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SUPPLEMENTARY HUMAN DIMENSION MEETING ON
MEDIA FREEDOM AND GENDER EQUALITY**

Vienna, 8 and 9 March 2021

**Session I: Gender equality and the right to freedom of expression,
including the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and
ideas of all kinds through any media**

Madam Chairperson,
Dear colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to thank the Swedish Chairmanship, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media for dedicating this human dimension meeting to the systemic relationship between media freedom and gender equality. This is an extremely topical issue of enormous interest for our societies, on which the Italian OSCE Chairmanship worked in 2018 also by promoting the adoption of specific commitments by participating States with Decision Nos. 3 and 4 approved at the Milan Ministerial Council and dedicated, respectively, to the safety of journalists and to preventing and combating gender-based violence.

Freedom of expression, which includes in its legal definition the freedom to seek, receive, produce and convey information and ideas of any kind through any channel of communication, whether traditional or digital, is among the rights recognized and protected by the Italian Constitution and by the laws that have settled and regulated this matter over the years, in accordance with the international standards adopted in the main systems, including the OSCE.

In terms of the individual and collective empowerment of women and girls, factors of a cultural and educational nature come into play – prevention and monitoring tools of the communication instrument that focus on the discriminatory dimension of the information message, the creation and operation of permanent mechanisms to impose penalties for harmful conduct towards women and girls and, at the same time, promote greater awareness of the importance of respect for the person and protection of dignity, also with regard to gender.

Let me mention two best practices in this area:

- With respect to information through the traditional channels of communication, the Authority for Communications Guarantees (AGCOM) has always acted to verify the correct methods used to represent the female figure, demanding “the correct representation of the image of women in information and entertainment programmes” and respect of the rights to dignity, honour, reputation and confidentiality of the person.
- Equally important, albeit at a decentralized level, are the Regional Communications Committees (referred to as Co.re.com.) as functional bodies of the Authority, many of which have signed and implemented protocols dedicated to the theme of “Women and Media” with all the public and private stakeholders concerned.

This takes on even clearer importance in the field of digital information: it is essential to involve online service providers so that, even on the most popular platforms and social media accessible to a large number of users, measures are actually in place to combat the sharing of content and images facilitating a stereotypical representation that is detrimental to the dignity of women and girls.

Therefore, collective action is indispensable, as is an active partnership among institutions, traditional and digital media, and communities for the formulation of messages in the communications sector.

In closing, Italy would like to offer the participating States and the OSCE institutions three concrete recommendations:

1. We recommend that in all programmes – from information through traditional and digital channels to entertainment and advertising – the representation of women should be effectively guaranteed, with respect for the female identity, without any prejudice and stereotypes or forms of discrimination based solely on gender.
2. We also hope that audiovisual media services will be more involved and accountable, including through self-regulatory or co-regulatory initiatives and media education projects, with the aim of promoting gender equality and respecting the image and dignity of women.
3. Within the legislative framework, we consider it essential to adopt in the digital sphere a clear and explanatory definition of the components of cyberviolence (such as cyberharassment or revenge porn) and, in the non-legislative dimension, to prioritize the strengthening of dialogue between police and judicial authorities, starting with the collection of best practices implemented in the participating States to respond to cyberviolence.

Thank you for your attention.