29	71	33	67	35	65	▲ 9

Source: GMMP 2015

Men outnumber women as reporters (63%), with a higher score in newspapers (65%), television (62%) and radio (59%). However, women report 5% more stories online than in traditional media combined (42% of news published online are reported by women).

In traditional media women report 31% of stories on politics (against 50% of stories on science and health)<sup>16</sup>. There was a 2% decrease since 2010, making politics the least reported topic by women.

### b. Stories reported by female reporters by major topics 2000-2015

	2000	2005	2010	2015	Δ 15 yrs
Science and Health	46%	38%	44%	50%	▲ 4%
Economy	35%	43%	40%	39%	▲ 4%
Social and Legal	39%	40%	43%	39%	■ 0%
Celebrity, Arts and Media, Sports	27%	35%	38%	34%	▲ 7%
Crime and Violence	29%	33%	35%	33%	▲ 4%
Politics and Government	26%	32%	33%	31%	▲ 5%
<b>TOTAL</b>	28%	37%	37%	37%	▲ 9%

Source: GMMP 2015

This finding confirms that while a majority of politicians are men and a majority of those reporting on politics are also men, there seems to remain what scholars have highlighted as

<sup>16</sup> GMMP 2015

a “gentleman’s club” tendency where rules are established by male politicians and male journalists<sup>17</sup> and which women journalists and politicians must comply with.

Interestingly, the GMMP highlights that while women journalists tend to include more women as subject of their news stories (29%) as opposed to their male colleagues (26%), there seems to be an overall journalism practice of mainly referring to male as subject, despite some slow improvement.

The report points at the limited journalistic gender lens when selecting their sources and qualifies it as “*male centred, but (...) also skewed towards a certain kind of masculinity when selecting interviewees for all types of views, from ‘expert’ opinion to ‘ordinary’ person testimonies*”.

### Female news subject by sex of reporter 2000-2015

	2000	2005	2010	2015	Δ 15 yrs
Female reporters	24%	25%	28%	29%	▲ 5%
Male reporters	18%	20%	22%	26%	▲ 2%

Source: GMMP 2015

Online news seems slightly more balanced in using female sources where women make 33% of sources in stories by online news female reporters, compared to 23% in stories provided by men.

The fact that few journalism schools include any curricula on gender equality shows that the gender deficit applied to journalistic sources is also intrinsic to journalism education and daily routines adopted at the beginning of journalistic careers.

### c. Framing the message: journalistic practices

The media have the capacity to “*direct the public’s attention to certain issues presented as the most important ones at that moment*”<sup>18</sup>. At election times the media will decide on the guests, the topics, the format of the debate, the time, the angle of cameras and the captions that go beyond photographs.

Different factors will influence journalists when they cover news including their personal experience, their orientation (ideological, political or religious), their gender, their

<sup>17</sup> « Send pretty girls to the white house”- the role of gender in journalists-politicians’ interactions, Liudmila Voronova, University of Stockholm, Sweden

<sup>18</sup> Election coverage from a Gender perspective, a media monitoring manual by UN Women and Idea

preferences, and their knowledge. Their specific frame of reference will inevitably influence the angle of a story<sup>19</sup>.

The way journalists frame their questions to politicians and set debate panels influences the public's perception of politicians. The choice of questions and who will answer them also impacts on the public's perception of female and male politicians' strength and weaknesses.

"The repetitive and persistent nature of most of the media's frames of women politicians produces a normative expectation that this is how women are, and these gender scripts slide easily into the journalistic consciousness to become the routine handy-grab to use for any women politician, good for one, good for all" says scholar Karen Ross<sup>20</sup>.

One important aspect pointed by research is that women politicians are often portrayed as extraordinary or achieving spectacular results. They are, in fact, too often referred as "women politicians". It conveys the wrong message that their presence is not a natural trend and implies that their coverage should focus on what makes them new instead of focusing on their programme and ideas.

Some research also suggests that women are more likely to be covered by news media if they are standing against other women or if a feature story is explicitly focused on women candidates<sup>21</sup>.

*"The gender lens is skewed to men when selecting interviewees in general but in the one in four chances that a woman is selected, the tendency is to portray the woman as an embodiment of a typical femininity of subordination and powerlessness even in cases where the woman holds senior public office, as media monitoring studies on portrayal of political women have demonstrated,"* says Ross.

A result of this is that women politicians tend to be portrayed in accordance with a number of stereotypes that have nothing to do with the office they are running for. Given the rise in infotainment, such stereotypes can only be reinforced when political programme comes second and personalisation of politics comes first.

#### ***d. What do politicians speak about?***

Research tends to show that questioned framed at politicians are still dependent on gender. A study of press coverage of the 2003 Swiss parliamentary election showed that women candidates were most likely to be reported in the areas of education, culture and gender issues. They were least likely to appear in stories about the EU, foreign policy and agriculture<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> Portraying Politics, a toolkit on gender and television

<sup>20</sup> Gender, Politics, News : A Game of Three Sides, First Edition, Karen Ross, 2017

<sup>21</sup> Gender, Politics, News : A Game of Three Sides, First Edition, Karen Ross, 2017

<sup>22</sup> Doing gender in der Wahlkampfkommunikation, Sibylle Hardmeier and Anita Klöti, 2004

A more recent Swiss study<sup>23</sup> showed, however, that progress has been made in not attributing specific hard issues to male candidates and soft issues to women candidates. A study in 2014 in Ecuador<sup>24</sup>, in which researchers monitored news during the election period, showed that 75% of candidates responding to interviews on issues such as foreign policy, national security and international agreements were men.

#### *e. Women politicians subject of stereotypes*

Research shows that women politicians receive more attention coverage on their appearance, sex, private life and family life as compared to men. These practices contradict the principle of equal treatment that should apply to all politicians.

##### *i. Style over substance*

After the news broke that Theresa May would be the new leader of the Conservative party and hence the next prime minister, the British daily *The Sun's* headline read "Heel boys" above a large photograph of May's kitten heels appearing to trample on the heads of her male opponents and colleagues<sup>25</sup>.

Hair colour, loss of weight, outfits are topics that are often more commented than women's politicians' policy decisions, voters' records and programmes. A study found that in newspaper coverage of 2002 gubernatorial and senatorial election in the United States of America (hereinafter "the U.S."), 6% of women's news stories mentioned their appearance compared to 1% in men's stories<sup>26</sup>.

##### *ii. Sexualisation*

"*Hot potato*" ("Patata bollente") was the headline used by the Italian right-wing Italian newspaper *Libero* on 10 February 2017 to describe Rome's Mayor Virginia Raggi. Patata is also a colloquial Italian term for the female genitals and the headline was heavily criticised for its misogyny.

A study conducted by the Inter-parliament union on sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians from 39 countries spread over five regions of the world<sup>27</sup> reveals that 27.3% of respondents believe traditional media had disseminated images or comments about them that were highly contemptuous or sexually challenged. That

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<sup>23</sup> Les elections dans les medias: les stereotypes de genre disparaissent, mais les candidates restent sous-représentées, Commentaire de la CFQF sur l'étude "genre et medias au préalable des elections fédérales 2015", (October 2016)

<sup>24</sup> Abordaje Mediatico En Epoca De Campaña Electoral <http://whomakesthenews.org/artides/abordaje-mediatico-en-epoca-de-campana-electora>

<sup>25</sup> Handbags and kitten heels – how not to write about prime ministers, Laura Bates, The Guardian 12 July 20

<sup>26</sup> Gender and Campaign Communication: TV Ads, Web Sites, and Media Coverage, Dianne G. Bystrom, Mary Christine Banwart, Lynda Lee Kaid and Terry A. Robertson, 2006

<sup>27</sup> Sexism, Harassment and violence against women parliamentarians, October 2016

proportion rose to 41.8% in the case of images or comments disseminated through social media.

### *iii. Family status*

The fact that women politicians are single or mothers is regularly a topic in the news. For the men, the question of how they manage to combine career and family rarely arises in the media. But for women this challenge - often presented as the "juggling act"- is constantly present<sup>28</sup>.

### *iv. Wives of politicians*

During election campaigns, media have a tendency to focus on political leaders' wives more than on women politicians themselves. In the United Kingdom, during the 1992 election campaign Norma Major and Glenys Kinnock appeared more often in the daily press than any politician, with the exception of the party leaders and Margaret Thatcher<sup>29</sup>.

In France, Aurélie Filippetti, former Minister of Culture, was appointed spokesperson for a socialist candidate Benoit Hamon during the 2017 presidential election campaign. However, in the news she was presented by some media as the wife of socialist politician Arnaud Montebourg rather than as former Minister of Culture.

### *v. Social media effect*

While there is no evidence that visibility on social media translates into votes, they can still have a devastating effect on a politician's campaign. While these platforms allow voters to share information and opinions freely, they also open the door to excessive comments, including sexism. The anonymity of many Twitter and Facebook users that are not per se media professionals and publish in their own capacity can add to the increase of widespread sexism that surrounds a particular woman politician.

In 2016, the U.S presidential election demonstrated the political power of social media. During the campaign Hillary Clinton was subject to hundreds of sexist messages per day. Tweets directed at her showcased a broad range of sexism, from appearance-related insults to obscene names paired with sexual threats. Users told Clinton to "go back to the kitchen" and suggested that "if she can't keep her man under control, she can't keep the country under control."<sup>30</sup>

In Serbia, pre-electoral activities on the internet were monitored during the 2016 elections. The reports<sup>31</sup> conclude that on Facebook, the last week of the campaign there was a striking number of more than 350,000 interactions, of which approximately 271,000 were likes of

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<sup>28</sup> Portraying Politics, a Toolkit on gender and television

<sup>29</sup> Gender, Politics, News : A Game of Three Sides, First Edition, Karen Ross, 2017

<sup>30</sup> Does Sexism on Social Media Hurt Women Running for Office?, Madison Shumway, The Bengal 2017

<sup>31</sup> Share Foundation, Monitoring reports Elections 2016, Serbia <http://www.shareconference.net/sh/tags/izbori-2016>

the content published by the political parties on their official websites. In the overall standings, more than one million Facebook interactions were recorded involving more than 200,000 users. This indicates that political parties did not underestimate the potential of Facebook for the dissemination of ideas and for gathering support. It is interesting that the comments on the posts were far less numerous than likes, which shows that the communication of parties with supporters and potential voters was largely one-sided.

The election results show that the online campaign should not be ignored, even considering the not-so-young age structure of the Serbian citizens. The movement "It is enough", due to the lack of coverage in the traditional media and the lack of funding, focused their activities on the social networks and platforms, which undoubtedly contributed to their success in the 2016 elections. The successful employment of unconventional campaign strategy by "It is enough" surprised the wider professional community, many voters and analysts. The movement not only passed the threshold for entering the parliament, but also won a higher percentage of parliamentary seats than any other opposition representatives with its 6.02% (227,626 votes).

#### **4. Influence of media reports on voter's opinion**

Public opinion is inevitably influenced by the way the media present the facts<sup>32</sup>.

During elections times, any accentuation of gender-based stereotypes is likely to influence voters' opinion on the different candidates and their voting decision. Interviewing women politicians on "soft" issues only, namely health, education, culture, fashion may give voters the impression that they are not fit for other issues. Of course, these topics do matter to women politicians and to voters but if women are the only one answering them it reinforces the stereotype that they are "women's issues"<sup>33</sup>.

A survey<sup>34</sup> commissioned by Name It. Change It., a joint non-partisan media-monitoring and accountability project of the Women's Media Center and She Should Run, a project dedicated to increasing the number of women in public leadership, conducted during the final days of the U.S. presidential election 2016 showed that social media were the source where voters saw the most sexist treatment of women candidates. They were followed by cable news and broadcast news.

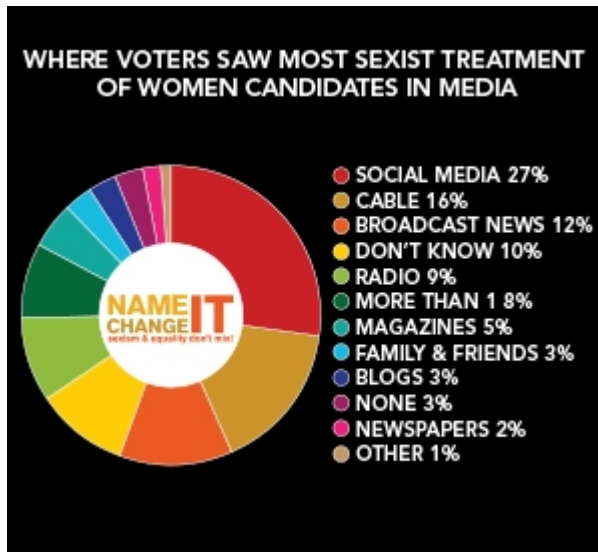
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<sup>32</sup> Handbook on the implementation of Recommendation CM/Rec (2013) 1 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on gender equality in Media.

<sup>33</sup> Portraying Politics, a toolkit on gender and television

<sup>34</sup> Where voters saw most sexist treatment of women candidates in the media, Name it. Change it. 2016





Source: Name it. Change it.

"This research shows an awareness of media sexism toward women candidates and elected officials and affirms the power of the media in shaping opinions, influencing perceptions, and fostering stereotypes," said Julie Burton, president of the Women's Media Center. "The fact that 87% of voters could report seeing sexist media coverage of women candidates underscores both the problem and the need for media accountability for this kind of content—especially on social media, which had substantially more reports of sexism than other media platforms."

As regards the effect of female and male politician's portrayal and their influence on voters' decision, a research conducted in the U.S. suggests that voters tend to respond more positively to political candidates that, regardless of their gender, receive the type of coverage usually accorded to male candidates, including the opportunity to voice their views on "hard" issues such as crime or defence<sup>35</sup>.

Furthermore, the *Name it. Change it.* research project<sup>36</sup> suggests that the way the media cover the appearance of women candidates matters in elections. The findings of the 2014 nationwide research showed that sexist coverage diminished votes in favour of women. It also showed that neutral, positive and negative description of a woman candidate's appearance damaged the woman. The man opponent paid no price for that type of coverage.

Online initiatives such as Kaleida<sup>37</sup> in the UK, which measure the flow of information around the world, could help measure users' reaction to gender equality topic covered in the news.

<sup>35</sup> Does being male help? An investigation of the effects of candidate gender and campaign coverage on evaluation of U.S. Senate candidates, Kim Kahn in *Journal of politics*, 1992

<sup>36</sup> Name it. Change it. Research on appearance coverage of women and campaign simulation, Women media center and She should run, 2013 <http://www.nameitchangeit.org/blog/entry/name-it.-change-it.-releases-nestw-research-on-appearance-coverage-of-women-c>

<sup>37</sup> [www.kaleida.com](http://www.kaleida.com)

The project produces insights into what matters most and to whom by analysing the output of news publishers and the sharing habits of consumers. While Kaleida's results on gender equality show that the topic is poorly addressed in the news, some results show that women share coverage about British Prime Minister Theresa May on Facebook more than men. A similar research could contribute in measuring consumers' habits in election coverage from a gender viewpoint.

### **Part III. Review of regulatory and self-regulatory mechanisms and practices in member states of the Council of Europe**

The section provides an overview of gender equality mechanisms of media regulatory bodies and other public bodies, of self-regulatory initiatives, practices adopted by the media themselves and finally of initiatives from various international and civil society organisations.

It must be observed that few existing initiatives deal with social media specifically, in spite of the growing importance of this component of media landscapes. This is probably explained by the current uncertainties regarding social media generally. While public regulation has been deemed to be justified for broadcast media and self-regulation has been the recommended approach for print media, the debates around social media have not definitely settled.

As new initiatives regarding gender equality and elections on social media will probably develop in the near future, it is necessary to remind that, under Article 10 of the ECHR, any measure that restricts freedom of expression must be proven to be necessary in a democratic society, and that the least restrictive means should always be preferred. In that sense, self-regulatory initiatives are the recommended approach to this issue on social media.

#### **1. Media regulatory authorities**

It may first be observed that according to the European Institute on Gender Equality (EIGE)'s study carried in 2012 across 44 independent media regulators in the EU<sup>38</sup>, women made 31% of board members. Given the role these bodies can play in setting the pace of developments within the media sector, offering them a watchdog role in sustaining gender equality among European broadcasters could contribute to better gender portrayal in the news including in election coverage.

While a series of regulators have adopted some form of commitment towards gender equality, few specific initiatives have directly tackled election coverage from a gender perspective. However, many initiatives to strengthen gender equality in broadcasting content could also be applied to a certain extent, to election coverage.

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<sup>38</sup> European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), Advancing gender equality in decision-making in media organisations, 2013

Since 2012 Italian media are required by law (“Par condicio di genere”) to provide a balanced representation of women and men in their election campaign coverage and political programmes. The Italian regulatory authority AGCOM was requested to publish data on the presence of women politicians in radio and TV political programmes, but to our knowledge no report has been produced to date. One of the reasons for that advanced by some women groups is that such report would be a challenge, considering that candidates are mainly men. Moreover, the law is based on quantitative criteria only, leaving out any qualitative ones that would look into the type of portrayal politicians receive in the press.

The Declaration on gender equality adopted in 2011 by the French Speaking Media Regulators’ Network (REFRAM)<sup>39</sup> is a joint commitment by the members of REFRAM to promote women’s access to the media, recommending in particular “regular, quantitative” assessment of gender equality policies, with easier access to data making it possible to take stock of the situation. Following a comparative study on the gender equality policies of REFRAM’s member regulators, REFRAM published a VADE-MECUM<sup>40</sup> on integrating the gender equality dimension through regulators’ policies.

In Belgium, French speaking public broadcaster must commit to the National Audiovisual Council (CSA) to be “active in the respect of the principle of equality between women and men and in the fight against sexist messages and stereotypes”<sup>41</sup>.

The French Law on Gender Equality adopted on 4 August 2014<sup>42</sup> establishes the role of the National Audiovisual Council (CSA) as regards respect for women’s rights in the audio-visual communication field. For example, the CSA must ensure that women and men are fairly represented in audio-visual communication services and pay special attention to the way in which women are portrayed in their programmes, with a view to combating stereotypes, sexist prejudice, degrading images, violence against women and domestic violence. The public audio-visual services are also tasked with combating sexist prejudice and violence against women by broadcasting programmes about these subjects.

The High Authority for Regulation of the Audiovisual Media in Morocco (HACA) put together a monitoring tool to analyse audiovisual media through a gender lens<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> Déclaration du REFRAM sur l’égalité entre hommes et femmes dans les médias audiovisuels, 2011

<sup>40</sup> REFRAM Vade-mecum égalité hommes-femmes, 2012

<sup>41</sup> Etude comparative des politiques des régulateurs membres du REFRAM en matière d’égalité hommes-femmes, 2011

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/afchTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000029330832&categorieLien=id>

<sup>43</sup> Contribution à la lutte contre les stéréotypes fondés sur le genre et à la promotion de la culture de l’égalité hommes-femmes à travers les médias audiovisuels- proposition d’une démarche de monitoring des programmes audiovisuels, Octobre 2014

British regulator Ofcom published in November 2016 guidance and resources for broadcasters on how to improve diversity from setting up a strategy to monitoring and evaluating its impact, recruiting new talents and training the workplace.<sup>44</sup>

It may also be noted that national institutions for the promotion of equality can play a useful role. For instance, in France, the French *Haut Conseil pour l'égalité*, a governmental body, published in 2015 a brochure aimed at public services for a "Communication without sexist stereotypes"<sup>45</sup>. It encourages users to eliminate all forms of sexist expression in their communication material, do not only limit to women questions on personal life, include an equal representation of women and men in all medium and conferences.

## 2. Media self-regulation

The International Federation of Journalists' Declaration of principles on the conduct of journalists<sup>46</sup> states the principle of non-discrimination on the basis of gender which has been reproduced in most codes of ethics across the globe.

However, most journalists' codes of practice refer only to the principle of non-discrimination on the basis of gender, without providing further detail of what a sexist stereotype involves. A study of European Press councils conducted in 2009 show that only 15 of them specifically prohibit gender discrimination<sup>47</sup>.

Press councils and other instruments of self-regulation such as mediators have not been highly involved in the gender equality debate. Complaints concerning content contrary to gender equality remain very limited and cannot be departed from the lack of public knowledge about existing rules and the process for lodging a complaint<sup>48</sup>.

A "Commitment to self-regulation to improve women portrayal in the media" (Acte d'engagement pour une démarche d'autorégulation visant à améliorer l'image des femmes dans les medias) was signed by representatives of French media to improve the presence of women experts and raise awareness of newsrooms<sup>49</sup>. In 2013, key French media organisations representing 61 TV channels, radio stations and print publications signed a self-regulation agreement undertaking to strive to increase the number of women experts appearing in their programmes and articles. The agreement had been prepared by the Commission on the Image of Women in the Media, which comprised not only media and

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<sup>44</sup> <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/information-for-industry/guidance/diversity/diversity-guidance>

<sup>45</sup> Guide pratique pour une communication publique sans stéréotype de sexe, Haut Conseil à l'Egalité entre les femmes et les hommes, 2015

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.ifj.org/about-ifj/ifj-code-of-principles/>

<sup>47</sup> Codes, Press Councils and Discrimination in Europe, William Gore, 2009

<sup>48</sup> Handbook on the implementation of Recommendation CM/Rec (2013) 1 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on gender equality in Media.

<sup>49</sup> Acte D'engagement pour une démarche d'autorégulation visant à améliorer l'image des femmes dans les médias, 2010 : [http://www.femmesenvue.eu/wp-content/uploads/charte\\_femmes\\_dans\\_les\\_medias.pdf](http://www.femmesenvue.eu/wp-content/uploads/charte_femmes_dans_les_medias.pdf)

regulators, but also educators, lawyers, health professionals and NGOs. The commission monitors compliance with the agreement, and produces an annual report.

The Canadian association of broadcasters in 2008 adopted a code on equitable portrayal<sup>50</sup>. It intends to overcome “unduly negative portrayal and stereotyping in broadcast programming, including commercial messages, based on matters of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, marital status or physical or mental disability.” In its specific section on “language and terminology” the code emphasises that “equality of the sexes must be recognised and reinforced through the proper use of language and terminology. Broadcasters shall employ language of a non-sexist nature in their programming, by avoiding, whenever possible, expressions which relate to only one gender.”

### 3. Initiatives from the media and journalists

While media have adopted guidelines on coverage of elections, including time, paid political advertising, right of reply and opinion polls, very few have inserted specific provisions on gender equality in election coverage. Some media have however taken some interesting steps towards better portrayal of women, although election coverage seems to be left aside in most initiatives.

*Belgian TV Notélé* is a local TV channel that proposed in the 1990s to all political parties to introduce diversity in their political debates and adapt their choice of representatives on stage. They scored 41.94% in the CSA 2014 study on women representation in pre-electoral debate.<sup>51</sup>

The *Gender, Media and Election Watch blog*<sup>52</sup> was set by members of the Network of Women in Media in India and aims to examine how political parties and candidates are viewing women’s issues, female electorates, candidates and examine the media’s handling of women voters and politicians.

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) is committed to providing programmes of great diversity that reflect the full range of audiences’ interests, beliefs and perspectives. Representing the whole spectrum is a requirement on all programme genres from arts to news and current affairs, from sport to drama, from comedy to documentaries, from entertainment to education and religion. In its 2016-2020 diversity and inclusion strategy<sup>53</sup> the BBC commits to build “a workforce at least as diverse, if not more so, than any other in the industry” , meet “portrayal targets that cover a much wider range of diversity than any other broadcaster, with a bigger impact for audiences across a wider range of programmes”

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<sup>50</sup> Canadian Association of Broadcasters’ Equitable Portrayal Code (2008)

<sup>51</sup> La représentation des femmes dans les débats pré-électorales télévisés belges francophones, CSA, Belgium, May 2014

<sup>52</sup> <https://nwmigenderwatch.wordpress.com/>

<sup>53</sup> BBC Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2016-20 http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/diversity/pdf/diversity-and-inclusion-strategy-2016.pdf

and enhance their diversity culture by hardwiring “*diversity in what we do, making it something that everyone at the BBC understands and all those who make programmes for us supports*”. An important target for portrayal is to achieve “50% women on screen, on-air and in lead roles across all genres from Drama to News by 2020”.

A co-operation agreement between the Spanish government and the Spanish public broadcaster RTVE in 2009<sup>54</sup> entrusts and assists the broadcaster with the dissemination of content on all its channels promoting gender equality and combating violence against women. The agreement also requires that all advertising on RTVE be in accordance with the principle of non-discrimination on grounds of gender. Lastly, the agreement provides for training on equality for RTVE employees.

*Tonight with Vincent Browne*, a late evening current affairs television programme aired by TV3 in Ireland, decided in 2012 to bring in a policy of gender parity<sup>55</sup> – meaning that half of the experts interviewed should be women. Though it has not been formally evaluated, TV3’s policy has influenced the media landscape in Ireland, and other broadcasters have followed suit.

Italian public broadcaster RAI published data on the representation of politicians during the 2014 electoral campaigns on a weekly basis.

*Global Voices* is a citizens’ media news site that provides a space for individuals to write about politics. According to *The Guardian’s* open gender tracker team women produce 51% of all posts.

A number of initiatives have been launched to improve the presence of women as experts in the news. One of the latest is *Expertalia*<sup>56</sup>, a database of female experts developed by the Belgian Association of professional Journalists (AJP) to respond to women’s absence as news sources. Another example is *Expertes.eu*<sup>57</sup>, a database of female experts launched by the French public service broadcasters (Radio France and France Television) to increase women’s presence in their programmes. Useful tips on how to manage those lists have been developed by Danish KVINFO database<sup>58</sup>.

In Sweden, Prognosis<sup>59</sup> is an online gender equality tracker that monitors social media interactions and gender equality through algorithms.

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<sup>54</sup> <http://www.rtve.es/noticias/20090707/rtve-tendra-programacion-especifica-favor-igualdad-entre-hombres-mujeres/283924.shtml>

<sup>55</sup> <http://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/good-practices/ireland/irish-current-affairs-programme-gives-women-equal-place>

<sup>56</sup> [www.expertalia.be](http://www.expertalia.be)

<sup>57</sup> <http://expertes.eu>

<sup>58</sup> <http://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/good-practices/denmark/kvinfo-expert-database>

<sup>59</sup> <http://www.prognosis.se/>

#### 4. Civil society initiatives

The She-Expert Initiative<sup>60</sup> was launched by the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies in Cyprus to improve the “visibility of women in the media, increase the inclusion of women’s voices on key issues in the national dialogue, fight sexism and bias in media coverage, and increase professional opportunities for women”. The project is developing an online “Expert Women’s Platform and Database” with the aim to become the leading source of expert women for organizations, employers, political parties, as well as the media in Cyprus.

The NGO Forum 50%<sup>61</sup> launched in collaboration with The Nordic Chamber an international mentoring and training programme for female candidates in the Czech Republic. This initiative is inspired by Denmark and Norway, where political parties run mentoring programmes and training courses for female politicians. Activities include workshops, trainings and consultancy, training of women politicians and women interested in politics, networking and mentoring and media campaigns to support women politicians in the elections (public discussions, press conferences, workshops, web site, conferences) as well as studies on women's representation.

CELEM, the Spanish coordinator of the European Women’s Lobby, developed a database of gender-aware journalists to ensure that gender equality concerns are sent to Spanish media and are no longer ignored. It researched the journalists likely to be sympathetic to the cause of women’s equality and developed a database. The database contributed to raise the profile of women’s issues in the press, claims CELEM. It has helped journalists to take a gender perspective when reporting the news, and established CELEM as an expert source of information on gender<sup>62</sup>.

In Slovakia the organisation “*Freedom of Choice*” worked together with media organisations to promote, discuss, provide options for and develop Codes of conduct for different media and the Council for Broadcasting and Retransmission, the Advertising Standards Council and other bodies. This was part of a larger activity with the Ministry on sensitizing the media. Other activities included the assessment of the role of media in gender equality and gender stereotyping, a gender analysis of media communications and gender institutions, sexism and gender discrimination in advertising, a gender analysis of media organisations as a workplace (vertical and horizontal segregation) and lastly, an analysis of self-regulation in media ethics and gender equality<sup>63</sup>.

#### 5. Tools and guidelines to improve gender portrayal in media coverage

A few existing tools can be very useful to monitor gender portrayal in the news and some of them are specifically dedicated to election reporting.

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<sup>60</sup> <http://www.medinstgenderstudies.org/call-for-applicants-experts-womens-initiative/#more-6539>

<sup>61</sup> <http://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/good-practices/czech-republic/czech-female-politicians-learn-international-experience>

<sup>62</sup> <http://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/good-practices/spain/database-gender-aware-journalists>

<sup>63</sup> <http://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/methods-and-tools/slovakia/codes-conduct>

The *Election coverage from a Gender perspective, a media monitoring manual*<sup>64</sup> by UN Women and Idea provides a monitoring tool to assess the presence of women in election coverage as well as the gender topic in political debates.

The *Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP)* is ran by the World Association of Christian Communications (WACC). Every five years researchers, students and media professionals around the world analyse the presence of women in the news. The analysis takes place on one and the same day around the world and looks into politicians' presence in the news, but also into persons who report on politics. The GMMP provides analysis grids that are recognised monitoring standards used by all researchers involved in the monitoring. This allows for comparison and definition of general trends across regions.

UNESCO's *Gender Sensitive Indicators in the Media*<sup>65</sup> supports the monitoring of women and men presence in media and news content including in politics. While not making specific reference to elections, the indicators focus on important aspects such as the proportions of men and women producing or reporting various news subjects including politics, women and men appearing in news on politics or stories highlighting gender equality/inequality aspects of events, and issues including politics and government.

The *Learning resources kit to strengthen gender-ethical journalism and media policy* launched by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and the World Association of Christian Communications (WACC) contains a whole chapter on reporting on women in public office, including a sample story analysis, facts about women in government and reporting guidelines for journalists<sup>66</sup>.

*Portraying Politics* is a toolkit on gender and television. It aims to stimulate debate among journalists, programme-makers, media managers and journalists' teachers on the way media portray politicians on television. Created by representatives of European public TV, journalists' organisations and journalism training centers, it aims to "make visible the media practices" involved in the representation of women and men in public life and promote "critical reflection and change".

In addition, it must also be noted that academic research plays an important role in the understanding of the issues.

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<sup>64</sup> Election coverage from a Gender perspective, a Media monitoring Manual, UN Women, IDEA

<sup>65</sup> Gender-Sensitive Indicators for Media, Framework of indicators to gauge gender sensitivity in media operations and content, 2012

<sup>66</sup> Learning resources kit to strengthen gender-ethical journalism ad media policy, IFJ and WACC, 2012



## Part IV. Recommendations

### 1. Regulatory and self-regulatory mechanisms

Member states should be encouraged to define gender equality in legislation covering the media and make it an explicit part thereof, ensuring that a clear distinction is made between that principle and the protection of diversity.

Member states should adopt concrete mechanisms for the implementation of the legislation and policies to achieve gender equality in the media coverage of electoral campaigns. These mechanisms should aim at enhancing women's visibility in electoral campaigns and their access to the media by building their capacity to campaign and participate in media public debates.

Member states should, through legislation, policies and other means, encourage political parties to develop internal policies mindful of a gender equality perspective and to ensure a balanced representation for men and women in electoral campaigns.

Member states should encourage dialogue among media practitioners and self-regulatory bodies on the gender perspective of the coverage of elections, including by promoting self-regulatory mechanisms for individual complaints regarding media content contrary to gender equality.

Member states should encourage self-regulatory bodies and media outlets to review the composition of editorial teams and the assignment of subjects to journalists with consideration of the gender breakdown. They should also encourage more female news and general media staff and promote women in the leading roles.

Member states should encourage the media to adopt measures for monitoring the production and supply of media content respecting a balance between women and men during election campaigns. Member states may also set up gender equality requirements for the media with regard to production and dissemination of programmes concerning politics and elections. Media should further be encouraged to set up good practices aiming at:

- 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;
- 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;
- Avoiding using gender stereotyping or biased language;
- Making equal gender representation a matter of editorial policy;
- Avoiding the "tabloidization" of media in terms of the representation of female candidates;

- Avoiding that women candidates are identified in respect of their family status or their relationship with others (“mother”, “wife”, “daughter”, etc.);
- Promoting the training of journalists on gender aspects so that they are encouraged to publicly highlight issues faced by women candidates;
- Monitoring gender commitments made by political parties and reporting on their progress;
- Monitoring regularly their own output setting targets for an equal gender representation.

## **2. Media educations and trainings**

Member states should be encouraged to implement measures that promote media education and media literacy and to integrate them into schools’ curricula, providing for a steady process of awareness-raising in respect of gender equality, gender portrayal and sexist discrimination.

Member states should ensure accessibility and dissemination, in their respective languages, of gender equality tools such as the UNESCO’s Gender sensitive Indicators in the media, the UN Women reporting on elections and training material such as Portraying Politics.

Member states should be encouraged to develop gender equality modules in journalism schools, including modules on covering elections through a gender lens, and to mainstream gender equality across all journalism courses to provide students with a critical approach to media representation of both sexes. They should also support life-long learning on gender equality including on election coverage for journalists, editors and other media workers at all levels of media governance, as well as for self-regulatory bodies.

Member states should encourage and support media companies to develop their own gender policies with regards to media content, including on election coverage, and encourage them to set up monitoring mechanisms to assess implementation.

## **3. Research**

Member states should be encouraged to conduct additional research on different aspects of election coverage to make the problem more visible, in particular to:

- Analyse the impact of biased election coverage, from a gender perspective, on voters’ perception of male and female politicians during elections campaigns;
- Measure and analyse the impact of social media sexism during election campaign on voters;
- Provide regular reporting on women portrayal;
- Conduct research on media coverage of elections campaigns including detailed indications of how male and female politicians are treated by the media;

- Conduct research on how media coverage differs for women politicians, across types of office, party and ethnicity and how women and men politicians are framed;
- Make the results of those studies known to the public at large and also to media organizations and media professionals and journalist students.

## Conclusions

**1.** Women and men continue to be subject to significantly different portrayal in the news. The same conclusions can be reached about women and men running for office. While few studies in Europe have regularly looked into the media coverage of election with a gender lens, findings show that men are more visible and that women are still subject to discrimination.

Although the data and initiatives presented in the study lead us to conclude that there is a growing awareness about the issues of gender equality in the field of politics and media, there is still little research into the portrayal of women candidates for elections. Also the volume of regulatory and self-regulatory instruments and standards is very limited.

The topic of gender equality in media coverage of politics should be systematically included in legislation. In addition, the implementation of the existing policies and practices across the member states of the Council of Europe should be continuously examined to acquire accurate overview on the implementation process, environmental changes and obstacles faced in gender mainstreaming.

As gender equality is a cross-cutting issue, the enlisted instruments are in most member states to be implemented across several sectors which may hinder prompt and proper implementation.

**2.** Furthermore, there is but few data available on the impact of the gender-biased media coverage of candidates on the outcome of the elections, and while existing instruments and accompanying guidelines provide adequate recommendations on how to remedy the gender bias in media generally, none have specifically focused on gender equality in the media coverage of elections. The Council of Europe's Recommendation on measures concerning media coverage of election campaigns – apart from the non-discrimination principle mentioned as a broader notion encompassing gender equality – does not contain special focus on gender equality in terms of media coverage.

The fact that there is a gender dimension to media pluralism and diversity of content has been duly acknowledged, but it still needs to be brought to attention of member states and all stakeholders in civil society in the context of media coverage of elections, with specific issues such as gender balance statements, angle from which the story is told, pluralism of sources, gender representation, and gender portrayals.

**3.** The study included social media and generally all new developments of media landscapes. It shows that social media and new media have so far not been much taken into consideration in existing research on gender equality in media, and on gender equality in

media coverage of elections. Neither have social media and new media been the focus of existing initiatives to improve gender equality in media coverage of elections.

While existing recommendations (as reviewed above) are still relevant, the Council of Europe, either through the adoption of new standard-setting instrument or through the revision of the existing Recommendation on measures concerning media coverage of election campaigns, has an opportunity to:

- reaffirm the need for action to address the issue and push for further mainstreaming of gender equality;
- address specifically the situation of gender equality in the media coverage of elections;
- address the situation of gender equality in the coverage of elections in new media and social media.

## Appendix – The standard-setting instruments of the Council of Europe

### **GENDER EQUALITY IN ELECTORAL PROCESS IS GOVERNED BY THE FOLLOWING INSTRUMENTS:**

- Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, 1950 (CETS No.005) and its Protocol No.12, 2000 (CETS No.177);
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966 (ICCPR);
- United Nations, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979 (CEDAW);
- UNESO Gender Sensitive Indicators for Media GSIM 2012;
- OSCE, Moscow Document, 1991;
- Council of Europe, Committee of Ministers, declaration on equality between women and men, 1997;
- Council of Europe, Committee of Ministers, Recommendation (2003)3on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making, 2003;
- Council of Europe, Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017, including the objective to achieve a balanced participation in political and public decision-making and gender mainstreaming in all policies and measures;
- OSCE/ODIHR and Venice Commission, Guidelines on political party regulation, 2010 ([CDL-AD\(2010\)024](#));

### **THE FOLLOWING VENICE COMMISSION DOCUMENTS:**

- 2002, Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters (CDL-AD(2002)023rev);
- 2006, Declaration on Women's Participation in Elections (CDL-AD(2006)020);
- 2009, Report on the Impact of Electoral Systems on Women's Representation in Politics (CDL-AD(2009)029);
- 2015, Report on Proportional Electoral Systems: the Allocation of Seats inside the Lists (open/closed lists) (CDL-AD(2015)001);
- 2015, Report on the method of nomination of candidates within political parties (CDL-AD(2015)020);
- OSCE/ODIHR, Election Observation Handbook, sixth edition;
- International IDEA, Atlas of Electoral Gender Quotas, 2014.

### **WHEN IT COMES TO MEDIA COVERAGE AND GENDER EQUALITY IT IS GOVERNED BY HEREAFTER STATED INSTRUMENTS:**

- Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2007\)15](#) of the Committee of Ministers to member states on measures concerning media coverage of election campaigns;
- Recommendation [No. R \(99\) 15](#) of the Committee of Ministers to member States on measures concerning media coverage of election campaigns;
- Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2013\)1](#) of the Committee of Ministers to member States on gender equality and media;

- [Handbook](#) on the implementation of Recommendation CM/Rec(2013)1 on gender equality and media;
- [Recommendation 1931 \(2010\)](#) and [Resolution 1751 \(2010\)](#) on Combating sexist stereotypes in the media, Parliamentary Assembly, 25 June 2010;
- [Resolution 1557](#) and [Recommendation 1799 \(2007\)](#) on the image of women in advertising, Parliamentary Assembly, 2007;
- Recommendation [CM/Rec\(96\)10](#) of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the guarantee of the independence of public service broadcasting;
- Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2007\)3](#) of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the remit of public service media in the information society;
- Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2004\)16](#) of the Committee of Ministers to member states on right of reply in the new media environment;
- The Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2007\)2](#) on media pluralism and diversity of media content;
- Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2011\)7](#) of the Committee of Ministers to member States on a new notion of media