



BACKGROUND NOTE ON SEXIST HATE SPEECH



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1. Introduction

The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has recognised the importance of the Internet as “one of the principal means by which individuals exercise their right to freedom of expression and information”¹ and the UN Human Rights Council has referred to the Internet as having become “a site of diverse forms of violence against women, in the form of pornography, sexist games and breaches of privacy.” Indeed, women receive threats and insults of a sexual character on daily basis via emails, websites or social media; including threats of publishing personal photos and information.

According to the International Telecommunication Union, more than 3 billion people were using the Internet in 2015.² The increasing availability and use of Internet and social platforms have made sexist hate speech expand rapidly. The feeling of impunity given by the possibility to publish in an anonymous manner and the thought of a virtual environment as free from consequences have contributed to an increased level of sexist hate speech and hate speech in general.

In 2013, the Everyday Sexism Project was launched, inviting women to share their daily experiences of sexism. Thousands of women revealed comments they received offline and online³. However, compared to sexism, racism and homophobia are more ‘visible’ and generally acknowledged. While the ECtHR has recognised homophobic hate speech⁴ and dealt with online intermediaries’ liability⁵, there is no such case on sexist hate speech.

Sexism can be defined as “the supposition, belief or assertion that one sex is superior to the other, often expressed in the context of traditional stereotyping of social roles on the basis of sex, with resultant discrimination practiced against members of the supposedly inferior sex”⁶. Two European countries adopted a legal definition of sexism. The **2014 Belgian Act to combat sexism in public** uses the following definition: “[...] sexism is understood to be any gesture or act [...] that is clearly aimed at expressing contempt towards a person, based on his or her sex, or, for the same reason, to consider that person as inferior or essentially reduced to his or her sexual dimension, resulting in a serious violation of his or her dignity”⁷. In 2015, the **French Labour Code** included the issue of sexism in the work place which states that “no one shall be subjected to sexism, defined as any act related to the sex of a person, the purpose or effect of which is to damage her/his dignity or to create an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment”⁸. Despite the lack of legal definition in other countries, acts of sexism can be condemned via criminal or other sanctions in several areas of law: anti-discrimination; gender equality, including combating gender stereotypes; hate motivations for criminal acts; incitement to hate; hate speech; harassment; violence against women, including sexual harassment; and regulations against violence and degrading treatment in advertising (see Section 4).

¹ ECtHR, *Ahmet Yildirim v. Turkey*, 2012, para 54.

² International Telecommunication Union, “Key ICT indicators for developed and developing countries and the world”, 2015: https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/statistics/2015/ITU_Key_2005-2015_ICT_data.xls.

³ Laura Bates, The Everyday Sexism Project: <http://everydaysexism.com/>.

⁴ ECtHR, *Vejdeland & others v. Sweden*, 2012.

⁵ ECtHR, *Delfi AS v. Estonia*, 2015.

⁶ Inter Press Service (IPS), *IPS Gender and Development Glossary 3rd Edition, A Tool for Journalists and Writers*, 2010.

⁷ Act of 22 May 2014 aiming to combat sexism in public, modifying the Act of 10 May 2007, Article 2, Belgium (translation from the Belgian Institute for the Equality of Women and Men).

⁸ Non-official translation.

Sexist hate speech is closely linked to violence against women and part of the continuum of violence against women, as evidenced by daily lives and experiences of women and girls all over the world. This concept offers explanations and solutions to the issue of violence against women not only by looking at (extreme) manifestations of brutality in isolation but by looking at all the different and varied manifestations of behaviour within the overarching order of gender inequality and domination by men over women. This also means that answers to sexist hate speech may be found in existing instruments to combat violence against women, such as the Istanbul Convention (see section 2).

There is no universally accepted definition of “hate speech”. The Council of Europe defines hate speech “as covering all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including: intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin”⁹. Sexist hate speech is not included in CM Recommendation No. R (97) 20 on hate speech and the Explanatory Memorandum of this Recommendation justifies the lack of reference to sex, gender and gender identity in the context of hate speech as: “[i]t was considered necessary to avoid losing the focus of the text by covering all forms of intolerance (e.g. intolerance on grounds of sex, sexual orientation, age, handicap, etc.)”¹⁰.

Nevertheless, according to the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights the list should be read as open-ended to recognise other targeted groups such as women and girls. Furthermore, anti-discrimination provisions such as Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) corroborate this reading as they are intended to ensure the prohibition of all forms of discrimination. This position is also supported by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) which explicitly refers to sex, gender and gender identity in its General Policy Recommendation No. 15 on combating hate speech (2015). The Recommendation recalls the need to combat gender-based discrimination and sexism, and recognises that hate speech can be based on grounds other than those that have been considered already. This provides yet another support for the amendment of the Committee of Minister’s Recommendation on hate speech to explicitly refer to sex and gender.

“Sexist hate speech” as a legal term is only present in some national laws¹¹ but legal documents support its inclusion¹². Sexist hate speech targeting women has been referred to in several terms such as “sexualised hate speech”, “sexist hate speech”, “cyber gender harassment”, or “cybersexism”¹³. The aims are to humiliate and objectify women, to destroy their reputation and to make them vulnerable and fearful. It is a form of “social shaming”, spreading the message that the woman is not “a full human being”¹⁴. Gender motivated hate speech “instils deep fear” and “creates, reinforces and perpetuates gender hierarchy in public places”¹⁵ and the specificity of anonymity should not be a deterrent to legislate. As gender discrimination, sexist hate speech “has a set of core features: (1) its victims are female [men are less targeted], (2) the harassment is aimed at particular women, and (3) the abuse involves the targeted individual’s gender in sexually threatening and degrading ways”¹⁶.

⁹ See Committee of Ministers Recommendation No. R (97) 20 on hate speech, at [http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/media/doc/cm/rec\(1997\)020&expmem_EN.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/media/doc/cm/rec(1997)020&expmem_EN.asp).

¹⁰ Id, see paragraph 22 of the Explanatory Memorandum.

¹¹ For example: Dutch and French laws.

¹² For example: The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention).

¹³ International Women’s Media Foundation’s report “Violence and Harassment against Women in the News Media: A Global Study”, p. 14, 2014: <http://www.iwmf.org/our-research/journalist-safety/violence-and-harassment-against-women-in-the-news-media-a-global-picture/>.

¹⁴ Saul Levmore and Martha C. Nussbaum (eds.), “The Offensive Internet: Speech, privacy and reputation”, p.73, 2012.

¹⁵ Laura Beth Nielsen, “Research on the experience of being the target of hate speech”, The Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues. (See also: Nielsen’s “License to Harass: Law, hierarchy and Offensive Public Speech”, 2014): <http://www.spssi.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.ViewPage&pageId=476>.

¹⁶ Danielle Keats Citron, “Law’s Expressive Value in Combatting Cyber Gender Harassment”, 2009: http://digitalcommons.law.umaryland.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1687&context=fac_pubs.

In its Opinion on “Gender Equality and the Digital Society in Europe: opportunities and risks” (adopted in November 2015), the European Commission’s Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men defines sexist hate speech as “threats of violence or public incitement to violence or hatred directed against a group of persons or a member of such a group defined on the basis of sex.”

The explicit inclusion of sexism in the Council of Europe’s definition of hate speech, as well as at national level, would send a strong message, raise awareness about this increasingly common phenomenon and encourage affected women and girls to report it and combat it.

2. Relevant Council of Europe instruments

Freedom of expression as a fundamental human right has enjoyed a solid place in the human rights framework and the increasing accessibility of Internet has made it easy for users to share their thoughts publically, instantly and anonymously. It is enshrined in several legally-binding human rights instruments but its exercise might be subject to restrictions prescribed by law, such as the prohibition of hate speech¹⁷. The feeling of impunity and the thought of the Internet as disconnected from real life have contributed to the spread of hate speech, but also of a specific kind directed at women. There is a distinct fear of restraining free speech which is also shared by self-regulatory bodies and social media. Yet, allowing sexist hate speech to thrive with impunity does not constitute freedom of expression as it reduces plurality and diversity and is rather another manifestation of gender inequality. Online service providers and social media must take their responsibilities in the spread of sexist hate speech. “Self-expression should receive little protection if its sole purpose is to extinguish the self-expression of another”¹⁸.

Action by the Council of Europe under objective 1 of the **Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017**, to fight gender stereotypes and sexism, includes combating sexism as a form of hate speech¹⁹.

Sexist hate speech can also be addressed through standards to combat violence against women. In this context, Article 12 of the **2011 Istanbul Convention** provides that “Parties shall take the necessary measures to promote changes in the social and cultural patterns of behaviour of women and men with a view to eradicating prejudices, customs, traditions and all other **practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority of women or on stereotyped roles for women and men**” (emphasis added). This is an important provision, as practices based on the idea of the inferiority of women are at the core of sexism, which can take the form of sexist hate speech. Furthermore, the Istanbul Convention includes types of violence against women that can also represent forms of sexist hate speech:

- Article 40 of the Istanbul Convention on ‘sexual harassment’: *“Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment, is subject to criminal or other legal sanction.”*

- Article 34 of the Istanbul Convention on stalking: *“Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that the intentional conduct of repeatedly engaging in threatening conduct directed at another person, causing her or him to fear for her or his safety, is criminalised.”*

¹⁷ Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, 1950.

¹⁸ Danielle Keats Citron, “Law’s Expressive Value in Combatting Cyber Gender Harassment”, p.406, 2009: http://digitalcommons.law.umaryland.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1687&context=fac_pubs.

¹⁹ Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017:

http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/equality/02_GenderEqualityProgramme/Council%20of%20Europe%20Gender%20Equality%20Strategy%202014-2017.pdf.

The need to ensure the dignity of women's rights and prevent violence against women in the information and communication technology sector and the media, two major playgrounds for the exercise of hate speech, is also echoed in Article 17 of the Istanbul Convention²⁰. In January 2016, the Council of Europe published a paper on "Encouraging the participation of the private sector and the media in the prevention of violence against women: Article 17 of the Istanbul Convention"²¹. The paper refers to the importance of providing guidance and tools to avoid sexist and stereotypical language, as well as of having clear policy frameworks and complaint mechanisms to ensure the withdrawal of sexist and harmful content in the media.

In 2013, the Committee of Ministers adopted **Recommendation (2013)1 on gender equality and media**. In 2015, the Gender Equality Commission of the Council of Europe published a Handbook on the implementation of this Recommendation, highlighting the increased level of online harassment and threats towards women. Suggestions include the development of "an online platform for reporting sexist content and speech in news and everyday life"²².

The Istanbul Convention also covers online forms of sexual harassment and stalking, which are common ways to target women online. The Committee of Ministers **Recommendation CM/Rec(2011)7 on a new notion of media** recognised the new media ecosystem as a facilitator to spread harassment, bullying, intimidation and stalking. In addition, the importance of non-sexist language has been addressed by the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers. **Recommendation No. R (90) 4, on the Elimination of Sexism from Language** confirmed the "fundamental role of language in forming an individual, and the interaction which exists between language and social attitudes".

Under the supervision of the Steering Committee on Media and Information Society (CDMSI), the newly established Committee of Experts on Internet Intermediaries (MSI-NET) has been tasked with preparing a **draft recommendation of the Committee of Ministers on Internet Intermediaries**, including their role and responsibility.

In addition, the new **Internet Governance Strategy 2016-2020** (to be adopted in March 2016) emphasises the need to combat online harassment and bullying, and to monitor action taken to protect Internet users, especially women and girls, from online abuse including online threats of sexual violence and sexism. It also makes references to the Istanbul Convention, the Council of Europe Transversal Programme on Gender Equality and the No Hate Speech Movement campaign.

Since 2013, the No Hate Speech Movement campaign aims at mobilising young people in recognising and combating hate speech online. The campaign includes forms of discrimination and prejudice outside the scope of Recommendation No. R (97)20, such as misogyny and sexism. In this sense, the extension of the campaign in 2016-2017 will enable sexist hate speech to be fully integrated in the campaign activities.

²⁰ Article 17(1): "Parties shall encourage the private sector, the information and communication technology sector and the media, with due respect for freedom of expression and their independence, to participate in the elaboration and implementation of policies and to set guidelines and self-regulatory standards to prevent violence against women and to enhance respect for their dignity."

- Article 17(2): "Parties shall develop and promote, in co-operation with private sector actors, skills among children, parents and educators on how to deal with the information and communications environment that provides access to degrading content of a sexual or violent nature which might be harmful."

²¹ See at: <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/equality/03themes/violence-against-women/Article%2017%20Istanbul%20Convention.pdf>.

²² See at: [http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/equality/03themes/women_media/Handbook%20on%20the%20implementation%20of%20Recommendation%20\(2013\)1%20of%20the%20Committee%20of%20Ministers%20on%20gender%20equality%20and%20media.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/equality/03themes/women_media/Handbook%20on%20the%20implementation%20of%20Recommendation%20(2013)1%20of%20the%20Committee%20of%20Ministers%20on%20gender%20equality%20and%20media.pdf).

On 28 January 2016, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) adopted Resolution 2093(2016) on “Recent attacks against women: the need for honest reporting and a comprehensive response”. In this Resolution the Assembly urges parliamentarians to condemn all forms of violence against women, including harassment and sexism, as well as hate speech, and to contribute actively to awareness-raising efforts. PACE’s Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination is preparing a report on “Ending cyber-discrimination and online hate”, including sexist hate speech.

3. Targeted groups: women and girls

While specific groups can be highlighted, such as young women, women in media, women in gaming, women in politics and women human rights defenders, **every woman and girl is a potential target for online and offline sexist hate speech**. Women facing multiple or intersectional forms of discrimination also experience these discriminations both online and offline. Gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religious or other belief, disability, language, age, class or other factors might be used as additional grounds for discrimination²³.

Young Women

26% of 18-24 year old women have been stalked online and 25% faced online sexual harassment. Afro-American and Hispanic are more likely to be harassed online than white Internet users²⁴, and self-identified feminists feel comparatively more “threatened” or “attacked”²⁵. Young women are also the target of “revenge porn” or “cyber rape” when sexually explicit content of a former partner is uploaded on Internet as revenge. Other users are simultaneously encouraged to post so called “misogynic slurs.” As a result, women resort to drastic action, some change job, city of residence and even name²⁶ and some girls have reportedly committed suicide²⁷. Young women also experience sexist hate speech off-line in a variety of settings, including the public space, schools, transport, etc.

Women in the Media

The Council of Europe’s Commissioner for Human Rights has referred to the numerous cases where female journalists have been exposed to explicit gender-based threats. In Sweden, after the release of a documentary on Internet hate against female journalists, police started to investigate complaints more seriously but penalties remain very low²⁸. Examples of harassed female journalists include Arzu Geybullayeva, Jill Filipovic and Caroline Criado-Perez who received online threats of death, violence and rape. Women bloggers also face intense online violence often forcing them to close their blogs²⁹.

²³ For example, in 2013, a Twitter user called upon the rape of journalist and anti-racism activist Rokhaya Diallo. The man was later convicted of insult and provocation not followed by crime and was fined 2,000€ and 1,000 € for damages. Rokhaya Diallo made a documentary (“Les réseaux de la haine”) investigating social networks and their use for hateful purpose.

²⁴ Pew Research Center, “Online Harassment”, 2014:

http://www.pewinternet.org/files/2014/10/PI_OnlineHarassment_72815.pdf & UN Broadband Commission Highlights, 2015: <http://www.broadbandcommission.org/Documents/publications/bb-wg-gender-report2015-highlights.pdf>

²⁵ Council of Europe Youth Department, “Survey Results. Young people’s experience and attitudes towards hate speech online”, 2012: <http://nohate.ext.coe.int/Resources/Studies-and-Research>.

²⁶ Lily Kendall, “Revenge porn: Human Rights Online. Centre for the Study of Human Rights”, 2014:

<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/humanrights/2014/05/17/revenge-porn-human-rights-online/>.

²⁷ Miriam Berger, “Brazilian 17-year old commits suicide after revenge porn posted online”, BuzzFeed News, 2013:

<http://www.buzzfeed.com/miriamberger/brazilian-17-year-old-commits-suicide-after-revenge-porn-pos#.vszaDA5NB>.

²⁸ Maria Edström, “The Trolls Disappear in the Light: Swedish experiences of mediated sexualized hate speech in the aftermath of Behring Breivik”, The International Journal of Crime, Justice, and Social Democracy.

²⁹ The shutdown of a website can generate a loss of income for the blogger (e.g. successful blogger Kathy Sierra).

Women in Gaming

44% of American online players and 52% of British players are female³⁰. Female players face “outrageous amounts of outright misogyny” including threats of violence and rape, along with other degrading words³¹. Anita Sarkeesian and Zoe Quinn faced intense and violent campaigns forcing them to leave their homes: The former released a video series called “The Tropes vs Women” to deconstruct misogyny and female representation in gaming. Zoe Quinn founded Crash Override Network: an “online anti-harassment task force” to offer outreach services and support to victims³².

Women in Politics

Women in politics face sexist comments regarding their career position³³ or the way they dress and look³⁴. Several female politicians have been confronted by violent sexist speech and harassment campaigns. For example, Stella Creasy, a British Member of Parliament was threatened with rape from a man - subsequently convicted - opposed to putting Jane Austen’s face on a bank note³⁵. Laura Boldrini, spokesperson of the Italian Parliament, also faced a violent harassment campaign including emails of threats of rape, torture and murder. In reaction to the prevalence of online sexism, British MP Yvette Cooper launched a campaign in December 2015 to “Reclaim the Internet”³⁶.

Women Human Rights Defenders

In 2015, the Council of Europe’s Commissioner for Human Rights denounced the obstacles faced by women’s rights defenders in their work and highlighted the fact that women face more attacks than male human rights activists, including the recent increase of hate speech³⁷. Due to their work, women human rights defenders are also in a position to help victims of these specific attacks and therefore need to be recognised as such and supported but also trained on digital security.

Impact of sexist hate speech on women and girls

Not only does sexist hate speech undermine freedom of speech for women and girls, but it can also have devastating consequences, be they psychological, emotional and/or physical, such as anxiety, sleeping problems and constant fear. Hateful campaign such as the GamerGate forced three women from the game industry – Anita Sarkeesian, Zoe Quinn and Brianna Wu – to move out of their houses due to threats of death and abuse and the disclosure of their home addresses online. Writers such as Jenn Frank or Kathy Sierra have been fired or felt compelled to end their jobs and cancel public appearances. This in turn causes a lack of income and it can become difficult to find a job or rebuild a life when online abuse remains on the Internet for everyone to witness. Journalists in particular can also feel less satisfaction in doing their jobs. Fear of retaliation for what they might be, say or do can impede women aspiring to use the Internet for personal or professional matters, including from choosing a job in an Internet-related field.

³⁰ Entertainment Software Association, “2015 Essential Facts About the Computer and Video Game Industry”: <http://www.theesa.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/ESA-Essential-Facts-2015.pdf> & Internet Advertising Bureau UK, The Gaming Revolution, 2014: <http://www.iabuk.net/about/press/archive/more-women-now-play-video-games-than-men>.

³¹ Lisa Nakamura, “Gender and Race Online”, in Mark Graham and William H. Dutton (eds.) “Society and the Internet: How Networks of Information and Communication are Changing Our Lives”, Univ. Press Scholarship Online, pp 81, 90-91, 2014.

³² Zoe Quinn, Crash Override Network: <http://www.crashoverridenetwork.com/>.

³³ A member of a French city council posted a photo of French Minister Najat Vallaud-Belkacem wearing a dress, with a tweet wondering which asset she had put forward to get the job. A male interviewer asked another female Minister, Fleur Pellerin, whether she had been appointed because she was ‘a pretty woman from a minority group’.

³⁴ Former Minister Cécile Duflot got teased while speaking at the French National Assembly while wearing a dress.

³⁵ Claire Carter, “Twitter troll jailed for ‘campaign of hatred’ against Stella Creasy”, 2014: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/11127808/Twitter-troll-jailed-for-campaign-of-hatred-against-Stella-Creasy.html>.

³⁶ Agnes Chambre, “Yvette Cooper launches ‘Reclaim the Internet’ campaign to stop online sexism”, Politics Home, 2015: <https://www.politicshome.com/home-affairs/articles/story/yvette-cooper-launches-reclaim-internet-campaign-stop-online-sexism#sthash.HI7vhB3h.dpuf>.

³⁷ Human Rights Commissioner, “Human rights comment, Remove obstacles to the work of women’s rights defenders”, 2015: <http://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/remove-obstacles-to-the-work-of-women-s-rights-defenders>.

4. Some examples of legislation, policies and case law for addressing sexist hate speech in Council of Europe member states

While in the vast majority of Council of Europe member states, sexism does not have a specific legal definition and it is not subject to specific criminalisation or comprehensive legal treatment, numerous countries have introduced criminal or other sanctions for different acts of sexism, including sexist hate speech. Some Council of Europe member states already have legal, administrative, civil or criminal provisions supporting the prohibition of hate speech toward groups on the basis of certain grounds, including sex in a number of countries, with punishment ranging from fines to jail. These provisions can be found in criminal codes (France, Lithuania, Netherlands), anti-discrimination laws (Republic of Moldova), gender equality laws (Lithuania, United Kingdom), laws on violence against women (Spain), laws on sexism (Belgium) and anti-harassment (Ireland, Switzerland), as well as in laws on freedom of the press (France, Greece, Turkey)³⁸.

For example, Article 170 of the Lithuanian Criminal Code punishes “(2) a person who publicly ridicules, expresses contempt for, urges hatred of or incites discrimination against a group of persons or a person belonging thereto on grounds of sex, sexual orientation, [...]” and “(3) a person who publicly incites violence or a physical violent treatment of a group of persons or a person belonging thereto on grounds of sex, sexual orientation, [...]”.

The Netherlands Criminal Code - Section 137d states that “Any person who publicly, either verbally or in writing or through images, incites hatred of or discrimination against persons or violence against their person or property because of their race, religion or beliefs, their sex, their hetero- or homosexual orientation or their physical, mental or intellectual disability, shall be liable to a term of imprisonment not exceeding one year or a fine of the third category.”

There are not many court cases dealing with sexist hate speech. This might be due to the lack of clear legislation, the lack of awareness and knowledge about rights, the difficulty to find the identity of an anonymous hater or the unwillingness to consider this issue as a serious one. However, there has been a conviction of online haters in the United Kingdom. Stella Creasy, a British Member of Parliament was threatened online with rape from a man opposed to the campaign to put Jane Austen’s face on a bank note. In September 2014, the author of the threatening tweet was convicted to 18 weeks imprisonment. Stella Creasy supported the campaign of journalist Caroline Criado-Perez who was also the target of threats. In January 2014, two of her Twitter ‘trolls’ were sentenced, respectively, to 12 weeks and 8 weeks imprisonment for abusive messages.

An offline example of sexist hate speech is provided by the Group of Feminists Initiative of Moldova. The group filed a complaint against Dorin Chirtoacă, Mayor of Chisinau, for his sexist and ageist public remarks towards his political opponent, Zinaida Greceanii, during the elections in June 2015. A month later, the Council on the Prevention and Elimination of Discrimination and Ensuring Equality ruled that his speech constituted incitement to discrimination, on the basis of sex and age, and ordered him to apologise publicly, using the same media previously used during his discriminatory speech. The apology was the following: “I apologise for my statements that discriminate against women and men in politics and I apologise for my sexist statements against women.”

Another example is the former Serbian Minister of Defence, who was fired in 2015 by the Prime Minister for his sexist remark towards a female journalist. Women in the Serbian Parliament established a cross-party Women’s Parliamentary Network which issues statements when hate speech or misogynistic attacks target female politicians.

³⁸ The country examples in brackets are given as illustration only. The information comes from the study by the Institut pour l’Egalité entre les femmes et les hommes : « Etude préparatoire de droit comparé sur les législations qui visent à sanctionner le sexisme », Brussels, 2010.

5. Some examples of initiatives, actions and campaigns against sexist hate speech

- In 2006, the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) launched the international online campaign “**Take Back the Tech**” to engage people to use ICT tools to end violence against women. Women could report their experience on the platform to map out the phenomenon and make it visible, indicating the type of violence, harm and perpetrator, the platform used, as well as the age and the strategy adopted by the survivor. Research papers and resources are available online³⁹. In 2014, after an analysis of user policies and redress framework of Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, Take Back the Tech launched the campaign “**What are you doing about violence against women?**” targeting these three intermediaries. In March 2015, they published a report on corporate policies to end technology-related violence against women, which includes a checklist for addressing violence against women⁴⁰. ‘Take Back the Tech’ won the 2014 Gender Equality Mainstreaming – Technology Award (a joint initiative by the International Telecommunication Union and UN Women) for the category “Efforts to Reduce Threats Online and Building Women's Confidence and Security in the Use of ICTs”. APC also carried out a study in March 2015 on existing domestic legal remedies for survivors of technology-related violence against women to access justice in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Mexico, Pakistan and the Philippines.
- In 2013, a campaign was undertaken by Women, Action and the Media group (WAM!) and **The Everyday Sexism Project** in the United Kingdom against Facebook content inciting sexual assault and other types of violence. As a result, Facebook modified its policy on hate speech. In 2014, WAM! and Twitter ran a pilot project for users to report sexist harassment and abuse. The data collected will be analysed to improve further responses to harassment on the social platform.
- In 2013, a Swedish video exposes the world of online sexist hate speech by filming women reading out loud the attacks they’ve received.
- The awareness campaign “**Stop au Cybersexism**” was launched in France in April 2015⁴¹, with posters displayed in metro stations and a website with advice on how to react to cyber-sexism. Awareness-raising kits were distributed to middle and high schools and apprenticeship training centres⁴².
- In 2015, the anti-harassment NGO Hollaback! launched **HeartMob**, a platform to report online harassment and support individuals as well as to empower bystanders. Previously, they had invited twitter users to report sexist hate speech via the hashtag #MyTroll.
- In September 2015, the Cybersmile Foundation – an anti-cyberbullying non-profit organisation, launched a gaming support centre in partnership with Intel to support victims of misogyny, digital abuse and online hate.
- Anti cyber-violence campaign for women and girls called “**Move it Forward**” was launched in Brussels (from September to November 2015) with workshops to provide girls and women with skills and resources to tackle online violence, bullying and hate speech.

³⁹ Take back the Tech: <https://www.takebackthetech.net/research-resources>.

⁴⁰ Rima Athar, “From impunity to justice: Improving corporate policies to end technology-related violence against women”, March 2015: http://www.genderit.org/sites/default/upload/flow_corporate_policies_formatted_final.pdf.

⁴¹ Information is available on its website, including definitions and statistics, phone lines and websites to report cybersexism. Centre Hubertine Auclert: <http://www.centre-hubertine-auclert.fr/stop-cybersexisme>.

⁴² Centre Hubertine Auclert, website on stopping cybersexism: <http://stop-cybersexisme.tumblr.com/#>.