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**GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN MEDIA IN THE BALKAN REGION AND  
THE EUROPEAN UNION COUNTRIES**

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Madam Chair, Dear Seminar Participants,

First I would like to thank United Women Banja Luka for your very kind invitation and the opportunity you have given me to come and address you all here today in Bosnia Herzegovina.

Since the workshop today will focus on Gender Mainstreaming in Media, I would first like to start by going back to the definition of this term, since I so often meet people who do not understand what it stands for. Gender mainstreaming as a concept appeared for the first time in international texts after the UN World Conference in Nairobi in 1985. At the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, the strategy of gender mainstreaming was endorsed by the Platform of Action which was adopted at the end of the conference. It stated that "governments and other actors should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programs, so that before decisions are taken an analysis is made of the effects on women and men respectively". It was also in 1995, during the preparations of the Beijing Conference that the Council of Europe decided to set up the Group of Specialists on mainstreaming which developed the present framework and methodology for gender mainstreaming. This Group of Specialists have agreed upon the following definition: "Gender Mainstreaming is the (re)organization improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that gender equality is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making". As stated by the European EQUAL program, gender mainstreaming is a pro-active process to tackle inequalities which can and do discriminate against either sex. Gender mainstreaming recognizes that differences exist in men's and women's lives and therefore our needs, experiences and priorities are different. Gender mainstreaming is ensuring that initiatives not only correspond to gender differences but seek to reduce gender inequality. For example the unequal use of time by women and men has a direct impact on work patterns and eventually on their life choices. Typical male paid work patterns, like full time continuous employment across the life cycle, impose a constraint on family time budgets. Women provide the flexibility because they are the ones who reduce their working hours or leave full time careers when the family needs occur. The result is that women continue to form the majority of the unemployed and of the poorly paid. Gender mainstreaming challenges the resource allocations and recognizes the strong link between women's disadvantage and men's advantage. It therefore provides a partnership between women and men to ensure that both participate fully in society's development and benefit equally from society's resources. Gender equality is the goal and mainstreaming the strategy. I think it is important to clarify this before we start to look at the situation of women and media.

The media can influence and shape the political agenda. They inform the public and reflect parts of the public opinion and what the public considers to be important. They can also have an influence in the shaping of the opinion of the public and policy-makers and can make an important contribution as an awareness-raising tool. The influence the media have in constructing and perpetuating values and norms is also crucial. It would therefore be important for the media to reflect on current gender relations and the strategy of gender mainstreaming, as well as the need to achieve gender equality and what this implies.

When we go back to the Beijing Platform of Action of 1995 two main objectives were adopted for women and mass media:

1. To increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication (ICT) and
2. To promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media

What has then been happening since the Beijing Conference?

Although progress has been made in several countries, women's image in the media remains a negative one and continues to be stereotyped and sexist according to a Council of Europe report. In recommendation 1555 the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly already in 2002 noted that while the contemporary world had undergone rapid change, the image of women in the media had not really altered and that little had been done by governments and media. And yet the European Commission funded a study on the image of women in the media with important recommendations and proposals to European governments which could have had the potential for an immediate implementation. Also the European Parliament Resolution A4-0258 has emphasized that member states' and European legislation are inadequate when it comes to protecting women from a degrading portrayal in the media. The above mentioned resolution called for that all forms of pornography in the media and advertising should be prohibited. In Canada, a group called Media Watch, organized the Global Media Monitoring Project, to examine women's portrayal and position in the media. Over 15.000 television, radio and newspaper reports were analyzed. The group's conclusions in 2000 stated that the situation had hardly changed since 1995. A small improvement had taken place in some countries but some situations had got worse. In every case, general news reporting failed to reflect women's actual place in society.

If the image of women in the media regularly since decades has been studied as a topical issue, a European Commission report reveals that certain countries like the Nordic ones, Germany, the Netherlands or the United Kingdom have carried out work in this area whereas other countries like France or Italy have done less due to that they did not consider it of necessary importance and as an area of research sufficiently legitimate. When we look at one of the Nordic countries, Finland, a Screening Gender Training kit was prepared to promote new approaches among program producers when it comes to the portrayal of women and men. The kit, which in the beginning was produced in English and German, has been so successful that additional funding was obtained from the European Commission to translate it into French, Italian and Spanish. In Finland, an ombudsperson has been made especially responsible for equality issues to ensure that national and European legislation is applied. The results have been very convincing in relation to the portrayal of women in the media. The Finnish ombudsperson namely deals with issues relating to the media and has as her main task the combating of human rights violations. Finland, Norway and Sweden have all extended their ombudsperson's duties to the media, radio and television. In Germany a media kit available in prototype form was prepared by Germany's Women Journalists Federation to provide media monitoring groups with the tools they needed to subject media content to critical examination and analysis, in order to make complaints and to publicize their comments more widely. German NGOs have pointed out that government makes no mention of a list of women media experts called for on many occasions during discussions. The Top link office which maintains a database covering women with specific skills was set up in the Netherlands to increase women's participation. In France the Watchdog association through verbal attacks regularly protests against the injustices women face in France. An Observatory for Gender Parity which reports directly to the French Prime Minister was set up in 1995 to draw up public policies to promote gender equality. Certain semantic changes also have led to improvements in France when it comes to the portrayal of women in the media. As traditionally masculine job titles give way to corresponding feminine ones, like for French female ministers now addressed as "Madame la Ministre", it contributes to changes within the political context as well as within society as a whole. In France the content of advertising is governed by a law from 1891 which does not contain specific measures as to gender discrimination. A special law adopted in 1986 with regard to the audiovisual sector refers to human dignity and prohibits violence of all forms. A report to the French government recommended starting to work on new measures so that associations should be able to complain to the courts when advertising campaigns go too far and show degrading images of women and do not respect human dignity. But there are still those who do not admit that advertisers go too far. The lack of training of media managers has led to an under-representation of women in media decision-making posts like for instance in the French broadcasting authority, the CSA. As to Spain, women hold 1% of shares in media firms, 30% of press posts although they constitute 60 % of students attending schools of journalism. The Andalusian institute for women is an official body which has close links to universities. It works with many press associations. One of the tasks is to study the role of women in the media and to take positive action to make sure that the image of women is correct and corresponds to reality. A survey of theirs has shown that women on the whole who have higher education watch less television. While women in general would prefer programs dealing with people's private lives or entertainment, those with university degrees prefer news programs. In Eastern Europe the Czech media have managed to keep their traditional, patriarchal approach with graphic images used in advertising which often go beyond what is considered tasteful and ethical. In southeastern Europe, when Croatia organized a fortnight of action to prevent violence against women in 1998 the group BaBe wrote a song and recorded a video with young female rap singers which achieved good media coverage and publicity. But generally speaking the editorial policies of the media in Croatia either take no account of equality or are simply anti-women. The portrayal of women is sexist and the gender equality principle practically nonexistent. If we look at several post communist countries like Albania, Bulgaria, Moldova and the former Soviet republics of the USSR, the image of women in the media is relatively negative. The media describe men as reformers, innovators, competent and courageous politicians, dynamic businessmen and so on whereas a limited role is attributed to women. These countries suffer from lack of democratic experiences and meet difficulties during the process of developing. The images of women in the media are evidences of the dramatic situation of women's human rights in these countries. Women's real problems or women's movements are ignored. Although journalism is a female profession in several post communist countries and that 80% of the members of the profession in Russia are women, many of them are not sensitive to the problems linked to women's rights and thus continue the stereotyping. There are no real links between women journalists and feminist movements. Training and co operation is vital for women journalists of this region. Many editors regard freedom of expression as giving the freedom to publish everything which was previously forbidden like pornography. The neo-liberal ideology which is taking over from the communist ideology does not care about active participation by women in political or economic developments and women are beginning to be regarded by public opinion as second class creatures or as victims of reforms. Women are portrayed in the media in a stereotypical way as wives and mothers or as sex objects. The current crises of the media in the former Soviet republics are linked to general economic and democratic crises, the absence of instruments which can be used by civil society and the passive nature of public opinion. The media depend on their owners and the authorities in many of the states put strong pressure on the free media as well as pressure to keep the press, national television and radio companies under control. A survey conducted by an Albanian group of media women found that 70% of the 200 journalists questioned thought that the press did not comply with the principles of ethics and violated women's rights. The major problem of professional ethics when dealing with women by journalists is the one of respect for individual privacy. Several Albanian NGOs who deal with women's issues have been unable to impose their views on the media or on society and have not managed to start a debate on women's image in the media.

Therefore it is quite clear that the undertakings at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 have not been honored by the participating and signatory states. Much progress remains to be done in every country needing a real political will to change the image of women in the media. When some countries have tried to set up self regulation machinery for media producers, their governments have not granted the necessary funds. Every European country should need to adopt and implement a policy to prevent sexist stereotyped images, representations and portrayals of women in the media.

More women are working in the mass media today than ever before especially in broadcasting. The press lags far behind the electronic area, with only 29% of stories written by female reporters according to Margaret Gallagher "Who makes the News?" and part of the Global Media Monitoring project, the most extensive worldwide research on gender in news. Women are half of the population but only a fifth of the news. According to this report, expert opinion in the news is overwhelmingly male. Only 21% of news subjects – the people who are interviewed or whom the news is about – are female. Men are 83% of experts and 86% as spokespersons. Particularly in stories that dominate the international agenda, news content reflects male priorities and perspectives. Research in the northern European countries reveals that women were mostly portrayed in roles with low social status: 47% of "ordinary citizens" and 37% of victims were women whereas men constituted the great majority politicians and experts. It was found that the largest female participation was in programs with traditional "women's topics" such as family affairs, social and health issues. Women were least represented in programs dealing with crime, technology/science and sports. Sports programs showed the smallest proportion of women (9%). The absence of women from news is the most powerful stereotype of all and is of course a terrible democratic deficit. There is also a definite age factor: the younger the woman the more likely she is to appear on the screen. 51% of those 19 years old or younger are women but the figure declines dramatically with age: of the over 50 year-olds only 20% are women. Past the age of 35 more men are reporting news than women. This of course suggests that appearance and age are criteria for women journalists and not for men. Even if media portrayal of gender relations and topics such as violence against women, equality before the law, women's right to education play an important role in international debates, they are almost non-existent in the news. Interaction between gender specialists and media professionals is therefore the only way forward. To reach the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) the United Nations Development Program note that negative portrayals of women in popular media and media insensitivity to women's rights have been identified as major impediments to gender equality by governments and civil society. Only two of the national MDG Reports mention the role of the media in countering negative stereotypes of women. This indicates a persistent lack of understanding of the role played by the media in counteracting inequality.

The European Women's Lobby (EWL), the largest umbrella organization of women organizations in Europe, has in its Road map for Equality between Women and Men 2006-2010, point 5.3 recalled the commitments made by the European Commission: "The media have a crucial role to play in combating gender stereotypes. It can contribute to presenting a realistic picture of the skills and potential of women and men in modern society and avoid depicting them in a degrading and offensive manner". As stated in the 2005 Global Media Monitoring Project in "Portraying politics –A toolkit on gender and television", the perceptions of politicians and the public in general are mainly forged by the media which more often than not maintain, reinforce and perpetuate gender stereotypes in our society. For example in the European media women and men are not asked questions on the same subjects.

The media have an enormous influence on the people who buy magazines, read newspapers, listen to the radio, watch television or surf on the internet. All these media help shape fashion. The role model for women of today is one where the physical criteria is more important than the intellectual one and to reach this criteria many women are prepared to make necessary sacrifices. However the consequences of these sacrifices might be complex, unhappiness or even illness like bulimia or anorexia among girls but also among older women. In the struggle to be attractive many women suffer such identity problems that they resort to plastic surgery or even commit suicide.

Media does not determine opinions or attitudes. Rather media mirrors social realities as well as prevailing values and contributes to affect and shape people's perceptions. The role of the media and in particular of TV is often debated. So far, the great majority of men find it to their short term advantage not to question the dominance of the masculine ideal. Independence of the media is a fundamental cornerstone in democratic societies but today's media is far from gender neutral and is actually maintaining stereotypes and thereby preventing equality between the sexes. As pointed out in the report of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men of the Council of Europe: "Women have always been associated with the private sphere, the household and family life. But while the modern world has changed rapidly, the image of women conveyed by the media has not really altered. The way in which the media show women reflects the current journalistic culture, based on male values. It is therefore vital to refocus the female and male ideals. Even if the number of women in charge of companies or leading higher education establishments has increased, it does not prevent the media from continuing to highlight women's appearance rather than their skills. Media management is largely in the hands of men and it is usually men who are engaged in specialized journalism like covering employment issues, politics, economics and sport. Women tend to report on culture, social affairs and health or issues related to children, disabled or general family matters. This may be regarded as a natural choice, but in contemporary society the various spheres of life are increasingly open to both sexes and women work just as much in the private as in the public sphere. The conflict between the two spheres is

intensifying and women, including those who work in the media very often have to opt for one of the two. Those who choose to be journalists frequently are doing so on the basis of a male model and female journalists holding senior management posts are usually single or divorced.”

Increasing internationalization and commercialization of media is reflected in the common trends of the production of TV-shows, soap operas and reality-TV. All of these tend to give traditional images of women often with a stress on women as sexual objects or as “the weaker sex”. Anyone who looks closely at advertising knows that it is usually men who are shown driving cars whereas women promote shower gels or shampoos. Women are sometimes shown naked even when the products advertised have no whatsoever connection with the human body or with hygiene. TV entertainment mainly target women because they are seen as the main consumers. In northern European countries for instance women are the main decision-makers when it comes to purchasing goods for the family and the home. The focus on slimming, fixing house and garden reinforces traditional images of women’s roles as caretakers and homemakers. A much distorted image is usually given of women both in advertisements and in television serials. They are shown at work in only 8% of advertisements, and in TV-serials certain stereotypes are promoted frequently: if women are successful at work they have sad personal lives or if they are divorced they have problems with their children. Certain television and cinema films show women with careers as solitary or childless.

In a report to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on recommended ways to improve the image of women in the media you can read: “In a modern democratic society, the aim is nothing less than to create a new social contract under which men and women work on an equal footing and in ways which are complementary. In order to achieve this objective, men’s and women’s mentalities must change significantly. The media should stop depicting women as inferior to men and stop exploiting them as sex objects. It should be promoting a positive and realistic image of women. Journalists and other media representatives should realize their responsibilities when presenting an image of women and men which is distorted or stereotypical. Violent and degrading images of women should be eliminated. Women and men should receive training from both male and female instructors. Emphasis must be placed on providing journalists with equality training to improve their priority selection, their presentation of subjects and teach them how to convey a non-sexist message. Media tends to focus on individuals who identify with a cause without worrying about their gender. It should give a thought to the way they view women in general, women politicians in particular, and make them take a new approach. Encouragement needs to be given to strengthen communication networks and women’s media active in gender equality work. Governments should in their national systems to improve women’s position, set up and finance centers to monitor national media. This monitoring should be extended to all media, including the new information and communications technologies”.

The most obvious change in the communications sector in the past years has been the emergence of the internet as an area where women can not only gain access to information but also to produce and disseminate their own information and run a network of their own. Women must have access to information and communication technologies to make it easier for them to set up worldwide networks. The internet offers a lot to women users: it represents cultural, economic and social progress. Unfortunately these new information communications technologies are frequently used for dishonest purposes by unscrupulous individuals. It has not taken long for pedophiles, pornographers and sects to realize their enormous potential. As virtually no mediators or boundaries apply to communication via the internet, anyone using it to commit unlawful or harmful activities runs less risk. The World Summit on the Information Society Process (WSIS), held in Tunis in November 2005 and highlighting the Gender Digital Divide, noted women’s limited access to and control over new technologies which deepens their already disadvantaged position in society. A full participation of women in the information society is necessary to ensure respect for human rights and gender equality. The Tunis Agenda wished to develop gender-disaggregated indicators to measure the digital divide but the section on financial mechanisms contains no references to women, the gender gap or specific gender budgeting. It is though increasingly obvious that the digital divide is visible not only between north and south but even within several countries where certain categories of women have access to the new technologies while others are left out, a situation which aggravates existing disparities.

The European Women’s Lobby (EWL) has stressed the correlation between the image of women sometimes portrayed by the media and violence against women in particular programs containing scenes of pornography or scenes of violence towards women and girls. The Council of Europe has in many of its seminars stressed the same preoccupation. The Steering Committee on Mass Media organized a seminar on “Human rights and gender: the responsibility of the media”. That seminar stressed the need to include gender equality programs in journalist training. Another seminar was organized on the media and trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation. When it comes to the impact of new information technologies on trafficking in human beings, the Group of Specialists has addressed the role of the media in presenting trafficking issues and asked to draw up codes of practice to protect women.

Viewing time has increased dramatically in some countries in recent years to an average of over four hours per individual per day. The media impact on persons is therefore constantly growing. Research presented at the Council of Europe has shown that the more children watch television the more they associate sexist ideas with traditional female and male roles and the more aggressive is the behavior of boys. The link between sex and violence, increasingly present in all media from

advertising to violent films is particularly worrying at a time when society is trying to fight violence against women. Programs are often based on repetitive patterns of old fashioned gender representation with women dressed up like blond Barbie dolls, usually occupying supportive roles, while men are generally shown as dynamic and pursuing more substantial activities in society. Another phenomenon is the large number of talk shows. A large number of women make their voices heard in these kinds of programs.

The development of private satellite stations has accentuated the global trend which is concentration of ownership. For instance the concentration of media ownership among a few very powerful men like Mr. Berlusconi or Mr. Murdoch also constitutes an obstacle to women's access to decision-making posts. No woman in the world has such an authority over the media and few women edit major magazines or newspapers. Media conglomerates merge and buy smaller enterprises. In Europe buyers are increasingly of American origin. New creative ways to see gender roles have not been stimulated and the global trend of increased commercialization and consumerism dominates. Women living in rural areas and in regional sub-centers are often excluded. Critical journalism and citizenship are closely interlinked since they work to increase public awareness.

A production of quality TV programs is the only way to fight commercialization. Public service broadcasters should therefore be encouraged and funded to take on their role to promote gender equality like producing productions that show possibilities to create a new gender culture. The principle of equality of men and women is not difficult to understand if the objectives are clear.

Finally the increase of female reporters has **not** contributed to a change in the news extent. One of the reasons is that women as a whole have remained excluded from the level of decision-making and production.

What examples do we then have of good practices in communication?

1. Access to information and media promoting equality: there is a co operation between certain countries when it comes to children's TV programs showing children as actors and decision-makers in their own lives with the emphasis on equality and creation of role models

2. Balanced portrayals: Les Penelopes in France for instance promote and diffuse information from women's point of view in all kinds of media to ensure the visibility of women's initiatives

3. Guidelines: The International Federation of Journalists organized a conference on Gender Equality in journalism and trade unions in 2001 and adopted a policy and action plan on Mainstreaming Equality in Journalism

4. Monitoring: The Global Media Monitoring Project presents a worldwide effort to study the representation and portrayal of women and men in the media. The results have been used to highlight the persistent lack of women in national news media and to start a dialogue.

5. Gender-sensitivity and research: The department of journalism and mass communication of University of Gothenburg has a body of researchers working on the topics of gender and media (women in journalism, history of female journalists and diversity in the news

6. Awareness campaigns on violence against women: for instance engaging the media and the population at large

7. Overcoming stereotypes since early age: children's TV program in Sweden show positive inspiration and role models for children like Pippi Long stocking

Among the challenges needed are venues for women's expression as well as women in management and decision-making positions in media and communication. We also need portrayal of women in the media and mechanisms and monitoring of portrayal of women. It is clear that there is not enough research on women and communication and gender sensitization of students and media professionals and that therefore advocacy and networking regarding women and communication is also needed.

What concrete recommendations could then be defined as necessary?

1. To develop a gender sensitive broadcasting legislation

2. To support women's opportunities for self expression and sharing information i.e. community radio

3. To promote women's equal participation at all levels of media, management, programming and research
4. To increase women's access to new information technologies
5. To promote balanced portrayal of women and men in the media, to combat pornography and the growing sexualisation of the public space
6. To promote a new gender culture with better gender relations between women and men
7. To combat stereotypes

As to the recommendations to media professionals:

1. To offer gender sensitive training programs and curricula for media managers, editors, journalists and students of mass communication
2. To create mentoring systems for women as to the advancement of women in the media
3. To develop the use of ICT as a resource for the empowerment of women in line with the Tunis Agenda
4. To offer scholarships for girls and incentives to make them choose media careers

According to the Group of specialists on Gender Equality Standards and Mechanisms in its report of the 4th Meeting which took place in Strasbourg on 6 to 8 December, 2006:

"Media in modern societies hold an immense potential for social change as they can either hinder or hasten structural change towards gender equality. While considering the independence of the media and the freedom of expression, states must ensure that gender equality as a principle of human rights is fully respected in the media sector act in conformity with this legal principle and with their social responsibility as regards social change towards gender equality, a responsibility that is linked to the power they hold in modern societies."

Elements indicating states' political will and commitment to gender equality in this regard include the following:

- full implementation of strategic objectives and actions of Chapter IV of PFA in particular Section J (women and the media)
- adoption/existence and implementation of norms, consistent with freedom of expression, against threats to human dignity, gender-based violence and the negative use of women's and men's image in the media, including in advertising as well as guidelines for the safeguard of human dignity and for the projection of positive, balanced and diverse portrayals of women's and men's images and roles
- encouragement, to the extent consistent with freedom of expression, of adoption and implementation of self-regulatory measures; guidelines; codes of conduct or other forms of regulation within media organizations that include the matter of sex-based discrimination/gender equality, promote the use of non-sexist language and the presentation of non-stereotyped images and exclude the use of violent or degrading materials;
- regular assessment of the participation of women in decision-making and management levels and in technical services of media organizations, both public and private, as well as in advisory, regulatory and monitoring bodies of the media sector;
- regular assessment and encouragement of women's presence as journalists and participants in the different content areas of printed, broadcast and electronic media - news, politics, culture, entertainment, advertising, etc;
- encouragement of research projects into media coverage of women's participation in education, science and culture, politics, economy and social life, as well as the impact of the media in the shaping of values and attitudes, needs and interests of women and men throughout their life span;
- encouragement of gender-sensitive training for media professionals, including owners and managers;

The media must undertake to introduce policies under which women will be shown as they actually are. The role of media for

democracy is essential. There can be no democracy without a balanced participation of women and men. It is a prerogative for democracy.

Thank you for your attention.