Audiovisual and information services: protection of minors and human dignity. Follow-up of Green Paper

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The information society has arrived. In addition to traditional means of communication, an extraordinary expansion in electronic methods of production and distribution is taking place, in particular through on-line technology. This clearly raises issues such as the protection of minors and human dignity. The whole area is the subject of a Council recommendation on which Parliament has been asked to state its position under the consultation procedure. The report by Philip WHITEHEAD (PES, UK) adopted by the Committee endorses the approach of the Commission, which is to encourage self-regulation involving all concerned (the industry plus access and service providers). As the rapporteur says, the new services are too varied, too novel, to adapt to regulation from on high of the kind familiar in the development of European broadcasting. Although self-regulation should be tried, a degree of watchfulness is needed. National practices will vary depending on the culture of each country. This means there should be an attempt to make codes of conduct converge. The report therefore calls for common labelling of content guidelines to be devised in order to facilitate the transfrontier identification of illegal and harmful content. A regular and systematic review should also be carried out of the self-regulatory frameworks. Two years after the entry into force of the recommendation, an evaluation of their effectiveness should be made to determine whether regulatory action is needed.