



Position paper

By the European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (CESI)

**The image of women in the media:
CESI demands an urgent readjustment**

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EN Brussels, 21.05.2012

Confédération Européenne des Syndicats Indépendants

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Having taken note of the growing importance of the media in all its forms in the lives of individuals for one thing and the lack of tools which enable us to decipher its message for another, in particular tools for the youngest members of our society, CESI is alarmed at the image of women which the media is currently sending out. CESI takes the view that the problem behind the way women are (re)presented in the media is twofold. For one thing, women are underrepresented when it comes to the choice of guests asked to speak on news programmes as well as play one of the main parts in fictional programmes. For another, women who are presented and represented on screen are predominantly boxed into stereotypical social roles and do not reflect the diversity of profiles in terms of age, appearance or origin.

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CESI feels that providing a realistic depiction of society and applying fairness in the way that media content is handled, especially with regard to gender equality, plays a key role in journalistic ethics and the overall quality of information provided. There would therefore seem to be a need for media professionals to bank less on what they presume to be the audience's expectations when setting out their programmes and arranging who will speak on them and paying more attention to the need to reflect life as it really is. CESI takes the view that readjusting media content and reconsidering who is asked to take part in a programme is a powerful force when it comes to improving the place awarded to women in society and the world of work.

The *Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) 2010*¹ sheds light on the biased image of women which is given out by the majority of European media, highlighting the fact that just 24% of the people seen or heard on the news are women, and that these women are, incidentally, often confined to a stereotypical task, or given an 'anonymous' role. For CESI, it is therefore urgent that media professionals give some thought to the place they give women on the news. In particular, it is inexcusable in CESI's view that just 20% of experts (according to the GMMP) contributing to the media are women. By providing a better reflection of society and by readjusting contributions in such a way as to include more women experts, the media should contribute towards providing citizens with positive women role models, in particular for young girls and young women. This is why CESI welcomes initiatives which aim to raise awareness of the deficit of women contributing to programmes and also do something to put the problem right, such as the Voxfemina initiative in France.

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At a time when the European Union is hoping to increase the participation of women in the labour market, an ambition which CESI supports, it is essential that medias do not just represent women in their personal and family dimension, as is too often the case at present. The GMMP thus highlights the fact that the subjects of news regarding the world of work are always, for the most part, men, even in sectors where there are more women. The only fields which provide an exception are people homemakers and students. For CESI, this helps damaging stereotypes take root when it comes to the participation of women in the labour market as well as hindering their career.

In particular, this is key when one considers technical or scientific subjects, where women are still less present than in other fields. At a time when a number of sectors are having difficulty recruiting young qualified workers, CESI feels that the media have their part to play in showing women who are active in these fields on a more frequent basis.

¹http://www.whomakesthenews.org/images/stories/website/gmmp_reports/2010/global/gmmp_global_report_fr.pdf

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Given the fact that not just women but also more and more men are facing the difficulty of striking the right work/life balance in their daily lives, CESI also feels that this reality needs to be highlighted in the various programmes. This can only help everyone make progress, men and women alike, when it comes to their aspirations being taken into account with regard to managing to combine a professional and private life.

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For CESI, improving the image of women in the media starts with raising awareness amongst journalists and future journalists as well as all workers in the sector of the media who play a part in establishing programmes, setting up editing teams and the way these teams deal with news content as well as addressing the issue of representation and its impact on the public.

Incidentally, at a time when the journalistic profession is continuing to attract women, the place occupied by women in decision-making positions within the various media remains extremely low. CESI, which incidentally welcomes current national and European initiatives which aim, via quotas or strong incentives, to promote the place occupied by women in decision-making bodies within companies and administrations, feels that the same instruments ought to be implemented on editing boards.

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