Council of Europe: Guidelines Protecting Human Rights on the Internet

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On 3 October 2008, the Council of Europe published two sets of guidelines aiming to encourage respect and to promote privacy, security and freedom of expression within the context of internet access and internet games. These guidelines therefore cover a series of online activities, such as e-mail use, chat or blog participation and online game playing. The guidelines are the product of close cooperation of the Council with European online game designers and publishers and with Internet Service Providers (ISPs).

The Human Rights Guidelines for Online Game Providers were developed by the Council of Europe in coordination with the Interactive Software Federation of Europe (ISFE) and provide a benchmark for online games providers and developers. While stressing the important positive role that games can play in the lives of individuals, the guidelines underline a concern that games designers and publishers take into account the rights and freedoms, values and dignity of gamers.

The games guidelines urge developers and providers to consider how game content may impact on human dignity, thereby recommending that they pay specific attention to the risks connected with content which displays gratuitous violence, which advocates criminal or harmful behaviour and which conveys messages of racism or intolerance. Included in the guidelines is a stress on promoting and applying independent labelling and rating systems to games to help inform gamers of sensitive content, encouragement to develop in-game parental control tools, as well as mechanisms for the automatic removal of game generated content after a certain time of inactivity. The guidelines also underline the importance of providing gamers with clear information about the presence of advertisements or product placement within games.

The Human Rights Guidelines for Internet Service Providers, developed by the Council in cooperation with the European Internet Service Providers Association (EuroISPA), recommend that ISPs ensure that information is available to end-users concerning the risks of privacy, security and freedom of expression. The guidelines emphasise the important role played by ISPs in delivering key services to users, such as access, e-mail or content services, and they take note of the considerable potential for ISPs to promote the exercise of and respect for human

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rights and fundamental freedoms. One of the ISP guidelines' main objectives is to complement the work already carried out by operators in helping to protect children from harmful or illegal content and other risks, such as grooming. The guidelines also cover risks for data integrity, such as viruses or worms, and for privacy, for instance the collection of personal data without the consent of users or the use of such data for promotional or marketing purposes without such consent. The ISP guidelines also warn providers about cutting individual customer accounts, which can constitute a restriction on a user's right to access the benefits from the information society and to exercise their freedom of expression and information.

Both sets of guidelines are without prejudice to and must be read in conjunction with the obligations applicable to ISPs and online games providers respectively and their activities under national, European and international law.

"Human Rights Guidelines for Online Games Providers", Council of Europe in co-operation with the Interactive Software Federation of Europe

http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/media/Doc/H-Inf(2008)008_en.pdf

"Human Rights Guidelines for Internet Service Providers", Council of Europe in co-operation with the European Internet Services Providers Association (EuroISPA)

http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/media/Doc/H-Inf(2008)009_en.pdf

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