How marketing and advertising affect equality between women and men

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The European Parliament adopted by 504 votes to 110, with 22 abstentions, a resolution on how marketing and advertising affect equality between women and men.

The own initiative report had been tabled for consideration in plenary by Eva-Britt **SVENSSON** (GUE /NGL, SE) on behalf of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality.

Above all, the Parliament emphasises the importance of giving women and men the same opportunities to develop as individuals. It then notes the continued widespread existence of male and female stereotypes despite various Community programmes to promote gender equality. To discover more on this issue, the Parliament calls for further research into the matter with the aim of elucidating any link between gender stereotyping in advertising and gender inequality and asks that the results of this research be disseminated as widely as possible.

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

Combating sexist insults: the plenary calls on the Council, the Commission and Member States to develop awareness-raising actions against sexist insults or degrading images of women and men in advertising and marketing. It also calls on the Member States to study and report on the image of women and men in advertising and marketing. A whole series of actions have been proposed to combat gender stereotypes, including through education and awareness-raising. The Parliament stresses that stereotypes in advertising on **children's television programmes** are a particular problem because of their potential impact on gender socialisation and, subsequently, children's views of themselves, of their family members and of the outside world. It notes that efforts to combat gender stereotypes in the media and advertising should be accompanied by **education strategies** and **measures to cultivate awareness** from an early age and to develop critical faculties from adolescence onwards. The Parliament stresses, in particular, the fundamental role which should be played by the education system in developing children's critical faculties with regard to images and the media in general, in order to prevent the unwelcome effects of the perpetuation of gender stereotypes in marketing and advertising.

Stereotypes in textbooks and computer games: the Plenary draws particular attention to the need to eliminate from textbooks, toys, video and computer games, the internet and the new information and communications technologies (ICTs), and from advertising through different types of media, messages which are contrary to human dignity and which convey gender stereotypes. It notes with particular concern the advertising of sexual services which reinforces stereotypes of women as objects, in publications which are readily visible and available to children.

Media to blame: the Parliament condemns the major role played by the media in creating and perpetuating gender stereotypes. Beyond that, the Parliament notes the need to challenge traditional gender roles in order to achieve gender equality as well as the need to conduct continuous training for and in collaboration with media professionals, and **awareness training for society on the negative effects of gender stereotypes**. Given that the use of television and new technologies is increasing among children and adolescents, that such use starts at a very early age and that unsupervised television viewing is on the

rise, the Parliament calls 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. The Parliament also notes that marketing and advertising portrayals of the ideal **body image** can **adversely affect** the self-esteem of teenagers (and can lead to anorexia and bulimia). The plenary therefore calls on advertisers to consider carefully their use of extremely thin women to advertise products. At the same time, the Parliament reminds the Commission that Council Directive 2004/113/EC, when first proposed by the Commission, also covered discrimination in the media. It therefore calls on the Commission to intensify its efforts against this discrimination.

Set an example: the media are called upon to set an example from a gender perspective to show that change is possible and desirable. The Parliament considers that Member States should formally establish **awards** given by advertisers to their peers, and by the public for advertising which best breaks with gender stereotypes and presents a positive or affirming image of women and men and of the relations between them.

Best practices: the Parliament emphasises the need to disseminate the principles of gender equality through the media by means of publications and programmes, designed for different age groups, to popularise best practice and respect for gender differences. It emphasises the need for an ongoing debate on marketing and advertising and their role in creating and perpetuating gender stereotypes. It also calls on the Member States to design and launch educational initiatives developed in a spirit of tolerance and eschewing all forms of stereotyping. In conclusion, the Parliament emphasises that gender stereotypes must be eliminated. Note that the plenary did not accept the committee’s proposals calling on the Commission and the Member States to establish a **code of conduct** and more severe ethical and **legal rules** on this matter.