proceedings under Article 226 of the EC Treaty. However, the information available to it in the present case suggests that neither of these categories applies in this instance.


WRITTEN QUESTION E-3718/00
by Cristiana Muscardini (UEN) to the Commission
(30 November 2000)

Subject: Terrorism, violence and black humour on websites

The Internet is increasingly becoming a meeting place for every possible kind of evil. Alongside sites carrying paedophile images and scenes of pornographic violence, there is a proliferation of sites showing harrowing scenes of attacks and explosions caused by various international terrorist organisations, with a marked preference for ideological or fundamentalist movements. Another series of sites involves animated cartoons and extremely violent black humour, with characters shot in the head and another character called Ricky Martin who is tortured and cut into pieces, fat chicks dancing until they explode and sweet little puppies that have their heads kicked off.

Although this type of communication admittedly involves the exercise of freedom of expression,

1. Does the Commission not consider that this continual transmission of violence, failure to respect human dignity and absolute contempt for the slightest degree of self-regulation, should be subject to internationally agreed standards?

2. Does it not think that it should take advantage of the forthcoming world communications forum organised by the United Nations to put forward proposals on the need for regulation of the Internet and to prevent, inter alia, unfortunate situations similar to those caused by the 'European union' site?

Answer given by Mr Liikanen on behalf of the Commission
(31 January 2001)

The approach of the Commission to dealing with illegal and harmful content on the Internet has remained consistent since the adoption of the Communication on illegal and harmful content on the Internet (1) and the green paper on protection of minors and human dignity in October 1996 (1). Significant progress has been made thanks to a concerted approach by Member States and the institutions of the Union.

The primary responsibility for dealing with illegal content is with the appropriate law enforcement and judicial authorities. Industry can provide assistance to law enforcement in particular in removing illegal content from circulation and in providing information and expertise in accordance with applicable legal rules.

However, the Internet is a global instrument and does not recognise national frontiers. International co-operation involves law enforcement collaborating in appropriate ways including the existing channels of communications, such as Europol and Interpol. Co-operation is being reinforced as a result of work in the group of eight most industrialized countries (G8) and the draft Council of Europe convention which the Commission is following closely.

Harmful content means both content which is allowed but whose distribution is restricted (adults only, for instance) and content which may offend certain users, or which responsible adults (parents and teachers) consider potentially harmful to children in their care, although its publication is not restricted because of the principle of freedom of expression.
Action at an international level needs to take account of divergent approaches in different countries to what is harmful and how far free speech can be restricted. It is not likely that agreement could be reached on a single set of rules for Internet content.

The best approach to deal with harmful content is a combination of industry self-regulation within a legal framework, encouragement of technical tools to protect children and services offering suitable content for children, and education and awareness-raising.

The action plan on promoting safer use of the Internet (3) supports four areas: a European network of hotlines (to take reports about illegal content), self-regulation by industry, filtering and rating and education and awareness-raising. 20 projects are currently under way.

Member States are also committed under the Recommendation on protection of minors and human dignity (4) to provide the appropriate framework for self-regulation.


(2001/C 187 E/35)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-3727/00
by Graham Watson (ELDR) to the Commission
(30 November 2000)

Subject: The lack of European Business and Innovation Centres in the South West of England

Could the Commission please explain why European Business and Innovation Centres currently exist in relatively affluent areas of the UK such as Birmingham and Cambridge, when there is no Centre at all in the South-West of England, a region that contains areas such as Cornwall which are among some of the poorest areas in the EU?

Answer given by Mr Barnier on behalf of the Commission
(20 February 2001)

European business and innovation centres (BICs) are private companies or not-for-profit associations set up by local or regional public-private partnerships. They are founded on the Community concept of business support services under a Community brand name but are legally and financially independent.

The decision to set up a BIC does not depend on the Commission but on the local partnerships of public and private bodies having an interest and responsibility for business development in the local and regional community. Such was the case, for example, in Cambridge.

In areas assisted by European regional policy, such as Birmingham, the launching of new BICs may in addition be supported financially by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for a strictly limited period of time. Such a project should be presented to the competent bodies at regional level.