CHILDREN AND THE MEDIA

Background document

On 11-15 March 2001 the Third World Summit on Media for Children will be held in Thessaloniki, Greece. It will be organised by the European Children’s Television Centre, an associate member of Euronet, under the auspices of the President of the Hellenic Republic, UNESCO and UNICEF. Euronet, as a member of the advisory committee to this World Summit, has been asked for its input for this World Summit. This will be an excellent occasion for EURONET to bring to bear its views on a number of issues related to children and the media, and to make recommendations for further action. This paper provides a short summary of issues related to children and media, the actions that have been undertaken by the European Union in this field and a number of recommendations EURONET brings forward at the World Summit and the European institutions.

I - The Third World Summit on Media for Children

The first World Summit on Children and Television was held in Melbourne and the second in London. In Melbourne a Charter on Children and Television was adopted and in London a Children’s Charter on Children and Media was made. Children took this charter forward to television makers. For example, in the USA children took the Charter around to broadcasters and asked them to sign it.

The theme of the third World Summit is Children and Media. The theme has been broadened among others on the advice of the European Commission DG X, which finances part of the World Summit. The Summit will consist of 4 days at which 4 specific themes will be discussed.

Day one: “Going global: Policies and decision making, shaping the audiovisual future”
This will be more the political day of the Summit and a day that Euronet should be involved in.

Day two: “2000 for all: Developing countries facing the new millenium”

Day three: “What’s new: Promising new technologies?”
Day four: “Children have a say: Children’s audiovisual rights, audiovisual education, research, etc.” This theme would also be good for Euronet to get involved in, since it concerns the participation of children at the Summit.

The target groups of the Summit are media professionals in the field of children’s television, film and the new media as well as researchers, academics, teachers and children.

II - Summary of issues related to Children and Media

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been in force for 10 years in October 1999, the child shall have access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being (from article 17); the child shall have the right to freedom of expression (from article 13); and the child has the right to express her or his views in all matters affecting the child (from article 12).

- Children’s access to media

However, in spite of the globalisation of the media, children’s access to media is still very unequal. Access to new technologies is even more unequally spread. Only 4% of the world’s population was estimated to have access to Internet. Of these few percent, four fifths of the Internet use is estimated to occur in North America and Europe.

- Children and media violence

Apart from the fact that media education and participation is a child’s right, and the need to fight unequal media exposure, media violence is a phenomenon that should be given more attention. This violation can be perceived in different ways. In the first place there is the physical and visible violence (murders, blood, shooting, fighting) in the media, that is increasingly perceived as a threat to the well being of children.

- Children are underrepresented in the media

One can identify another kind of, more latent mental and structural, violence related to children and the media. That is that children as a group are underrepresented in the media. Although children under 18 constitute approximately 37% of the total world population, they are highly underrepresented and the younger they are, the more invisible they are. Moreover, certain social categories of children are represented more seldom than others. For example, girls, children belonging to the working class and ethnic and linguistic minorities are highly underrepresented. A number of scientists, amongst whom Dale Kunkel & Stacy L. Smith in the USA, have found that news media’s dominant frame for child coverage involves reports of crime and violence. For television, they found, such coverage accounted for nearly half (48%) of all stories, with only slightly less representation (40%) in the newspapers. Some argue that this under- and misrepresentation of (certain groups of) children in the media is a form of symbolic violence or cultural oppression. Good to know is that children themselves are critical to media contents and the way in which they are represented in them.
• **Children’s presence in advertising in the media**

There is one exception where children are more often represented in the context of the media — and that is advertising and other marketing techniques. The fact that children are becoming more common in advertising than in the media contents generally is a sign of the comparatively high economic-consumption value in society, as present and future consumers and as selling concepts and advertising strategies for products, values and life styles. Yet children are a vulnerable group. They do not react as adults do. They do not easily identify marketing for what it is, and particularly more covert techniques, such as children's clubs and advertorials. Moreover they cannot defend themselves from (unwanted) exposure and influence.

**III - EU Actions in the field of Children and Media**

The introduction of new information and audiovisual services, such as the Internet, has posed new risks for children. This is particularly the case with regard to sexual exploitation by child abusers. Child rights groups and consumer organisations, such as the European Consumers' Organisation (BEUC), urge the EU to take measures to protect children from such practices, as well as from aggressive marketing techniques in the media.

The reaction of the EU consists in encouraging the IT and audiovisual industry to develop self-regulatory frameworks. The industry however has not shown a great commitment to develop filtering and rating systems. A number of initiatives have been taken by the EU in order to improve the protection of children' and young people's rights in the media:

> A first step on a European level in reflecting on the ethical dimension of the Information Society was taken by the European Commission in 1996, when it issued a **Green Paper on the Protection of Minors and Human Dignity**\(^1\). This Paper opened a wide-ranging debate on the problems associated with the protection of minors and human dignity in audiovisual and information services, such as television and the Internet.

> This Green paper has led in 1997 to a Proposal for a Council Recommendation, presented in a Communication\(^2\) on the issue, which has resulted in the adoption of a **Council Recommendation on the Protection of Minors and Human Dignity in Audiovisual and Information Services**\(^3\) in 1998. This is the first legal instrument concerning the content of on-line audio-visual and information services made available on the Internet. The Recommendation, which is a legal act under Article 189 of the Treaty, aims to provide guidelines for national legislation and covers all electronic media:

- Television broadcasters are asked to try out new digital methods of parental control (such as personal codes, filtering software);
- On-line Internet service providers are asked to develop codes of good conduct so as to better apply and clarify current legislation.

The Recommendation offers guidelines for the development of national self-regulation regarding the protection of minors and human dignity.

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1 COM (96) 483 final.
2 COM (97) 570 final.
The Recommendation is closely linked to the 1999 Action Plan on Promoting Safe Use of the Internet, which refers to the 1999 Communication on Illegal and Harmful Content on the Internet.

In 1997 the Commission adopted the Television without Frontiers Directive, which focused, amongst others, on the prohibition of television programmes susceptible to seriously harm the child's development.

As required by Article 22b of the Television without Frontiers Directive, the Commission has issued a Communication on Parental Control of Television Broadcasting in 1999. This Communication further links in with the recent Council Recommendation on the Protection of Minors and Human Dignity in Audiovisual and Information services.

In 1997 the Commission introduced the DAPHNE Programme, which is aimed at combating violence against children, adolescents and women. In autumn 1999 the Council has adopted a Common Position on the DAPHNE Programme so as to create the legal base that is still lacking. Among many projects, the Programme provides for a project aimed at protecting children from harmful contents on the Internet or any other instrument of new technologies.

The Commission's DG Education and Culture has introduced the Netd@ys Europe initiative. This is a programme aimed at promoting the effective use of on-line technology in education and training.

IV – EURONET Recommendations

EURONET welcomes the initiatives taken on a European Community level to ameliorate the protection of minors from harmful contents of audiovisual and information services. Yet the summary overview of the most pressing issues related to children and the media (see II) reflects the need for more action on a number of points. EURONET therefore does the following recommendations:

In order to perfect the security of children, the European Commission, in collaboration with the EU Member States, should elaborate the initiatives that have already been adopted. The Commission should persist in following up national measures on audio-visual and information services.

Self-regulation for the protection of children by the industry should be improved and stimulated by the European Commission, for example by a code of ethics.

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5 Communication adopted on 11 May 1999.
The EU institutions should engage more actively at the side of NGOs in the sector of audio-visual and information services, as well as with children themselves, in order to elaborate strategies and projects relating to the policy field.

The European Commission should undertake supplementary steps in order to make available new technologies to all children and young people.

The Council of Ministers should allow supplementary measures to be taken by Europol so that it can play a stronger role in policing the development of audio-visual and information services.

E.U. legislators should be urged to support legislation that protects children in relation to all types of marketing practices, notably in-school marketing, direct marketing, as well as new forms of advertising and marketing practices such as via e-commerce. Direct business contacts could be set up in order to start the dialogue at a grassroots level.

The different working groups at the Third World Summit on Children and Media should develop an Action Plan for the next 5 to 10 years on Children and the Media. This should be a kind of Charter on Children and Media, including all different types of media. The following issues should be addressed by an Action Plan:

- **Child friendly journalism** needs to be developed further. This can be achieved in a number of ways: giving children a say in stories, listening to children, and talking to a representative group of children and through the drawing up of guidelines for journalists. The International Federation of Journalists has already published some draft guidelines for media professionals on child rights and the media.

- **Children’s participation** not only being a child’s right, it is also a means to increase democracy. Moreover, participation proves to be an effective tool to teach children to be intelligent users and consumers and to harness them against advertising and media violence. Children’s participation in media begins with teaching children about media. Schools, parents, child-focused NGOs and media practitioners have a special role to play in this respect. Children’s participation at the Summit is crucial, not only in a separate programme where they can make their own films, etc, but in being able to give their views and input on the issue of media for children.

- Concretely, children should have an input in the Charter on Children and Media and the Guidelines for journalists. These documents could be developed into a practical and legally binding Code of conduct on Children and Media, to which politicians and journalists can be held accountable.

- **Media education** must emanate and be produced to a large extent from students themselves in order to achieve critical thinking. Examples of this are initiatives such as kids creating media for kids, TV by and for Teens and video production by students.
Access to, participation in and initiatives to improve the existing situation widely vary in different parts of the world. Therefore, regional conferences should be organised in order to provide the Summit with a comprehensive overview of the situation.

V - Selection of International and Regional Legislation and Declarations

European Union Legislation and Declarations

- The European Convention on Trans-frontier Television of the Council of Europe
  Especially article 7: responsibility of the broadcaster
- The European Union Directive “Television without frontiers”
  The Directive establishes the legal frame of reference for the free movement of television broadcasting services in the Union’s 15 member states. To this end it provides for the Community co-ordination of national legislation in several areas, not least protection of minors, expressed in article 22 of the Directive.
- The European Broadcasting Union’s guidelines for programmes when dealing with the portrayal of violence.
- The European Union Recommendation on the protection of minors and human dignity in audio-visual and information services.
- The European Union Action plan on promoting safer use of the Internet.

International/General Guidelines

- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: Article 17 (access to appropriate information)
- The Children’s Television Charter.
- Child rights and the media: Guidelines for journalists