European Commission: Communication on illegal and harmful content on the Internet and Green Paper on the protection of minors and human dignity published

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On 16 October 1996, the European Commission issue two new texts on further development of the information society: a Communication on illegal and harmful content on the Internet and a Green Paper on the protection of minors and human dignity in audio-visual and information services.

The two texts are complementary, both in time-scale and content. While the Communication covers short-term measures which concern the specific problems of the Internet, and also go beyond the protection of minors and human dignity, the Green Paper focuses specifically on those two issues. Unlike the Communication, it analyses the situation across the whole spectrum of the new services, and is intended to provide a basis for medium- and long-term discussion. Both documents meet the call of the European Parliament and the Council for thorough exploration of the various aspects of European policy on these new services.

Communication: The Commission declares that Member States have a responsibility to enforce the existing regulations (criminal law, laws on copyright and the protection of minors). But it also acknowledges the problems raised by the special technical features of the Internet, as well as the danger of obstacles to competition and renewed fragmentation of the internal market. It suggests tackling the problems by:

- increasing co-operation between the Member States;

- encouraging service providers to monitor themselves;

- promoting the use of filter and rating systems; running campaigns to make parents and teachers aware of the issues;

- organising an international conference and generally extending the discussion, with maximum involvement of organisations like OECD, the World Trade Organisation, the United Nations, etc.

According to Commissioner Bangemann, the Commission intends to submit proposals to the Council on urgent measures to curb abuses on the Internet

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before the end of November. The Working Group on Ethical Questions (set up in Bologna by the Ministers of Culture and Telecommunications) is also likely to propose solutions at the Council meeting on 28.11.96.

Green Paper: The Commission first announced that it would be producing a Green Paper on the new services back in the mid-eighties, when it submitted the draft Directive on `Television without Frontiers'. As already made clear on many sides (e.g. in the annual report of the Information Society Forum, see IRIS 1996-8: 3), action to protect minors and human dignity is at present a matter of major political concern. The important thing now is to find out what can usefully be done on the various levels. In its three chapters, the Green Paper accordingly considers, among other questions:

- how co-operation can be initiated between public authorities on the basis of shared guidelines;

- how self-regulating machinery, technical filtering facilities and parental supervision can be promoted;

- how international co-operation outside the European Union can be developed.

It also lists nine questions of key importance for future policy. The Commission welcomes comments and suggestions from all interested parties (to be sent in by 28 February 97). It also intends to consult the European Parliament, the Council of Ministers, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions. The Council for Ministers of Culture will be discussing these issues at its meeting on 16/17 December. The Green Paper has a substantial appendix, comprising both a glossary and a comparative survey of existing regulations in the Member States. The preparatory work on the Green Paper was based, inter alia , on a series of studies of regulatory, economic and technical aspects in the fifteen EU countries, as well as Canada, Japan and the USA; a summary of these studies is available from the Commission.

Green Paper on the protection of minors and human dignity in audiovisual and information services, COM(96) 483.

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:1996:0483:FIN:EN:PDF

Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions, Illegal and harmful content on the Internet. Brussels, 16 October 1996, COM(96) 487.

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:1996:0487:FIN:EN:PDF

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