



● ESC unveils results of major new research on protecting children on the internet

In an additional opinion ("**A programme for child protection on the internet**") adopted in plenary session on 28 November without any dissenting votes, the European ESC has made public the results of a survey of children's attitudes to, and use of, the internet across Europe.

- Between 75-80% of Austrian and UK children between the ages of 11 and 14, for instance, surf the internet alone. **UK children are, according to this survey, more likely to find "nasty" or "violent" sites than their EU counterparts. Austrian children are at almost the same risk.**

- **UK children are more likely to surf alone without parental supervision** compared - especially - to southern European countries where "family" internet use is more common. In Greece, for instance, virtually no children in the 11-13 age group use the internet without parental supervision. **Nevertheless, 80% of Greek children use internet chat lines.**

What do the children themselves think? When asked:

- **Well over 80% of children wanted to be protected from "rude pictures"; over 75% wanted to be protected from violent sites and gambling.** Children did not generally think they needed protection from **internet shopping sites**, however. In certain countries - such as **France** - racist sites were mentioned as a particular problem.

What is to be done? According to the rapporteur, Mrs Davison (Various Interests, UK) the results show that



Mrs Ann Davison, rapporteur

"children have become very internet savvy". "But children themselves also feel that they need to be protected from pornography and violence more than is currently the case," she added.

The ESC makes a specific call in its opinion for European internet sites to be tagged as "children-friendly". These could then easily be selected by search engines. While parental supervision is clearly a good thing, the ESC recognises that it is not possible or practical all the time. The ESC takes the view that voluntary rating has not done the job; all internet sites must be rated as a mandatory requirement. Mrs Davison added: "The Commission has already tackled a number of internet issues - for instance regarding education - but children's safety must not be left out. There is a pressing need for internet service providers to be legally obliged to protect children surfing on the internet."

● ESC voices concern about pension provision in two separate opinions



Mrs Giacomina Cassina, rapporteur

The ESC's November plenary session saw adoption of two separate opinions on the subject of pension provision in the EU. The first of these - an own-initiative opinion (on **Economic Growth, Taxation and Sustainability of Pension Rights in the EU**) adopted by a large majority - calls for the basic right of pensioners to enjoy a decent standard of living. In the Committee's view, **creating more employment was an integral part of a responsible strategy.** The rapporteur in this case was Mr Byrne, an Irish member of the Committee's Employers' Group. The co-rapporteur was Mr van Dijk (Workers, the Netherlands).

Future decisions on pensions should take into account the social changes proper to each Member State and taxes and pension contributions should fall

into line with these changes. The modernisation of Europe's pension systems should take into account compatibility with the work pool, equality between the sexes, transparency and flexibility. **Applicant countries** must examine their pension systems in their assessment of long term sustainability while member states should think about the possible use of supplementary schemes.

In the second opinion (**Supporting national strategies for safe and sustainable pensions**) the ESC calls for an integrated approach to safe and sustainable pensions. The main goal is achieving a synergy between political, economic, and social policies with the active participation of the social

partners. **Each Member State has its own pension system which makes it unrealistic to try to harmonize their structures: the open method of coordination should help communication between Member States and the social partners.** The ESC favours the creation and use of a set of indicators that takes into account means of communication and transport, degree of social integration in terms of housing including home ownership, accessibility to services and leisure, etc. This would complete the analysis of national systems.

The rapporteur was Mrs Cassina (Workers, Italy). The opinion was adopted without any votes against, and a single abstention.

● Services and the single market: the Commission should take its role of guardian of the treaty with "more determination"

On 28 November ESC members adopted an additional opinion on an **Internal Market Strategy for Services** with a very large vote in favour and a single abstention. The rapporteur was Mr Vever, a French member of the Committee's Employers' Group. This opinion underscores the problem of obstacles that hinder European companies from offering proper services to consumers across national borders. The ESC takes the view that it is imperative that the principle of free circulation of goods and services in the common market be reaffirmed and that frauds committed be severely reprimanded. This would work towards more efficiency and cohesion in the internal market. **The Commission should take its role of guardian of the treaty with more determination and consider ways to deter various forms of crime more rapidly.**

● Commission President Prodi and Belgian Minister Neyts guests at November plenary session

Commission President Prodi began his speech on 28 November by remarking that EU citizens were losing confidence in the Union's institutions and that "we must put an end to this". In this connection, promoting new forms of governance was a vital priority for the Commission. **Mr Prodi congratulated the ESC on its work on stepping up contacts both with civil society organisations in the EU not directly represented on the Committee, and with civil society organisations in the candidate countries.**

Referring to the Commission's White Paper on European Governance, Mr Prodi told Committee members that he placed "high hopes in ESC exploratory opinions" that would involve the Committee earlier in the consultative process. "We need to preserve democratic accountability, but we must also allow for participatory democracy," commented Mr Prodi.

There was a need for the EU to clarify its common objectives and for each institution to concentrate on its core

activities. The Nice Treaty reflected the increasing recognition of the role of the ESC. Referring in particular to the situation post-Laeken, the Commission president noted that the Committee was an **"essential intermediary between vital forces in our society... your job is to encourage and synthesise debate"**.

For her part, **Mrs Annemie Neyts**, Deputy Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs, informed ESC members of the state of preparations for the Laeken Summit. She noted that "just about everybody" had accepted the principle of a convention which would operate for 12-15 months to prepare the next intergovernmental conference. **The ESC would, the minister said, participate in the convention as a permanent observer.** Thanking Mrs Neyts for her participation, ESC president **Göke Frerichs** reminded her that the Committee was the only EU institution able to represent the Union's economic and social interests. Referring to those groups not currently represented on the ESC he said: "our door is open".

● September 11 and the world economy

In an own-initiative opinion entitled **World Economic Changes: New Economic Challenges for the European Union** (rapporteur: Mrs Konitzer, Workers, Germany) adopted in plenary session in November without any dissenting votes, the Committee calls on the Commission to clarify its approach to macroeconomic policy in the European Union. The ESC further calls on the Commission to submit *specific proposals*, going beyond the declaration of the Ghent European Council, as to how the economic policy and macroeconomic policy mix of the Community and monetary union should be adapted to the changed world economic situation (after the terrorist attacks of September 11). These proposals should also clearly set out what contribution is expected from individual players.

Commissioner Fischler urged to assist increase in EU production of plant protein crops

● Mr Fischler on the Commission's position: "Our assessments hold water and will continue to do so"



Commissioner Franz Fischler

At a hearing* on 5 December organised by the European ESC in cooperation with the European Parliament, Commissioner Franz Fischler heard the concerns of a number of key players in the agricultural sector - together with the ESC rapporteur on the future of plant protein crops in the EU, Mr Jean-Claude Sabin, and Mr Struan Stevenson, the EP rapporteur on the same subject.

Both Mr Sabin and his ESC Agriculture section colleague Mr Bastian stressed to Mr Fischler that it was in the Union's interests to "slightly increase" EU self-sufficiency in plant proteins given the consequences of the ban on bone meal

in animal feed and the high percentage of GM crops in our imports. Mr Bastian remarked: "The Commission's report (*Options to promote the cultivation of plant proteins in EU*) really discourages us. *What we need is a strategy for the long term and one that gives a positive signal to this type of production so that investments in research and factories can be made.*"

Commissioner Fischler, meanwhile, counted on a "full recovery" of the Union's beef and veal market. Currently the need for between 1 and 1.5 million tonnes more soya to meet this extra demand for animal feed could be sourced from the world market. The proposal of funding a sharp increase in production put forward by a number of speakers at the hearing was difficult or impossible to reconcile with the Blair House agreements. Also, using set-aside land would "undermine the efficiency of the set-aside scheme".

In his concluding remarks, Mr Fischler said that he was open to the possibility of renegotiating international agreements to encourage protein crops, but he needed to know what concessions European agriculture would offer. In the meantime he took the view that "our assessments hold water and will continue to do so"

* Full title: "Plant protein crops: their future and their role in animal nutrition"

● Past ESC president honoured by France

Mrs Beatrice Rangoni Machiavelli, who chaired the Committee between 1998 and 2000, has been awarded the Légion d'Honneur by the President of France, Mr Jacques Chirac. Mrs Rangoni Machiavelli was presented the award by France's ambassador to Italy, Mr Jacques Blot, on 13 November. Mr Blot cited Mrs Rangoni Machiavelli's dedication to the European cause, both since 1982 as a member of the ESC and as a journalist in her home country of Italy, as reasons for the honour.

● Opinions adopted during the 386th plenary session

- ◆ Sustainable Europe (additional own-initiative opinion)
Rapporteur: *Mr Ehnmark*
(Gr. II - S)
Co-rapporteur: *Mr Ribbe*
(Gr. III - D)
- ◆ An Internal Market Strategy for Services (additional opinion)
Rapporteur: *Mr Vever*
(Gr. I - F)
- ◆ A programme for child protection on the Internet (additional opinion)
Rapporteur: *Mrs Davison*
(Gr. III - UK)
- ◆ Network and information security
Rapporteur: *Mr Retureau*
(Gr. II - F)
- ◆ Joint Undertaking/Galileo
Rapporteur: *Mr Bernabei*
(Gr. I-I)
- ◆ World economic changes: New economic challenges for the European Union (own-initiative)
Rapporteur: *Mrs Konitzer*
(Gr. II-D)
- ◆ Economic growth, taxation and sustainability of pension rights in the EU (own-initiative opinion)
Rapporteur: *Mr Byrne*
(Gr. I-IRL)
Rapporteur-general: *Mr van Dijk*
(Gr. II-NL)
- ◆ Safe and sustainable pensions (communication)
Rapporteur: *Mrs Cassina*
(Gr. II-I)
- ◆ Cross-border payments in euros
Rapporteur: *Mr Burani*
(Gr. I - I)
- ◆ Simplification in the single market (additional opinion)
Rapporteur: *Mr Walker*
(Gr. I - UK)
- ◆ Financial collateral arrangements
Rapporteur: *Mr Barros Vale*
(Gr. I - P)
- ◆ XXXth report on competition policy
Rapporteur: *Mr Sepi*
(Gr. II - I)
- ◆ Food ionisation
Rapporteur: *Mr Jaschick*
(Gr. III - D)
- ◆ Common Procurement Vocabulary
Rapporteur: *Mr Hernández Bataller*
(Gr. III - E)
- ◆ European Charter for small enterprises (additional own-initiative opinion)
Rapporteur: *Mr Girón*
(Gr. III - F)
- ◆ Immunity from fines (additional opinion)
Rapporteur: *Mr Sepi*
(Gr. II - I)
- ◆ Market access to port services
Rapporteur: *Mr Retureau*
(Gr. II - F)
- ◆ Speed limitation devices for certain categories of motor vehicles
Rapporteur: *Mr Colombo*
(Gr. II - I)
- ◆ State aid: coal industry
Rapporteur: *Mr Gafo Fernández*
(Gr. I - E)
- ◆ COM - bananas
Rapporteur: *Mr Espuny Moyano*
(Gr. I - E)
- ◆ Sweden: Economic situation and implementation of the structural reforms (own-initiative)
Rapporteur: *Mr Walker*
(Gr. I - UK)
- ◆ Tax policy of the European Union - priorities
Rapporteur: *Mr Morgan*
(Gr. I - UK)
- ◆ Structural Funds for 2000-2006
Rapporteur: *Mr Christie*
(Gr. II - UK)
- ◆ Effective taxation of savings income in the form of interest payments
Rapporteur: *Mr Ravoet*
(Gr. I - B)
- ◆ Labour cost index
Rapporteur: *Mrs Hornung-Draus*
(Gr. I - D)
- ◆ Minimum standards on the reception of applicants for asylum in Member States
Rapporteur: *Mr Mengozzi*
(Gr. III - I)
Co-rapporteur: *Mr Pariza Castaños*
(Gr. II - E)
- ◆ Organisation of a labour force sample survey in the Community
Rapporteur: *Mr Sklavounos*
(Gr. III - EL)
- ◆ Medical devices incorporating stable derivatives of human blood or human plasma
Rapporteur: *Mr Ribeiro*
(Gr. III - P)
- ◆ Co-operation on activities concerning the information and communication policy of the European Union
Rapporteur-general: *Mr Gafo Fernández*
(Gr. I - E)
- ◆ Common rules in the field of civil aviation security
Rapporteur-general: *Mr Green*
(Gr. I-DK)

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CES-Info is a free publication from the Press Service of the European Economic and Social Committee. Available in 11 languages, CES-Info provides a summary of keynote ESC activities every month.

CES-Info is not the official record of the Committee's work; this appears in the Official Journal of the European Communities and other ESC publications.

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Print run: 20,750. The next edition will be published in January 2002.