Illegal and harmful content on the Internet: child protection and human dignity

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OBJECTIVE: the Commission communication seeks to describe briefly the various types of illegal and harmful content on the Internet and to propose a certain number of practical initiatives to be implemented forthwith. SUBSTANCE: the Commission considers it necessary to have a first set of measures for immediate action with a view to reducing the illegal and harmful content on the Internet. These measures should be adopted - according to their respective nature - under the provisions of the EC Treaty (free movement of services) or within the framework of Justice and Home Affairs. 1) As regards illegal content, the Commission proposes: - the stepping up of cooperation between the Member States in order to combat the sources from where criminal content comes and to restrict distribution of copies (exchange of information, definition of minimum European standards on criminal content); - the assessment of the need for a common European framework to clarify the responsibility of access providers and host service providers; - the encouragement of cooperation between associations of Internet access providers to help the process of self-regulation. 2) As regards harmful content, the Commission proposes: - the adoption of a Council recommendation setting out a clear political message encouraging the use of filtering software such as PICS and one or more European rating systems; - the encouragement of European content providers to cooperate in this system by adopting their own code of conduct for content published on the Internet; - a Commission imitative to support national awareness actions for parents and teachers. 3) As regards international issues, the proposal by Germany to host an international conference was accepted by the Council. This meeting should open up the possibility of an international convention on illegal and harmful content. The dialogue must include the largest number of countries possible and could be extended to organizations such as the OECD, WTO or the United Nations. 4) Lastly as regards support actions, the decision was made to set up an Information Web site (hosted by a Commission server) containing: information and guidance for parents, teachers and children; parental control software; information on activities of official bodies.