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

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This document presents the evaluation report from the Commission on the application of Council Recommendation of 24 September 1998 concerning the protection of minors and human dignity in the Member States. The development of the digital media, namely in the form of Internet, digital broadcasting and videogames constitutes a major challenge for the European Union's audiovisual policy and in particular for the protection of minors. The Recommendation invites the Member States, industries and parties concerned and the Commission to take steps to enhance the protection of minors and human dignity in the broadcasting and Internet sectors. The need for the establishment of a safe environment has recently been stressed by the European Parliament when it adopted the resolution on Parent Control. Overall, after two years, the results of the application of the Recommendation are encouraging, although interested parties and in particular consumers should have been more involved in the establishment of codes of conduct. The Member States have applied the Recommendation in a heterogeneous way; nevertheless it should be stressed that most of the Member States have launched campaigns for a safer use of the Internet and that some have introduced new legislation or supported measures such as hotlines to the police to deal with child pornography. The heterogeneity of the measures is not surprising, taking into account both cultural heterogeneity and the variation in development of Internet. Also, two years may be a relatively short period for fully applying the Recommedation. Across the different audiovisual media, a decreasing intensity of activities can be recognised, whereas most efforts are devoted to the protection of minors and human dignity with respect to the Internet and the least with respect to videogames. This is not surprising as the actions undertaken by the individual Member States, a strong variety exists, reaching from nearly no activity at all, particularly concerning the Internet, to considerable efforts establishing a common policy across the different audiovisual media. Industry, in particular through ICRA, is working on the development of reliable filter and rating systems for Internet which can be individually adapted to the cultural values of citizens in the different Member States. As far as digital broadcasting is concerned, work by the industry is less developed. The DVB has expressed to the Commission its willingness to lead efforts in this area provided the European legislator gives a clear sign to the industry. The Commission has contributed to a better protection of minors in audiovisual media through the implementation of the Safer Internet Action Plan. As requested by Member States, and as foreseen by the Action Plan, the Commission will continue to strengthen European and international cooperation. While the Recommendation is not directly linked to the Directive "Television without Frontiers" the results of this evaluation Report may well influence how possible new Directive could deal with the protection of minors and human dignity in respect of all electronic content. In accordance with the provisions of the Directive the Commission will launch a full-scale review which will besubject to an open and wide ranging consultation of all parties.