

How marketing and advertising affect equality between women and men

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The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality adopted the own-initiative report drafted by Eva-Britt **SVENSSON** (GUE/NGL, SE), on how marketing and advertising affect equality between women and men.

First of all, MEPs note the continued widespread existence of male and female stereotypes despite various Community programmes to promote gender equality. They believe that further research would help elucidate any link between gender stereotyping in advertising and gender inequality. They emphasise that gender stereotypes must be eliminated.

The main issues of this report are as follows:

Better respect of legislation: Member States should respect the commitments they undertook through the European Pact for Gender Equality and adhere to the guidelines adopted through various Community programmes and guidelines focussing on gender equality. The Commission is called upon to monitor the implementation of existing provisions in European law on sex discrimination and incitement to hatred on the grounds of sex.

Zero tolerance: MEPs call on the EU institutions and Member States to develop awareness actions on zero tolerance across the EU for sexist insults or degrading images of women in the media. They call on Member States to establish national media monitoring bodies with a specific gender equality branch and expertise in order to receive complaints from the public, to grant gender equality awards to media and advertisement professionals, to study and report on the question of women in the media and to carry out regular, systematic monitoring of gender images in media content. In addition, research may be undertaken by the future European Gender Institute.

Gender stereotyping: MEPs note that stereotyping is utilised in marketing directed at both adults and children. They stress that stereotypes in advertising on children's television programmes are a special problem because of their potential impact on gender socialisation and, subsequently, children's views of themselves, family members and the outside world. To combat gender stereotypes in the media and advertising, MEPs call for efforts to be accompanied by education strategies and measures to cultivate awareness from an early age and develop the critical faculties as from adolescence. They stress the fundamental role which should be played by the school system in developing children's critical faculties with regard to images and the media in general, in order to prevent the disastrous effects of the recurrence of gender stereotypes in marketing and advertising. They believe that there is a need to eliminate messages contrary to human dignity and conveying gender stereotypes from textbooks, toys, video and computer games, Internet and the new information and communications technologies (ICTs), as well as advertising through different types of media.

Media to blame?: noting with extreme concern the advertising of sexual services, which reinforce stereotypes of women as objects, MEPs stress the importance of the role played by the media in creating and perpetuating gender stereotypes. They call on the EU institutions and Member States to comply with and/or establish ethical codes and/or legal rules applicable to creators and distributors of advertising concerning the concepts of discriminatory advertising and demanding respect for values of human dignity. The report notes the need to conduct continuous training actions for media professionals and, in collaboration with them, awareness training actions for society on the negative effects of gender

stereotypes. It highlights that media portrayals of the ideal body image can adversely effect the self-esteem of women, particularly teenagers and those susceptible to eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa. It recommends that broadcasters, magazine publishers and advertisers adopt a more responsible editorial attitude towards the depiction of extremely thin women as role models and portray a more realistic range of body images.

Codes of good conduct: MEPs call on the Member States to ensure by appropriate means that marketing and advertising guarantee respect for human dignity and the integrity of the person, are neither directly nor indirectly discriminatory nor contain any incitement to hatred based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, and do not contain material which, judged in its context, sanctions, promotes or glamorises violence against women. They note that the codes of conduct in the mass media and new information and communications technologies (ICTs) rarely include gender considerations, and that this is a problem that needs to be solved. MEPs encourage regulators in all Member States to share best practice with regard to these issues. A 'Code of Conduct' should be developed for advertising in which marketing communications respect the principle of equality between men and women and in which sex stereotyping and any exploitation or demeaning of men and women are avoided.

Follow best practices: MEPs consider that all Member States should, like Spain, which has established a prize for 'creating equality', make official the award of a prize by advertisers to members of their own industry, and a prize awarded by the public, to reward advertising which best breaks with gender stereotypes. They underline the need to disseminate the principles of gender equality through the media by means of publications and programmes, designed for different age groups, to popularize best practices and respect for gender differences. Member States are called upon to design and launch educational initiatives, developed in the spirit of tolerance and eschewing all forms of stereotyping, which significantly disparages the relationship between men and women. , to promote the culture of gender equality by means of appropriate educational programmes.