European Commission: Implementation Report on the Protection of Children in the Digital World

IRIS 2011-9:1/8

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On 13 September 2011 the European Commission adopted a report on how member states are implementing EU recommendations (dating from 1998 and 2006) on the online safety of children. Member states are increasingly making efforts to implement these recommendations, but it seems action in this area is insufficient and inconsistent between countries. Moreover, the scenery has rapidly changed since the last evaluation. Accordingly further action is needed.

Neelie Kroes, Commission Vice President for the Digital Agenda said: "Children are going online more, and younger, and are exploring an exciting digital world of opportunity. But we urgently need to step up a gear on what we do, and how we work together to empower and protect children in this ever-changing digital world. We need to give parents and teachers the confidence to take on their responsibilities. The strategy I will present later this year will tackle these problems head on".

Europe’s Digital Agenda acknowledges the impact the digital era has had on consumers and children in particular. Minors have increasingly better access to the internet, which is getting easier through the use of mobile devices. Although these new developments offer more opportunities for minors, they make it continually harder to protect them. The Council has published two recommendations, in 1998 and 2007, on how to protect minors who use audiovisual and online services. These recommendations speak of codes of conduct and new measures against illegal content and activities on the internet, such as breach of privacy and discrimination.

Since these recommendations were published, the way consumers use media has dramatically changed. In response, the Commission has adopted a report in which the implementation and effectiveness of the recommendations is analyzed. What has been done already and what should the next steps be in order to realise the Digital Agenda for Europe?

The report, which was based on the responses of member states to a questionnaire, suggests several courses of action. Firstly, hotlines should be better known and fully implemented. This way the removal of harmful and illegal content can be undertaken more efficiently. Secondly, online safety for children should be promoted through awareness campaigns and teaching in schools. The

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final suggestion concerns age-rating systems for online games. Different systems are currently being used through Europe, but retailers should be more aware of age ratings.

Commission Report on the Protection of Minors, "Protecting Children in the Digital World" and accompanying Commission Staff Working Paper

http://ec.europa.eu/avpolicy/reg/minors/rec/2011_report/index_en.htm

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