



# The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality

## Women and the Media

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## Comments Paper - Slovenia



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# Lack of gender equality perspective in media policy and practices

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## 1. Relevant context

### 1.1. Regulatory and policy framework

In Slovenia, the media sector is regulated by comprehensive media legislation. Several media laws are in place, totalling 300 articles. The main one, the Media Act, is over 160 articles long. Journalists and advertisers maintain self-regulatory bodies with their own codes of conduct. However, provisions on gender equality in the media are few, and mainly address the issue of media portrayal of women. They do not provide, however, any mechanisms for achieving gender equality in the media industry.

Legislation includes general provisions on prohibiting programmes and advertisements which encourage gender inequalities or other kinds of inequality. The same restriction is part of the principles set out in the RTV Slovenia Act, which are binding for all journalists and programme creators at RTV Slovenia. The journalistic Code of Conduct requires journalists to avoid gender and other stereotypes, while the Slovenian Code of Advertising Practice states that “advertisements shall not infringe upon the gender equality principle, and shall not portray men, women or children in an insulting or disparaging manner.” The criteria for granting subsidies to local and regional radio and television stations set out in the Media Act include the principle of equal opportunity for men and women, but this is not one of the criteria that need to be met when granting subsidies to other media.

At the same time, strategic documents drawn up as part of a gender equality policy have devoted some attention to the issue of gender equality in the media. The latest one – the National Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men 2015-2020 – prepared by the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities and adopted by the parliament, lists among the objectives of gender equality policy not only higher representation of women in the media content and less stereotypical representations of women (as was the case in past national programmes), but also increased presence of women in the leading positions of media organisations in Slovenia.

There is a lack of coordination between the state bodies in charge of gender equality policy and those tasked with media policy. National programmes for equal opportunities for women and men have had little impact on media policy. In a possible exception, the 2017 media development strategy proposal by the Ministry of Culture mentions the requirement of balanced representation of women in the governing bodies of the public service broadcaster. However, neither the government nor the parliament has adopted the proposed strategy or in other way instituted such a requirement.

## 1.2. A legacy of equal opportunity policies

Slovenia boasts a long tradition of organised institutional efforts to promote gender equality. These efforts date back to the socialist era. Women's movements and advocacy for gender equality were integral parts of the struggle to break with socialism and introduce democracy. These activities continued throughout the early 1990s after Slovenia became independent and began building its own institutions. Put differently, gender equality had been a prominent public issue long before it became a requirement for Slovenia's accession to the EU. For example, the Committee for Women's Policy, established in 1990, was part of the Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia when the country was still a part of Yugoslavia. In 1992, the government of the newly independent Republic of Slovenia established the Office for Women's Policy. This was renamed the Office for Equal Opportunities in 2001. Abolished in 2012, it continues to operate as an organisational unit of the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs, dubbed the Sector for Equal Opportunities.

On the other hand, civil society and individual scholars have put in a coordinated effort to bring about legislative changes and to introduce the principle of balanced representation of women and men in state bodies. Between 2004 and 2006, their continued efforts largely contributed to changes in the constitution and electoral legislation, leading to the introduction of gender quotas for candidates competing for offices in all bodies at all levels of political decision-making – in municipal boards, in the National Assembly and in the European Parliament. Later, this engagement resulted in the introduction of the preference vote.

## 1.3. Relevant data and good practices

In Slovenia, women have managed to break through the glass ceiling and exceed the one-third share in terms of their presence in television programmes and in terms of the number of senior positions they hold in media organisations. This is a finding of the 2012/2013 research project "Women in Media Industries in Europe," conducted under auspices of the European Institute for Gender Equality.<sup>1</sup> However, this conclusion only holds if we take into account all the roles played in television programmes and all decision-making levels. A closer look, unfortunately, tends to dispel optimism. The one-third share was exceeded thanks to an extraordinarily high share of female journalists in the TV shows we monitored. Similarly, the share of women occupying managerial positions within media organisations is rather high because many women occupy operational, rather than strategic, decision-making positions. Women working for media organisations in Slovenia explain this by reference to the media crisis, which has diminished the significance attached to such positions and ultimately led to lower salaries. As a matter of fact, managerial positions in such circumstances imply crisis management, which in their opinion, was why they were finally given access to attain such positions. The women media managers who were interviewed for another research project also pointed out the elements of gender discrimination present in employment procedures, promotions and salaries.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> B. Petković (2017), "Slovenia". In: K. Ross & C. Padovani (eds.), *Gender Equality and the Media. A challenge for Europe*. London: Routledge, p. 184-195.

<sup>2</sup> Ž. Humer (2014), *Enakost spolov in mediji – Raziskovalno poročilo* [Gender equality and media – Research report]. Ljubljana: Peace Institute.

### 1.3.1 Monitoring media industry by civil society and academic organisations

In Slovenia, data on the representation of women in the media are occasionally generated by civil society monitoring or by academic research, with no major impact on public policies and media industry practices. A civil society organisation Meta Dekleta [Meta Girls] has been monitoring, on a monthly basis, the representation of women in the Slovenian print media. Earlier, it monitored the most watched news and current affairs programmes from a range of television channels in Slovenia. The organisation has been publishing monthly reports on women representation in media content since December 2014. According to the summary of a longitudinal study published in September 2018, the average share of women in TV news, current affairs programmes, interviews and commentary/opinion pieces in print media in Slovenia is 27 percent. The share of women is higher in commercial than in public TV news programmes.<sup>3</sup> The same organisation observed the 2018 election reporting, covering five print media, three news web sites, two radio and four TV programmes. Women were mentioned in 17 percent of almost 2,000 election reports, and were quoted in only 5 percent of them. In the most watched pre-election TV debates, the share of women in both the number of speakers and the time afforded them was 8 percent.<sup>4</sup> This relates to the small number of women political party leaders and to the scarcity of female candidates on whose activities the parties and the media focus.

Between 1998 and 2013, the Media Watch programme within Ljubljana's Peace Institute conducted regular analyses of media practices and media policy. The programme published the Media Watch journal and books, and organised public debates. Media Watch regularly featured feminist analyses of media discourses and media policy. In 2002, the Peace Institute published *Making Her Up*, a collection of analyses of women's magazines in Slovenia,<sup>5</sup> followed in 2004 by a short manual for the media on the observation of gender equality in reporting.<sup>6</sup> The Media Watch programme was discontinued due to lack of funding.

The study "Women in Media Industries in Europe" has encouraged a follow-up academic research on women and media in Slovenia. In 2014, the Peace Institute conducted the survey entitled "Gender Equality and the Media", which was supplemented by a series of debates held in four Slovenian towns and a national conference on this subject. The study concluded that gender roles are stereotyped in the media and that gender equality is lacking both in media content (representation) and in media organisations (employment). Instances of gender-based discrimination in the media are not uncommon and occur in relation to both recruitment and promotion, to salaries and financial bonuses. The report further argued for the establishment of training and education programmes on gender equality for staff in media companies.<sup>7</sup> Between 2015 and 2018, the research project "Gender Differentiation in the Media Industry" has been conducted by research teams at the Peace Institute and the Faculty of Social Sciences of the

<sup>3</sup> Metina Lista (2018), *Medijske objave o parlamentarni volilni kampanji 2018* [Media reports on parliamentary election campaign 2018].

<sup>4</sup> Metina Lista (2018), op. cit.

<sup>5</sup> M. Hrženjak et al. (2002), *Making Her Up – Women's Magazines in Slovenia*. Ljubljana: Peace Institute.

<sup>6</sup> M. Hrženjak & R. Šribar (2004), *Priročnik za medije o upoštevanju načela enakih možnosti spolov* [Manual for media on consideration for principle of equal opportunities for men and women]. Ljubljana: Peace Institute/Media Watch.

<sup>7</sup> Ž. Humer (2014), *Enakost spolov in mediji – Raziskovalno poročilo* [Gender equality and media – Research report]. Ljubljana: Peace Institute.

University of Ljubljana, drawing on the theoretical principles of a feminist political economy of communication.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Policy debate

### 2.1. Policy development and regulatory bodies

In 2018, a new government was elected in Slovenia. Its coalition agreement promises a reform of media regulation, focused especially on the governing model of public service media and on the system of media subsidies. This opens the possibility for the introduction of legal provisions and policy measures aimed at promoting gender equality in the media. Strategic documents, such as the latest National Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, can serve as a basis for these policy changes.

This can lead to a provision of more concrete instruments to the Ministry of Culture (the ministry responsible for media policy development, for implementation of media law through its culture and media inspectorate, and for distribution of state subsidies) and to AKOS, the regulatory agency responsible for electronic media, to promote gender equality in the media.

After Slovenia had declared its independence, it introduced media education as an optional elementary school subject in the mid 1990's. However, the country has not followed the developments and needs for integration of media and information literacy at all levels of formal and informal education. The 2014-2017 National Programme for Culture,<sup>9</sup> adopted by the parliament, lists among media policy goals the increased level of media literacy and announces introduction of measures such as cooperation between sectors, obligation of public media to increase production of media literacy programmes, and financial support for civil society programmes that promote media literacy. These commitments, though, did not lead to concrete measures. The 2017 proposal of media development strategy until 2024 included similar goals. The policy debate expected during the reform of media regulation can be used for prompting policy solutions and measures to increase media literacy. This process can include actions related to gender equality issues in the media.

### 2.2. Self-regulation

Self-regulatory systems within media outlets, in journalists' associations and in the umbrella organisation of the advertising industry have been challenged on their professional misconducts against gender equality. This, for example, has led to strengthened cooperation between the Slovenian Association of Journalists and the Association SOS Help-line for Women and Children - Victims of Violence. The two entities have jointly developed a series of workshops and guidelines for journalists on how to report violence against women.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Gender Differentiation in the Media Industry, project description and interim results available at the web site of the Peace Institute at <http://www.mirovni-institut.si/en/projects/gender-differentiation-in-media-industry/>.

<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Culture (2013), *National Programme for Culture 2014-2017*. Available at:

<http://www.mk.gov.si/fileadmin/mk.gov.si/pageuploads/Ministrstvo/Drugo/novice/NET.NPK.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> K. Matko & D. Horvat (2016), *Kako poročati o nasilju v družini in nasilju nad ženskami – Priročnik za medije*. [How to report on domestic violence and violence against women – Manual for media]. Ljubljana: Društvo SOS telefon za ženske in otroke – žrtve nasilja.

Upon receiving complaints from watchdog and rights groups, from individual activists and scholars, the Ombudsperson of the public service broadcaster, RTV Slovenia, has addressed misrepresentation of women, particularly with regard to the share of female experts given voice in the news and current affairs programmes of TV Slovenia, but also in respect of the gender-insensitive language used by programme creators, and of the framing of the abortion debate in television programmes. The current debate within RTV Slovenia on the renewal of the code of conduct for programme creators includes a reference to the cases raised by the Ombudsperson.

Online hate speech and online abuse of women, including online attacks on female journalists, have urged the debates and initiatives for reforming the penal code and media regulation in Slovenia. Also, these episodes have underscored the need for improvements in the self-regulation of online media with public comment sections, and for monitoring and reporting online hate speech and abuse. Currently, the self-regulation system is stagnating. A small number of mainstream online media take part in a self-regulatory mechanism. They moderate their comment sections and feature a button for reporting hate speech to the “Spletno oko” hotline, where specialists analyse the reports and cooperate with the police and prosecutors in any further actions. The 2016 revision of the Media Act introduced the obligation of the online media with comment sections to adopt and publish the rules for commenting, and to ensure the removal of the content which violates the rules. This provision serves as a form of co-regulation but lacks efficiency.

### 3. Transferability aspects

The following policies could be transferred to Slovenia: 1) Introduction of Gender Equality Observatory within the Ministry of Culture, providing data about women’s functions and wages in the public audio-visual sector (or overall in public cultural institutions). 2) Introduction of additional monitoring and regulatory powers to the regulatory agency for electronic media in Slovenia related to gender representation in national television and radio services. 3) The work of the High Steering Committee for Gender Equality in France in debunking sexism and stereotypes in the media can inspire similar actions of the Gender Equality Expert Council within the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunity in Slovenia. 4) The umbrella organisation of advertising industry and the national press agency in Slovenia can follow the examples of the ARPP and the AFP in France in promoting gender equality principles. 5) Women’s Lobby Slovenia, Peace Institute and Metina Lista – representing a mixture of watchdog, rights and academic organisations – could develop joint actions/campaigns to denounce gender inequality in the media on a regular basis, under the same title, through the same online platform, similar to the work of some civil society, academic and feminist groups in France.

### 4. Conclusions and recommendations

The impressive scheme of state bodies in France with powers in the field of gender equality in the media, along with the wide range of activities of non-state actors, becomes less inspiring when the Discussion Paper explains the limitations and the remaining challenges. Despite all effort, the paper seems to reveal, little structural change has been achieved.

It seems that even if there is political will to introduce laws, institutions and policies, the media industry remains resistant to changes and improvements. One could draw similar conclusions regarding the adoption of various EU-level regulations addressing gender equality, regarding the prominent work of the European Institute for Gender Equality, and regarding the progressive ideas contained in the reports by the European Parliament, e.g. the one on gender equality in the media sector in the EU adopted in February 2018. In practice, not much has changed in terms of gender equality in the European media.

It can be concluded that gender inequality in the media must be addressed in a way which integrates various levels of inequality's origins. If we use the epistemology of the feminist political economic scholars, it is necessary to approach gender inequality in the media by a) questioning the macrostructures and policies of the (cognitive) capitalist economic system, b) addressing the mezzo level of organisational structures of media institutions and how they create audiences, and c) the micro level of symbolic constructions of meanings through media content, including advertisements.<sup>11</sup> If the micro and mezzo levels can be addressed by instruments and measures of cultural, media and educational policy (through media regulation, self-regulation, media literacy and education of media professionals), it seems that macro level of economic system (including work relations) remains less addressed.

The immense power of media corporations, and the concentration of media ownership in the hands of politically connected owners have been given free reign, enabling these actors to diminish and deflect efforts to make them serve the public interest. On the other hand, journalists and media content producers have been pushed into insecure, precarious and dependent work arrangements and economic positions, atomised and lacking the capacity to reflect on their own position and to fight for equality.

Simultaneously, various researches have illustrated that the media industry is very much subsidised throughout Europe, including France and Slovenia. We see the need to predicate direct and indirect state support, and the granting of any state-regulated status to media on whether these entities consistently implement regulations on labour, gender equality and other rights issues.

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<sup>11</sup> M. Pajnik (2017), "Spolna neenakost v produkciji in potrošnji televizije"[Gender inequality in production and consumption of television]. *Teorija in praksa*, 3-4, p. 606-611. E. R. Meehan (2002), "Gendering the Commodity Audience: Critical Media Research, Feminism and Political Economy". In: E. R. Meehan & E. Riordan (eds.) *Sex and Money: Feminism and Political Economy in the Media*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.