[DE] State media authorities examine complaints on the protection of minors from graphic war images

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According to a press release published on 7 April 2022 by the *Kommission für Jugendmedienschutz* (Commission for the Protection of Minors in the Media – KJM), the German state media authorities' central supervisory body for the protection of minors in private broadcasting and telemedia, the state media authorities had received numerous reports of violations of human dignity and of rules on the protection of minors in the media in relation to the war in Ukraine. The KJM was especially concerned about the effects that brutal images of war could have on the development of children and young people. These complaints and reports were being examined by the KJM.

How to reconcile the public interest in reporting on the war in Ukraine, which can sometimes include highly detailed descriptions and images of atrocities and war crimes, with the need to protect young people, is currently being debated in many EU member states and beyond. Although, under German legislation, the unconditional protection of human dignity is a boundary that written and photographic reporting may never cross, the depiction of real-life violence and other atrocities, even those that do not reach this boundary, can, in some cases, seriously harm the mental development of minors. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that such material, which can have informational value for adult audiences, is mainly found online, where it is difficult to make it accessible only to those mature enough to process it.

According to the KJM, many German media outlets were reporting on current events very responsibly and meeting their legal obligation to protect young people. However, in a number of cases brought to its attention, the KJM suspected that human dignity had been violated. In Germany, television and radio content is illegal if it violates human dignity, "especially by presenting persons who are dying or who are, or were, exposed to serious physical or mental suffering, while reporting actual facts without any justified public interest in such form of presentation, or reporting, being given" (Article 4(1)(8) of the *Jugendmedienschutz-Staatsvertrag* (Interstate Treaty on the Protection of Minors in the Media – JMStV)). The KJM was therefore examining whether there remained a justified public interest to publish certain graphic images of war or whether they should not be shown by broadcasters and telemedia providers in order to effectively protect young people.

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In its press release concerning the examination of complaints it had received, the KJM also expressly appealed to media providers to take the protection of children and young people into account in their reporting and to shield minors from graphic images, especially of dead bodies. It also reminded readers that they could submit complaints (including online) to the state media authorities if they discovered graphic images of war-related atrocities that went beyond what was necessary for reporting purposes.

Pressemitteilung der KJM Nr. 08/2022

https://www.die-medienanstalten.de/service/pressemitteilungen/meldung?tx_news_pi1%5Bnews%5D=5025&cHash=c88aa0a5bc951b35eb01b5a4ea2c0b24

Commission for the Protection of Minors in the Media, press release no. 08/2022

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