Gender stereotypes and discrimination in infotainment programmes through an important decision of the Greek Regulatory Authority

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A meeting of the "Working Group on Gender and Media" representing nine MNRA (Mediterranean Network of Regulatory Authorities) members was held in Lisbon in February 2018, during which the author represented the Greek Regulatory Authority (NCRTV). During this session, it was agreed that all participants would adopt a common three-month period of monitoring and analysing news reports and other current affairs programmes in at least two television channels (one public and the other one commercial with a high level of viewership). The scope of this study, articulated in both qualitative and quantitative parameters, was to elaborate the informative treatment of the gender violence issues in the above-mentioned programmes in order to draw significant conclusions about the attitude of media and journalists towards verbal or physical violence against women and therefore contribute to increasing public awareness. The study was completed by a questionnaire-based mapping of the current national legal framework on gender violence in every MNRA member.

The three-month monitoring period of the Greek media landscape proved that steps should be taken, particularly in the field of public awareness. Gender violence issues are more present in current affairs programmes or magazines than in news broadcasts. Even though public television often refers to gender violence using dramatisation, private television channels put more emphasis on the description of such issues using sophisticated techniques (such as zooming in) in a discriminatory manner. Additionally, in order to capture the audience's attention, private television channels avoid either an in-depth analysis of the facts or a presentation of any statistical evidence that could help the audience to identify gender violence as a social problem. On the contrary, public television takes care of informing the audience about counseling offices and helplines dealing with gender violence issues.

Until recently, the Greek legal framework did not contain specific rules on broadcasting gender-violence-related issues. According to Article 4, section 2 of Presidential Decree No. 77/2003 (Code of Conduct for Radio and Television News and Current Affairs Programmes), journalists reporting on news or current affair programmes should avoid any use of demeaning, racist, xenophobic or sexist

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vocabulary. Similar provisions related to sexual discrimination or derogatory remarks are included in Article 2 (a) and (f) of the 1998 Journalist's Union of Athens Daily Newpapers Code of Ethics, as well as in Article 5.1. of the 2016 Code of Ethics for Digital Media. Under the same scope, according to Article 10, section 1(d) of Presidential Decree No. 109/2010 on audiovisual media services, any gender discrimination in the context of an audiovisual commercial communication is prohibited.

The very recent Law No. 4604/2019 on promoting gender equality, preventing and combating gender-based violence expanded its scope of application to all categories of media or programmes, whether informative or not. It is specifically provided for that printed or electronic media, as well as advertising, should promote gender equality by reflecting a free-from-gender-stereotypes image of all individuals. Public or private television channels and radio stations are encouraged to include specific rules on gender equality and the elimination of stereotypes into their self-regulation or co-regulation codes of conduct. It is also prohibited to broadcast advertising that contains discrimination speech, as well as any reference to corresponding verbal or other behaviour. Most importantly, all media should elaborate and broadcast topics that contribute to promoting gender equality and fighting against discrimination and stereotypes.

A recent case examined by the Greek Regulatory Authority (NCRTV) proved that steps should also be taken in the field of self-regulation, as Law No. 4604/2019 suggests. A sexual assault took place in broad daylight at a university library; a young student assaulted a girl, who reacted instantly. The incident was reported during an infotainment programme broadcast on a private television channel with a high audience. This programme, usually on air at noon, contains news, as well as short interviews, music and entertainment issues. Instead of commenting on the assault in a context that could help mostly young viewers to identify the different aspects of gender violence and realise the impact that such behaviour can have on both the victim and on society, the panelists took a sarcastic approach which consisted in making humorous remarks on the sexual behaviour of the perpetrator, belittling the incident and demeaning the victim's reaction and feelings. Most of all, they never referred to the girl in question as being the victim of an assault; instead they presented the incident as being a funny instance of quirky student antics.

The NCRTV examined the case *ex officio* and imposed an administrative fine of EUR 150 000 for having violated the rules on human dignity and gender discrimination. It also ordered a week-long suspension of the transmission of the above-mentioned programme, a period during which the channel was charged with the obligation of informing its audience about the suspension by using a special window on the sreen (moral sanction). Decision No. 192/2019 (partially amended by Decision No. 5/2020 as regards the application of the moral sanction)

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was widely reported in the press and drew popular attention.This decision signals a proactive and strict attitude of the NCRTV and highlights that gender discrimination or derogatory speech consist a multi-aspect problem involving human dignity. Therefore, all kinds of programmes, including infotainment ones, should respect the legislation on gender discrimination. Moral sanctions costitute a nessecary measure to that effect, as they contribute to public awareness.

This case proved that the issues identified in the aforementioned three-month survey not only are present but they are actually exacerbated in infotainment programmes. The sensationalisation of gender violence issues may boost viewer ratings but at the same time belittles the impact of the problem and offends the personality of the victim. The existing Greek legal framework must be reinforced with self-regulation or co-regulation rules “in order to effectively fight against gender stereotypes in programmes” as the 2012 Lisbon Declaration on the fight against gender stereotyping in the audiovisual media suggests.

National Council of Radio and Television v. SKAI TV- Decision n. 192/2019 and Amending Decision n. 5/2020

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