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Protection of Minors – Convergences of the Regulation

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Thank you Lorena for giving me the floor. And thank fellow panellists and members of the audience for attending today's conference.

For those of you unfamiliar with ERGA, we were established in 2014 to assist the European Commission with the implementation of the Audio-visual Media Services Directive. Our members are independent, national AV regulators from across the EU.

Last year, we surveyed our members on their day-to-day experiences with the protection of minors in a converged environment and published a report on how this could be improved. Our recommendations included the need for better tools that empower parents to protect their children, encouraging self and co-regulation, and levelling protection across linear and non-linear content. The majority of our recommendations were incorporated into the proposal for the revised directive, which also strengthens the role of ERGA.

The need for better protection of minors is high and rising. This morning you saw images collected by the Netherlands Institute for the Classification of Audio-visual Media that show minors can easily access harmful content on common platforms like YouTube and Facebook. This material is deeply disturbing. Warzone executions. Mobs savagely beating people. Addicts shooting up heroine. Women crying as they are being raped. The bloody aftermath of accidents. Kids cartoons dubbed with profanity.

Consider for a moment that your son or daughter watches this on their iPad. Image their confusion and disgust. And realise that such content teaches them that human suffering, sexual degradation, violence and vulgarity are normal, amusing or cool. This influences their sense of self, their future relationships, and their parenting, harming both them and society as a whole.

ERGA members are reporting that parents are becoming increasingly concerned, as well as frustrated they do not have the tools to protect their children. Now, some tools do exist and the industry has begun to take steps, but there are too many different initiatives and too little coordination.

The way the industry is able to protect copyrighted material seems to suggest a more effective and efficient approach is possible. ERGA believes that what is needed is a system that works across platforms and devices, that is easy to use, affordable, and universally applicable, while taking into account cultural

differences. And we need a system that is robust, pragmatic and capable of protecting all minors at various ages.

The proposal for the revised directive gives the industry the freedom to develop this system. Later this Autumn, I will attend a meeting of the Alliance to hear about the industry' s ambitions, and I imagine they will make this a top priority. For two reasons. First, it is their social responsibility. Their position as creators, distributors or portals, gives them a moral obligation to protect the most vulnerable groups in society.

Second, there is a clear financial incentive. Parents will choose devices and platforms that offer the best protection, meaning the level of protection could in itself become a competitive advantage. This could mean more traffic, advertising income and subscriptions. Not acting, on the other hand, could lead to reputational and financial damage when parents complain and take their business elsewhere.

Furthermore, commercial parties will want to minimise the cost of compliance by getting involved in the design and implementation of the system as early as possible. Those who wait on the sidelines may find that it is far more costly to adjust their software, networks or even their business model.

So ladies and gentlemen,

Audio-visual media are a wonderful source of entertainment, learning, discourse and culture. They will help us shape the next generation of parents and leaders, but we need to do this in a caring and responsible way. That is why we need to protect minors from harmful content to the very best of our ability. Now, a narrow window of opportunity has presented itself to create a good European system of protection. ERGA expects the industry to deliver on this, in close co-operation with all stakeholders. Thank you.