



Communique

Regular meeting of National Assembly and Civil Society Cooperation Platform

on

"Hate speech in Armenian media: targeting women"

On December 2, 2019 "National Assembly-CSOs cooperation platform" (hereinafter the Platform) held its regular meeting on the topic of "Hate speech in Armenian media: targeting women".

The aim of the meeting was to present preliminary findings of the media monitoring on "Manifestations of sexism and violence on TV and online media: how gender sensitive Armenian media is" and to gather recommendations aimed at effective combating hate speech on media platforms.

The event is organized within the framework of "Modern Parliament for a Modern Armenia" project, which is implemented by UNDP in Armenia in partnership with the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia, OxYGen Foundation, Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) and International Center for Human Development. The project is supported by the British Good Governance fund and the Government Offices of Sweden.

The Platform meeting was attended by members of the National Assembly, officials from the Ministry of Justice, representatives of civil society and media organizations.

1. At the first part of the meeting, media expert Suren Deheryan presented the preliminary findings of the media monitoring on "Manifestations of sexism and violence on TV and online media: how gender sensitive Armenian media is"¹.

In the framework of the research three television channels and three online media outlets were monitored.

¹ The research was conducted in the framework of "Women in politics" project, implemented by UNDP Armenia, Ministry of territorial administration and infrastructure of Armenia, and the OxYGen Foundation with the support of UK "Good Governance Fund".

Preliminary results of the monitoring showed that gender related content made up only 5% of the total newsfeed and the number of gender-sensitive materials in online media were much higher than on television.

The monitoring of the TV channels showed that the situation is worse with the TV soap operas, where gender-sensitive attitudes are completely missing and derogatory stereotypes of women are being reproduced. Moreover, they also present the family model, family relationships and women in a distorted value system.

In addition, the authors of the monitoring see the danger in frequent use of insult and ribaldry in soap operas, pointing out that this leads to the formation of a distorted culture of communication which is also 'enriched' with elements of the criminal world.

Below is the presentation of the study.



2. During the discussion on hate speech, sexism, discrimination on the media and online platforms, the participants made number of suggestions for improvement of the field.

Legislative and political regulations.

- Consider the possibilities of combating abusive comments by users in online media, taking into account the provisions of Article 1087.1 of the RA Civil Code [1] and based on the case-law of the European Court "Dolphin vs. Estonia", according to which the media should be held responsible for comments that contain insults and should remove them from its platform when notified.

-Develop effective mechanisms to enforce the RA [Law](#) on Ensuring Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women to combat manifestations of sexism and discrimination against women. In particular - to further the law by by-laws to make it more operational.

-Exclude potential threats to freedom of speech and media freedom in the framework of the legislative initiative undertaken by the Government of Armenia towards criminalizing hate speech.

-To reach internal arrangements to use mechanisms in the political field aimed at preventing the use of the hate speech (for example, before elections the political forces can sign a document/statement under the slogan **Refuse the Hate Speech**).

-To consider [Not in My Parliament](#) initiative of the Council of Europe and [2275 \(2019\)](#)² resolution adopted by the PACE, as a basis for actions and initiatives combating the hate speech and extremism.

- Require disclosure and transparency of the real owners and sponsors of the media in the fight against the spread of hate and fake news. Set a requirement for special marking of promo materials.

Media regulations

- To organize seminars for journalists and cooperate with editors, writers, media managers, who make the decisions on the content of their media platforms.
- Prepare publication of topic-related professional guidelines for media representatives.
- Provide high quality translations of international documents into Armenian and make them available to the media representatives.
- To research and disseminate the best international experience in combating hate speech and sexism.
- To encourage self-regulatory initiatives, to cooperate with the media ethics observatory aiming to make amendments and improvements to the code of ethics (in particular, to suggest the media to insert provisions excluding gender discrimination and sexism in their ethical norms)
- Via by-laws, to define topic-related terminology for TV broadcasts ('horror', 'erotic', 'violence', etc.).

Regulations on the National Commission of Television and Radio

- To apply the oversight functions of the National Assembly over the National Commission of Television and Radio (NCTR), requesting clarifications on the cases of discrimination, violence, sexism and hate speech on television.

Proposals related to human rights activities

- Legally define the term "human rights activism" to avoid difficulties in filing lawsuits by human rights activists when applying to the court.
- To provide a comprehensive, impartial and effective investigation of cases of discrimination and hate speech against women human rights defenders and activists, thereby eliminating the atmosphere of impunity for hate speech and threats.
- To provide comprehensive statistics on hate speech against women human rights defenders and activists and collect information on judiciary cases and their progress.
- Run public campaign for valuating the role women play as defenders of human rights and activists.
- Publicly condemn the hate speech against women human rights defenders in the case such episodes are identified.

² PACE Resolution 2275 (2019), The role and responsibilities of political leaders in combating hate speech and intolerance <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-DocDetails-EN.asp?FileID=27636&lang=EN>

- Conduct a research, aiming to define the existence of sexism, violence and hate speech in the statements of "opinion-leaders", individuals with a large number of followers and subscribers on social platforms.

During the discussion, the following steps were agreed.

- To form a working group on the above-mentioned issues in the National Assembly with the involvement of CSO representatives.
- Circulate the final version of the media monitoring report, which will also include qualitative research results and recommendations for improving the field.
- Initiate another debate on this topic in January next year, inviting also Vahagn Tevosyan, a member of the National Assembly who is currently studying the international experience of media legislative regulations, to lead the work on the above-mentioned issues in the National Assembly.