Parliamentary Assembly: The Promotion of Internet and Online Media Services Appropriate for Minors

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On 28 September 2009, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted Recommendation 1882 (2009), entitled “The promotion of Internet and online media services appropriate for minors”.

The Assembly firstly states that the Council of Europe should pursue work on the protection of children in the information society, in particular as regards developing their media literacy skills and ensuring their protection against harmful content. The change that the Internet brought poses a challenge to the traditional standards for the protection of minors. Nevertheless, the Assembly emphasizes that the standards of freedom of expression have not changed. Any legal restriction for the protection of minors has to be necessary in a democratic society.

The risks to which minors can be exposed include illegal content and content that is legal but considered inappropriate for minors. The Assembly is especially concerned about the online availability of child pornographic material. The Assembly emphasizes that anyone who produces or makes available illegal content should be held liable under the law. It therefore calls on Member States to ratify without delay the Convention on Cybercrime, which sets up the legal framework for international co-operation against illegal behaviour and content on the Internet. An example of the latter category is content which depicts women and girls as objects. In certain cases this could lead to gender-based violence both in the virtual and the real world. Another issue is the growing number of social networks in the online world. As a consequence the number of minors sharing part of their private life publicly on the Internet is growing. This can lead to cyber addiction and online bullying.

The restriction of media content that is likely to have negative effects on minors is already regulated in traditional media. Minors nowadays however do not make much use of traditional media like television and radio. Instead minors make use of the Internet, where they can easily access all kinds of material anytime and anywhere, in most cases without parental supervision. This reduces even more the effectiveness of traditional media policies for the protection of minors.

The Assembly states that parents have an important role in protecting minors from harmful content. The State and social institutions like schools and libraries

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should assist parents in this task. Therefore, the Assembly makes several recommendations to the Member States concerning content harmful to minors. The Assembly calls upon Member States to assess the technological possibilities for increasing the safety of minors using the Internet. Member States should support the creation and marketing of services adequate for minors, like free software for parental filtering of harmful content. Member States should also promote the creation of public quality standards and ratings of Internet and online media services adequate for minors. These standards should ensure that access to harmful content is effectively restricted by age-verification systems. In general, the Assembly recommends that States should organize campaigns to create public awareness about the risks and opportunities for minors using the Internet and the technical solutions available for restricting harmful content.

The promotion of Internet and online media services appropriate for minors, Recommendation 1882 (2009), Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 28 September 2009

http://assembly.coe.int/Mainf.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta09/EREC1882.htm

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