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United-Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child
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Digital media and Children's rights

Workshop 2: Children's empowerment and engagement through digital media and ICT

I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to provide you with the media perspective, in particular broadcasters' views. I am proud to represent today the European Broadcasting Union, the world's largest association of national and public service broadcasters which operates Euroradio and Eurovision (the media industry's premier distributor and producer of top quality live sport and news, as well as entertainment, culture and music content) and which headquarters are located just a step from the building of the United-Nations here in Geneva.

As mentioned several times, the development of digital and social media has revolutionized the way media interact with their audiences, in particular with children and young people. This is true regarding child online protection, but also regarding programme making and how to empower children and young people through the use of online technologies.

The main challenge as addressed in the outline document is indeed how to find a balance in protecting children without restricting the benefits and opportunities they get through the Internet and ICT and, I would like to add without preventing the media from engaging with young audiences, and particularly public service media content and services.

Let me please focus on 5 main points: child protection, production of appropriate content, empowerment of children, digital media literacy, and finally EBU work cooperation with other key stakeholders.

- Child protection

The protection of children and minors in today's converging media environment is a special concern and represents a key challenge. The value in protecting children is deeply rooted in the DNA of broadcasters and of public service media in particular because of their specific role as providers of trusted content.

However, the relevance of the traditional means to protect children from harmful television programmes content such a "time to broadcast" (watershed) and the use of acoustic warning or visual symbol may be questioned in light of the new multiplatform and multi-device environment where media is consumed "anytime, anywhere and anyhow".

Moreover, filtering systems or parental control software, including pre-locking systems and PIN codes, have so far shown only limited value in practice. Their effectiveness and reliability are questioned and are under scrutiny (in particular on the Internet). Furthermore, there is the risk that they block access to suitable and valuable content.

From the broadcasters perspective, there is also a more general risk for freedom of expression and information in particular if these systems were to be defined and managed by third parties.

Ideally, in the era of Internet broadband and media convergence, the best solution would be a global coherent protection system (i.e. common consistent age rating and classification system for media content) across the various devices and platforms.

However, this may be considered unrealistic given the huge cultural and societal differences from one country to another. Even at the European level, there is no consensus on the feasibility of a common rating, classification of media content and parental control access systems.

There may be merit in exploring the interoperability between different existing classification systems with the industry working together on a voluntary basis to explore possible options. This is what the EBU is currently doing with the ITU.

Nevertheless, all national and public service broadcasters of the world are exploring/developing new tools and new forms of protection more suitable for the Digital era.

Efforts have been made in European countries to increase the use of content labelling systems for material distributed over the Internet and to facilitate the access of children to positive and appropriate content tailored to them.

But the protection of children is not only about technical means but a combination of different measures (i.e. production of appropriate content, digital media literacy) and the sharing of responsibilities among various actors.

- Production of appropriate content for children

Technical measures alone are not sufficient to deal with the question of the child's protection.

For PSM whose principal purpose is to inform, entertain and educate, trust is at the centre of the relationship with their audiences, a trust that must be earned each and every day.

Their editorial policy and principles are the same for all content transmitted on television or on-line. They have an outstanding track record in providing suitable content for children and for doing everything within their control to provide a safe viewing environment.

Broadcasters should ensure that children have access to safe and adequate-age content on all devices and platforms.

- Empowerment of children through online technologies

The EBU believes that media bear an inherent responsibility to create and use content that empowers the world's children, and not only those privileged.

The media can actively and proactively support creativity and imaginative thinking among children and young adults. The importance of empowering children in their role as media consumers but also contributors should be emphasized.

Particular account must be taken of a child's right to participate and to have the freedom to receive and impart information as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This includes the right to access information and material from a variety of national and international sources.

PSM develop campaigns, online tools and cross-media programmes enabling children to take an active part in the media world. PSM also work closely with educational partners to encourage creativity and reflective skills in children within a trusted online space.

A concrete example is TV2 Norway's development of a children's news program which has been integrated into the Norwegian school system to help children learn about the world through current events and provide a global perspective. Other examples are: Curiosphere.tv from France Televisions in France, Ketnet.be from VRT in Belgium.

- Digital Media Literacy

In a digital world, learning never ends. Understanding how to use the latest media technology and evaluate its content is fundamental to critical understanding and active participation. The challenge is to devise campaigns, online tools and cross media programmes that appeal to young minds and yet impart practical instruction: to make users aware of the dangers of the internet and provide practical guidance about how to handle personal data or behave in chat rooms.

PSM have achieved this through a variety of programmes that combine the potential for personal development with simple fun. For example: "2025 Ex Machina" France Télévisions in France and "Smokescreen" Channel 4 in the UK.

- Cooperation with other key stakeholders

The EBU regularly contributes to the policy making efforts of the European institutions dealing with child protection, such as the Council of Europe and the European Union, but also of International organisations, such as the ITU, IGF of the UN, UNICEF and others.

In this field our most recent contribution were our reply to the European Commission Green Paper on media convergence and also our position paper regarding the European Commission proposal for a General Data Protection Regulation (aimed at modernising the 1995 Data Protection Directive).

Even more recent, the ITU and UNICEF released last Friday, 5 September 2014, updated general Guidelines for Industry on Child Online Protection, with a large section dedicated to national and public service broadcasting, that was provided by the BBC and the EBU. Those guidelines will be distributed to all broadcasting unions of the world through the World Broadcasting Unions (WBU).

Last but not least, for your information, though this is not yet official, it is also the EBU's intention to host probably in September 2017 the World Summit on Media for Children Foundation. We are currently finalizing discussions with our partners and I am sure we will have the opportunity to talk about this event at a later stage.

Thank you.

Anne-Catherine Berg