

(7) STRESSES that social protection which guarantees an adequate safety net for all citizens is also an investment in balanced economic development and a significant competitive advantage in a globalising economy; RECOGNISES that the aspects relating to finance are common to all the objectives of social protection mentioned in point 6;

In addition to the broad four objectives for the development of social protection arrangements set out by the Commission,

(8) also EMPHASISES that equality between women and men must be mainstreamed in all activities aiming at the four objectives. This means assessing the consequences for women and men at all stages of planning, decision making and follow-up relating to such activities;

Furthermore,

(9) EMPHASISES that the Community should pay particular attention to a balanced economic and social development in the applicant countries in the process towards an enlargement of the European Union;

(10) STRESSES that full advantage should be taken of new technology and in particular of new information technology in the development of social welfare. At Community level, special attention should be given to activities which promote the utilisation of advanced information technology in the attainment of welfare goals. This technology must benefit the development of health and social services

and the social participation of all sectors of the population;

In order to achieve the goals of this cooperation for improving and modernising social protection,

(11) SUPPORTS the Commission's suggestion to establish a mechanism for enhanced cooperation brought about by the work of a group of high-level officials for the implementation of this action. Without prejudice to Article 207 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, a group of high-level officials will examine the issues raised in the Commission's communication and in these conclusions, and will in particular prepare a report to be submitted to the Council;

(12) UNDERLINES the necessity to create this group as soon as possible, and in the meantime asks the Member States and the Commission to designate, as soon as possible, for an interim period, high-level officials to launch the above-mentioned debate. Work should begin immediately and a progress report should be prepared in the context of the European Council in June 2000;

Finally,

(13) SUPPORTS the Commission's intention to associate the European Parliament with this process; also SUPPORTS the Commission's wish to involve the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions in this cooperation and WELCOMES the contribution of the social partners and social security institutions to this process.

COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS

of 17 December 1999

on the protection of minors in the light of the development of digital audiovisual services

(2000/C 8/06)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

(1) RECALLING Council Recommendation 98/560/EC of 24 September 1998 on the development of the competitiveness of the European audiovisual and information services industry by promoting national frameworks aimed at achieving a comparable and effective level of protection of minors and human dignity⁽¹⁾ and Decision No 276/1999/EC of the Parliament and of the Council of 25 January 1999 adopting a multiannual

Community action plan on promoting safer use of the Internet by combating illegal and harmful content on global networks⁽²⁾;

(2) RECALLING also the Council Conclusions of 27 September 1999 concerning the results of the public consultation on the Convergence Green Paper (in particular the aspects relating to the media and the audiovisual sector)⁽³⁾;

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 270, 7.10.1998, p. 48.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 33, 6.2.1999, p. 1.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 283, 6.10.1999, p. 1.

- (3) BEARING IN MIND the Council Conclusions of 27 September 1999 on the role of self-regulation in the light of the development of new media services ⁽¹⁾;
- (4) NOTING the outcome of the experts seminar on self-regulation in the media organised by the German Presidency, which began the debate on the possible contribution of self-regulation systems to the achievement of public interest objectives;
- (5) RECOGNISING that digital transmission systems are developing rapidly in the Member States and that it is therefore necessary to address the implementation of relevant protective measures for minors at this stage;
- (6) BEARING IN MIND the findings of the study on parental control of television broadcasting, carried out for the Commission in accordance with the requirements of Article 22(b)(2) of Council Directive 89/552/EEC of 3 October 1989 on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in Member States concerning the pursuit of television broadcasting activities (the 'Television Without Frontiers Directive') ⁽²⁾, and outlined in the Commission's communication to the Council, the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee on this study;
- (7) RECOGNISES the need to adapt and complement current systems for protecting minors from harmful audiovisual content, in the light of ongoing technical, social and market developments;
- (8) RECOGNISES that the development of new technical means for parental control must not reduce the respective responsibilities of the various categories of operators, such as broadcasters, providers of network, access, service, content etc., regarding the protection of minors from harmful content, and therefore;
- (9) CALLS ON Member States to:
- keep the effectiveness of current systems for protecting minors under review and to intensify their efforts with regard to educational and awareness measures,
- bring together the industries and parties concerned such as broadcasters and operators, regulatory and self-regulatory bodies in the audiovisual sector, software and Internet rating organisations and consumer associations, in order to examine ways to achieve greater clarity in the way audiovisual content is evaluated and rated, both within and between the various sectors concerned,
- continue their work to further implement the Recommendation cited in point 1 hereof;
- (10) INVITES the Commission, without prejudice to existing systems in the Member States, and where appropriate through existing Community financial instruments to:
- bring together the industries and parties concerned such as broadcasters and operators, regulatory and self-regulatory bodies in the audiovisual sector, software and Internet rating organisations and consumer associations at European level, in order to examine ways to achieve greater clarity in the way audiovisual content is evaluated and rated in Europe, both within and between the various sectors concerned, and to support the exchange of information and best practice regarding the protection of minors,
 - encourage the industry to develop user-friendly products for parents and educators which enable them to benefit from the technological means to protect minors,
 - examine possible Community actions to support and supplement Member State activities aimed at protecting minors from harmful audiovisual content through improved levels of media literacy and through measures to raise awareness,
- whilst taking full account of the work being done under the Community action plan on promoting safe use of the Internet and of developments and experience gained in the rest of the world.

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 283, 6.10.1999, p. 2.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 298, 17.10.1989, p. 23. Directive as amended by Directive 97/36/EC (OJ L 202, 30.7.1997, p. 60).