European Commission: Report on Parental Control of Television Broadcasting

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The results of a 6-month study on the techniques and technologies available to facilitate parental choice with regard to television programmes conducted by the University of Oxford on behalf of the Directorate-General X of the European Commission have been published. The scope of the study was to determine feasible means of ensuring compliance with Article 22 of the Television Without Frontiers Directive. From the analysis of the feasibility of the application of technical instruments enabling parental monitoring on the content of programmes viewed by children emerges the need for Europe to envisage its own particular response. Another important issue which has been pinpointed by the study is the fact that the substantial cultural diversity existing in Europe renders flexibility in the approach absolutely necessary. The study notes that compliance with Article 22 cannot be achieved by technical measures alone. The study recommends a model for parental choice schemes in a digital age in which a monopoly rating source is less dominant; pluralism in rating agencies and techniques is fostered and parental selection of desirable programme content criteria mobilises available analogue and digital technologies. Furthermore, the study recommends that the European Commission and Parliament encourage parental choice mechanisms for the digital age.

The research shows that the advancement of digital broadcasting in Europe would soon make overseas solutions to this problem (primarily the V-Chip, which is widely adopted in Canada and in the United States), technologically inadequate and obsolete.

The University of Oxford concludes its research by formulating a number of recommendations aiming at ensuring the achievement of a standard of compliance with Article 22 of the Directive among the Member States. The following main issues can be extrapolated from the study:

- The insufficiency and inadequacy of blocking techniques and other mere technical measures in order to achieve compliance with the requirements of Article 22 of the Television Without Frontiers Directive .

- The necessity of favouring pluralism in rating agencies as well as in rating techniques.

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- The vital importance of broadcaster responsibility, notably with regard to positive programming and the use of watersheds, and media literacy education. Models for enhancing parental authority cannot substitute for broadcaster responsibility and government supervision.

- The call for ensuring common descriptive criteria, co-ordination and standardisation of transmitted signals within Europe.

In order to encourage harmonious development on this issue the study also calls for the creation of a European Platform capable of co-ordinating policies and ensuring constant dialogue between the Member States.

Final report on "Parental Control of Television Broadcasting", study undertaken on behalf of the European Commission, March 1999, drawn up by Oxford University Centre for Socio-Legal Studies.

http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/docs/library/studies/finalised/parental_control/chapter1.pdf

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