Parliamentary Assembly: Image of Women in Advertising

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The demeaning attitude that the advertising industry has towards women and the ensuing skewed image of women is a source of discontent for the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). The fact that approximately half of the world's population is being depicted in a humiliating and degrading manner and that women are being portrayed as consumer commodities or simply objects of lust can, according to the Assembly, in certain cases be considered offensive to human dignity. The fact that the health of young girls, in particular, can be negatively affected (e.g. anorexia) by manipulative advertising and the resulting controversial "standard of beauty", can only underline those concerns.

In order to achieve the fundamental goal that all women should be able to "see their real image faithfully reflected in the world in which they lead their daily lives", the Assembly has adopted a Resolution on this subject. In this Resolution, the Assembly emphasises that freedom of expression is also a fundamental right also for the advertising industry. It is, however, argued that it is possible to take adequate measures against the degrading portrayal of women whilst respecting freedom of expression.

On the grounds of the United Nations Convention of 18 December 1979 on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Assembly recommends that Member States of the Council of Europe consider three kinds of measures. First of all, adequate domestic laws need to be adopted to prevent further damage to the dignity of women. Secondly, there should be more emphasis on the promotion of self-regulation. The Resolution insists that national ethical codes should have a binding character, which must be enforced by authorities that are appointed solely for that purpose. Last, but certainly not least, the Parliamentary Assembly has proposed that Member States take what it refers to as "educational measures". These measures would provide "training to help people to react critically to advertising". A range of possible measures are outlined in the document including: training programmes at (advertising) schools, press campaigns for public awareness, contact points for complaints, and an award for the "advertising which breaks most effectively with sexist stereotypes".

In a subsequent Recommendation on the matter, the Assembly has asked the Committee of Ministers to, inter alia, draw up a European code of good conduct. By dealing with the problem on both the national and European level, the

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Parliamentary Assembly hopes to bring an end to common problems that result from degrading advertising.

Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Resolution 1557 (2007), provisional edition, "The image of women in advertising", 26 June 2007

http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta07/ERES1557.htm

Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Recommendation 1799 (2007), "The image of women in advertising", 26 June 2007

http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta07/EREC1799.htm

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