Protection of children using the Internet and other communication technologies. Safer Internet programme 2009-2013

2008/0047(COD) - 22/10/2008 - Text adopted by Parliament, 1st reading/single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 672 votes to 9 with 19 abstentions a legislative resolution amending the proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a multiannual Community programme on protecting children using the Internet and other communication technologies ('Safer Internet').

The report had been tabled for consideration in plenary by Roberta **ANGELILLI** (UEN, IT) on behalf of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs.

The main amendments – adopted at 1st reading of the codecision procedure – are the result of a compromise between the Parliament and the Council. They are as follows:

Objective: the objective of the Programme is to promote safer use of the Internet and other communication technologies, to educate users, particularly children, parents, carers, teachers and educators in this regard and to fight against illegal content and harmful conduct online. . For the purpose of this Decision "children" shall mean persons under 18 years of age, unless the relevant national law confers on them, under certain conditions, full legal capacity under that age.

Priorities: in order to attain the overall aim of the Programme, the following lines of action shall be addressed: a) ensuring public awareness; b) fighting against illegal content and harmful conduct online; c) promoting a safer online environment; d) establishing a knowledge base.

New threats: MEPs introduced a certain number of amendments, in particular to insist on the need to combat new worrying phenomena such as the soliciting of children through psychological manipulation for sexual purposes (grooming), electronic harassment and electronic files showing physical and/or psychological aggression) and ensure public awareness of online risks and precautions, as well as to develop pedagogical tools on the basis of sound practices.

Actions and measures proposed in the framework programme 'Safer Internet plus' should aim, inter alia:

- to provide the public with and promoting the existence of contact points and **hotlines** for reporting online illegal content and harmful conduct. These contact points will also provide the public with the necessary information on how to report illegal content and assess the content of on-line information services which could harm the physical, mental or moral integrity of children;
- to stimulate application of **technical solutions** for dealing adequately with illegal content and harmful conduct online and informing end-users as to how this technology might be applied;
- to encourage the design, development or adaptation and/or promotion of **effective technological tools** to deal adequately with illegal content and the fight against harmful conduct online, in particular those tools made available free of charge for easy general use by stakeholders;
- to encourage development of **coordinating links between the Member States' databases** relating to child abuse, and also common approaches and methods of work;
- to create close cooperation between national authorities, police and contact points. Actions will be taken to build a common **European database** collecting information on child abuse and to ensure its connection with Europol;
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- to engage **domain name registries** where this is not the case and strengthening co-operation where it does exist, improving co-operation with domain name registries in Member States and encouraging positive relationships with registries outside the EU to enable earlier detection of potentially illegal content and minimise the longevity of known websites offering child sexual abuse content;
- to encourage and assist Internet service providers to develop, as a tool of self regulation, "**child safe" labelling** for web pages. These actions may include, inter alia, exploring the possibility of setting-up a system of common descriptive symbols or warning messages indicating the age category and/or those aspects of the content which have led to a certain age recommendation, which would help users to be more aware of potentially harmful online content;
- to stimulate the involvement children, ensuring **equal participation of girls and boys**, with the aim of promoting a safer online environment. This involvement shall be regularly exercised within the framework of activities such as the European Forum on the Rights of the Child, the Safer Internet Forum and others;
- to **increase information**, particularly for parents, carers, teachers and educators , about the performance and effectiveness of tools, such as filtering systems, for dealing with potentially harmful content online;
- to address the opportunities and risks of services using new distribution platforms, such as audiovisual services using **mobile phone networks**;
- to enable children to make responsible use of on-line technologies, in particular through media literacy or **media education** programmes;
- to provide **contact points** where parents and children can receive answers to questions about how to stay safe online, including advice on how to deal with both grooming and cyber-bullying;
- to analyse **statistics and trends** from different Member States to allow law enforcement agencies and relevant authorities from Member States to reduce duplication of existing efforts and maximise the use of current and future resources.

Lastly, MEPs propose that **expenditure** be broken down as follows:

1) ensuring public awareness: 48%;

2) fighting against illegal content and tackling harmful conduct online: 34%;

3) promoting a safer online environment: 10%;

4) establishing a knowledge base: 8%.