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EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP AND HUMAN RIGHTS AS INTEGRAL PART OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION POLICY

The aim of education for democratic citizenship and human rights (EDC/HRE) is the establishment of sustainable forms of democracy in society based on respect for human rights and the rule of law. In a period of rapid and unprecedented changes, EDC/HRE is one of society's strongest defense, as well as, preventive mechanism against the rise of violence, racism, extremism, xenophobia, discrimination and intolerance. It also makes a major contribution to social cohesion and social justice. The main objective of EDC/HRE is to help all people, children and youth as well, play an active part in democratic life and exercise their rights and responsibilities in society through exposure to educational practices and activities. EDC/HRE is a lifelong learning process that takes place in connected "sites of citizenship", in the classroom, education institution and local and wider community.

Citizenship education, which includes learning about the rights and duties of citizens, respect for democratic values and human rights, and the importance of solidarity, tolerance and participation in a democratic society, is seen, in the process of European integration, as a means of preparing children and young people to become active and responsible citizens.

Civic education, whenever and however undertaken, prepares people of a country, especially the young, to carry out their roles as citizens. Civic education is, therefore, political education or, as Amy Gutmann describes it, "the cultiva-

tion of the virtues, knowledge, and skills necessary for political participation"[1]. Of course, in some regimes political participation and therefore civic education can be limited or even negligible.

The general purpose of this paper is to introduce a couple of the key issues of the debate on education for democratic citizenship and human rights. Whereas the specific aim is to identify and highlight connecting points between the political and social discourse on human rights and education for democratic citizenship, and existing perspectives of children's rights in the informative society.

In the context of the 25th anniversary of the signing of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC)[2], the vital area of public policy-human rights-should be underpinned by respect for children's rights, including rights of participation, and the right of young people to have their voices heard in matters affecting them. While the Convention is not the first international treaty to protect children's rights[3], it stands apart from previous declarations in that it enshrines the idea of children as rights-holding individuals. Previous debates and declarations mostly focused on protection and provision rights, addressing children's 'vulnerability' by asserting their developmental needs for health and social care, education, and protection from harm. By contrast, the Convention constructs children as people with the right to express their opinion in matters that concern them, thus adding participation rights to those of protection and provision.

The development of digital media has brought new social, cultural and political opportunities for many people, including children. However, along with all these opportunities, risks and possible harmful practices have also emerged. Today, a child-rights-based approach to online safety is required in order to face the main challenge: how to keep a balance in protecting children rights enshrined in the CRC without restricting the benefits they can have through the Internet and ICT (Information and Communication Technology). That is why this presentation focuses on protecting child's rights in the digital world.

A child is a human being with the same rights as an adult but with different capabilities. We have to teach those rights to children and they themselves should be willing and capable of using them. We have to learn those rights as parents and educators. These are civic rights of human beings; the rights connected with children's participation in the social life, with their rights to have their say. Those civic rights are the priorities of the contemporary world. It is reflected in worldwide research and in the discussions.

In Europe the debate around internet safety has moved a long way since the 1990s when it focused mostly on pornography and predators. In the early days of

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[1] A. Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, Princeton University Press 1999, p. 287.

[2] United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989*. View at: http://www.ohchr. org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx (Last viewed on 6 March 2014).

[3] A Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child was adopted by the League of Nations in 1924 and later reviewed and adopted by the United Nations in 1948 and 1959.

the internet, public policy debates around children were mostly concerned with identifying risks and putting regulations in place to protect children from inappropriate content and online grooming. It is now widely accepted that digital media potentially present tremendous benefits for children and the community. While this does not deter from the fact that protection rights are vital to address potential harms that may be exacerbated by new technologies, a shift of focus towards the beneficial impact of digital media may well contribute to improving the management of the associated risks.

One fifth of the European Union's population are children and the protection and promotion of their rights are a priority for the EU and Council of Europe and their institutions. EU Member States are bound to protect, respect and promote the rights of the child under international and European treaties, in particular the UN Convention *on the Rights of the Child and the European Convention on Human Rights. The European Union's Charter of Fundamental Rights also recognizes children's rights in Article 24*[4].

In my opinion, the issue of safety online is much more complicated and complex than in the last decade of the 20th century. The problem requires much more attention because today, digital media and social networking sites are part of children's daily lives. From being simple recipients of information, children are becoming participants and agent of communication. It is therefore important to review the impacts that new ways of communication are having on children, in order to empower them, as well as parents and all professionals working for and with them, to make the best use of the online environment.

There is no special reference to digital media, ICT[5] or the internet in the Convention or its Optional Protocols. However, a direct or indirect link can be made between these new media and children's rights. Direct relation with the digital media and the ICT are encapsulated in the four principles of the Convention: non-discrimination (Art. 2), best interest of the Child (Art. 3), life and development (Art. 6) and right to be heard (Art. 12). Furthermore, there are links with the rights of freedom of expression (Art. 13), access to information (Art. 17), freedom from violence (Art. 19), right to education (Art. 28 and 29), right to rest, leisure,

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[4] Art 24 of the EU Charter states that: "1. Children shall have the right to such protection and care as is necessary for their well-being. They may express their views freely. Such views shall be taken into consideration on matters which concern them in accordance with their age and maturity. 2. In all actions relating to children, whether taken by public authorities or private institutions, the child's best interests must be a primary consideration. 3. Every child shall have the right to maintain on a regular basis a personal relationship and direct contact with both his or her parents, unless that is contrary to his or her interests". Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2010/C 83/02), http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=O-J:C:2010:083:0389:0403:en:PDF.

[5] See: ICT Coalition (2012) Principles for the safer use of connected devices and online services by children and young people in the EU. www.gsma-documents.com/safer_mobile/ICT_Principles.pdf.

play and engage in recreational activities (Art. 31), protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (Art. 34), protection from all forms of exploitation (Art. 36). Articles 2 and 3 of the Optional protocol are also related to the impact of digital media and ICT.

Already 25 years ago art. 13 of the CRC made it very clear that:" the child should have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice". There is no doubt that 'any other media' includes the internet. Therefore, according to the international treaty, children have codified rights when it comes to, what they can read and what can they say.

However, in the interest of protecting children, the adults may deny them the right to access certain harmful materials and express themselves. Schools around the world use filters that restrict access to some websites and apps. These filters have been already used for some time. Firstly, they were mostly used to block pornography. Over time they evolved to block also sites that advocate or depict violence, hate speech, the use of alcohol or illegal drugs. The purest interpretation of the Convention could be used against the use of these filters for any purpose. Yet, there is a wide spread opinion that parents and educators have the right to protect children from potentially harmful or disturbing content. Also schools have a right and responsibility to keep youngsters from accessing certain content within their facilities.

Consequently, intellectual freedom of children is not an absolute right in this framework. It is guaranteed with educational goals in mind, and is restricted to protect the most vulnerable from injurious materials online. The role of the internet can be considered as part of the implementation of Art. 13 and 17 in making the right to have an access to information effective for the child. But, the issue of blocking the access is manifold. Filters are not only used to block harmful websites. They can also be used to block access to social media sites. That procedure takes place in many schools all over the world.

The serious dilemma of ethical concern comes when we encounter concrete terms: both empower and protect in situation of the filtering of children internet access. This is a problem, because, in practical terms, the over-blocking of non-pornographic websites constitutes censorship which can in no way be tolerated. Allowing children unfiltered access to the internet places the responsibility of monitoring their access to the web mainly upon the parents and educators. It appears that some type of minimal monitoring must be done to ensure that children are not inadvertently exposed to harmful content. Although it is true that filters will not be completely effective, they should minimize the chances of children and young people being exposed to illegal content when they do not wish to view it. At this moment we should also raise the issue of internet filtering in the broader context of

the privacy rights guaranteed to children. There are rights related concerns regarding children's privacy in the digital environment. They relate, amongst other, to privacy of personal information, reputation related issues and cyberbullying (which can be at the same time a protection issue). It is contested where the responsibility lies to protect children against these risks: should the main players be industry, parents, child welfare or law enforcement agencies or children themselves? Article 16 of the CRC protects children from unwarranted interference with their privacy as well as from unlawful attacks against their honor and reputation. *No child shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his or her privacy, family, or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his or her honor and reputation* (Art. 16). While the Convention gives children the right of privacy, it is not entirely clear how this applies to parental or school supervision. It is certainly arguable that neither parents nor school authorities have the right to monitor children's speech without due cause. I am not saying that parents should never be allowed to look at their children's text messages or web history, but I am suggesting that any such monitoring be done only if deemed necessary to protect child and only with the child's knowledge and (ideally) consent.

It is important, therefore to keep human rights background in mind while engaging in debates over internet filtering. While the society have a justified and legitimate concern over internet filtering, it also have a duty of care to protect children from injurious materials, as spelled out explicitly in the CRC. Of course, intellectual freedom is the basis of democracy, but surely the health and well being of all citizens, both adults and children, is also at the basis of democracy.

We must remember that no one is too young to understand the concepts of free expression and tolerance, therefore even the young children can understand censorship if it is explain in a way that is appropriate for their age. As it was already pointed out rights of freedom of expression and access to information are guaranteed under the CRC (Art. 13 and 17). However, it must be noticed, that children's intellectual freedom is not absolute, unrestricted right. It is important to stress this point, since at the most basic level, even adult rights are constrained by other rights. Generally speaking rights come as a coherent package deal. In terms of children's rights, children as the most vulnerable in society have special protection from harm and injury which temper all freedoms. Therefore one may look at both CRC articles mentioned above as being "double provisions". On one hand they encourage the positive effects of information, on the other protect the child from negative effects.

It is clear that human rights framework demands a more nuanced approach to children's intellectual freedom and rights in internet. In the CRC intellectual freedom does not appear, it is implicit in "nourished through education". Both articles above mentioned have the aim of ensuring the child access to information from a diversity of sources, especially information that provides health and well being, and this is education in a broad sense. Furthermore, there is not an absolute,

unrestricted right of access either. Subparagraph 17(e) is devoted to the concerns of protecting children from harmful material.[6]

Arguably, the internet poses a much greater risk of damage to children than television, movies, or music. That's because the major media are at least identifiable and subject to some pressure and legislation. Some web sites have material that is hateful, violent or pornographic. So in this case there is a clear-cut case for intervention. But where do the boundaries lie between safeguarding and surveillance? What one regard as justified protectiveness could be constructed as gratuitous prying. There is a fine and very fragile balance between upholding the right to freedom of expression and protecting other human rights.

As the internet permeates every aspect of the economy and society, it is also becoming an essential element of our children's lives and it is an excellent tool to realize their rights. By communication in internet they build their identity, they inform themselves and they use their right to assembly. However, when we consider children's rights, we should have in mind their protection. While internet can bring considerable benefits for their education and development, it also exposes them to online risks such as access to inappropriate content, harmful interactions with other children or with adults, and exposure to aggressive marketing practices.

Since there is no doubt that education is a vital element in our democracies, and the internet has become a part of it a question that comes to my mind here is whether still underdeveloped subject concerning education about rights and threats that come from the internet has been treated enough seriously. In general we are aware of the fact that everything what happens in the vast area of the digital world is not always in child's best interest. On the other hand, it is in the best interest of the child to have information about his/her rights as well as duties in this field. The domain of the internet fits into the education about human rights. In my view, however, it is specific enough to be treated separately. Despite the existence of risks, internet offers almost endless possibilities for young generation to learn, share and socialize. Therefore, it is necessary to generate more content aimed at imparting knowledge about democratic citizenship and human rights, which are attractive and adapted to different age groups[7]. Besides strengthening formal and non-formal learning of civic competences in education, it is also important that society acknowledge and value young people's attitudes toward political participation in order not to lose their potential in bringing about political and social change. Modern expressions of political action and communication such as online forums and social networks are not in contradiction with traditional ones like voting; rather

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[6] CRC, Art. 17(e) states: "encourage the development of appropriate guidelines for the protection of child from information and materials injurious to his or her well being, bearing in mind provisions of articles 13 and 18".

[7] International human rights institutions have taken initiatives in this respect, such as the UN Cyber School Bus or the UNESCO=led D@dalos Education Server for Democracy, Peace and Human Rights Education.

they can serve as complementary tools facilitating social engagement and political participation of the youth. An important challenge to democratic institutions at, local national and European level resides in their ability to adapt to and incorporate the sometimes innovative modes of participation and to prevent young people's precious contribution from being lost. Yet, little can be done unless young people themselves are recognized as agents of changes, moving forward from being participants to meaningful participation in modern social and political environment. This means that an individual approach is not enough. It is not enough to understand that young person is also a human being. Absolutely necessary is entering into dialogue with him/ her and put these ideas into life in such difficult environment as contemporary world.

Regardless of how one defines it[8], the dialogue is a necessary and important way of communicating and reflective attitude of the fact that fills a significant part of the human life or even, represents the philosophy. In my opinion, it constitutes the centre of human existence and should be recognized as undisputed. Dialogue in the context of human rights education and education for democratic citizenship provides a framework for self-determination, auto-creation and building of inter-personal relations. Importance of dialogue in the above mention education process is based on the assumption that the purpose of dialogue is: listening to and being listen to, an experience and acceptance, cooperation in an atmosphere of respect, seeking understanding, taking into consideration different ways of perceiving reality, questioning one's own beliefs and their revision, discovering the importance of the difference in building social life.

Due to its specific features (engagement of parties and reciprocity) dialogue naturally enters the process of education – it defines the character of relations between the parties of educational process and is a tool of transferring knowledge and communication between partners.

In resolving the issue of children's rights in digital world an authentic dialogue may facilitate solving at least some problems previously mentioned, and it can prepare young people for building a social and cultural agreement, which, undoubtedly, belongs to crucial human rights competencies in a pluralistic and variable modern world.

I would like to emphasize that dialogue can also be an exchange of views that leads to a conclusion which can be accepted by two parties differing in their views and/or an attitude ready for an extraordinary "creating" meeting with another human being that requires involvement, respect, mutual understanding, acknowledgement and responsibility, striving for truth, resignation from aspiration to prove one's own arguments and reaching one's goals, coming out from the frames of schematic thinking.

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[8]   The category of dialogue, although present in theoretical thought since Plato, has only recently gained a particular value, as it became a benchmark for describing social reality and a determinant of human action.

The presence of such constructed dialogue in the teaching space concerning the internet is a fundamental determinant of development of each partner (pupil, parent, teacher etc.). It ensures participation in the process of transferring and gaining knowledge and values, liberating creative potential, solving educational problems, true understanding

While the dialogue should be considered as a significant instrument in balancing on one hand children's rights and on the other adults' concern about their safety, we must be aware of the fact that the existing generation gap calls for specific actions. Adults should be made aware of the impacts that new ways of communications are having on children, emphasizing that they continue to be responsible for their children's comprehensive protection, even though they sometimes lack knowledge of the technology they use, and fostering recognition of the potential of the internet for the development of all. This will encourage parents and educators to approach the use of these technologies, and promote discussion with their children.

Children's participation is a key at all stages of the implementation of a policy for the protection of their rights. This becomes particularly important when risks arise in a virtual environment in which they feel "at home", whereas their adult protectors do not. It is particularly important to promote an attitude of self-protection amongst children, as they are very often alone when they make decisions while interacting on the network. Children should be trained to identify risk, encouraging their active participation in activities designed specifically for each context and age. Awareness-raising campaigns should provide specific messages with a positive outlook, not based on fear; that is, similar to the daily experience of children on the internet. Messages should be different when they are targeting younger children or teenagers: as in the physical world, online activities vary significantly according to age. Children should be included in the design of these messages and strategies, starting with the language used in them.

The development of educational programs should incorporate in all of its stages, as an essential requirement, the meaningful participation of underage persons. To know and respect the operational rationale of children in the internet is basic in order to respect them as individuals and protect them from the risks they encounter in this environment.

Education is an essential tool for protecting children both offline and online. However, the internet technologies and uses evolve rapidly as compared with the time that societies need to understand new risks and make adjustments. Parents and educators often face difficulties in keeping abreast of the internet technologies, while their "digital native" children have a natural appetite for online media, driving the widespread adoption of instant messaging, blogs and social networks. The question arises as to what kind of advice parents and educators should give children. On the internet there is always a doubt regarding who is a friend and who is a stranger, since there is generally no visual interaction and few mechanisms to validate identity. Enforcing advice, such as telling children not to talk to strangers, is as difficult online as it is offline, as children often use the internet alone in front

of a screen, with a smartphone or game console, easily able to install software and click on links. Conversely, the possibility to communicate with strangers who share common interests, for example through social networks, is precisely one of the main benefits of the internet. Teaching children when and how to talk to strangers online rather than not to talk to them at all is probably a better approach. This simple example illustrates the need to educate educators as well as children and highlights that the problem extends beyond children and parents to all stakeholders who can play a role to support them.

Protecting children online is possible, provided we invest in children as rights holders and actors. An informed child, with the necessary means, who fully participates in this process, will result in a child connected and able to protect himself/herself and his/her peers.

Participation rights imply a degree of self-determination, albeit in accordance with the child's age and maturity, which is much closer to the notion of civil and political rights previously reserved for adults. However, participation in the modern media without certain conditions and rules under which it may take place runs into dead ends. What's the use of urging young citizens to 'actively take part in society life' if the access to society's institutions is blocked or when tools that one needs to actively take part are lacking. Such situation often takes place while protecting children's rights is interpreted as 'protecting them from harm'. According to the Convention, children's participation rights include the right to be consulted in all matters affecting them (art. 12) [9]. They also have the right to freedom of expression (art. 13), the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion (art. 14) and the right to freedom of peaceful assembly (art. 15). All these rights refer also to the child's use of the internet. However, these issues receive much less attention than children's right to protection online. While we examine art. 13 we notice that it is particularly relevant to the internet in its reference to fundamental freedom of expression. This article indicates that children should have the freedom 'to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing, or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of child's choice.' In fact, Article 13 – the right to have an opinion and have it respected – is recognized as one of the four guiding principles underpinning the implementation of the Convention.

But what about all the problems of cyberbullying, sexting[10], hate speech etc.; how to combine the contingent freedom included in art. 3[11], a cornerstone of the

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[9] *The views of the child (art 12):* Children should be free to have opinions in all matters affecting them, and those views should be given due weight *"in accordance with the age and maturity of the child"*. The underlying idea is that children have the right to be heard and to have their views taken seriously, including in any judicial or administrative proceedings affecting them.

[10] Sharing of sexualized images or text via mobile phones, A. Lenhart, *Teens and Sexting, and SaferNet Brasil Surveys*, 2009, p.75.

[11] *Best interests of the child (art. 3):* When the authorities of a state take decisions which affect children, the best interests of children must be a primary consideration. This principle relates to decisions by courts of law, administrative authorities, legislative bodies and both public and

CRC which states that *in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration*, with protection against various harms hidden online? Some help comes from Art. 18 which states, that child must also respect the rights of reputation of others, and responsibility for the child upbringing is put on parents. Since children may meet anyone and go anywhere online, Art.15's reference to freedom of association is very much applicable to the internet.

We can see now that child's right to participate in modern world activities online (freedom of thought, expression, assembly and association) and society's efforts to protect them there can come into conflict. Restricting child's access to content that is potentially harmful for them should not cover restricting social networking services settings (such practices take place in many countries). However, it is still unclear when rights must be limited by responsibilities.

The protection response needs to strike a balance between the right to protection from all forms of violence, sexual abuse and exploitation, and the right to information, freedom of expression and association, privacy and non-discrimination, as defined in the CRC and other relevant international standards. That balance must be anchored in the best interests of children as a primary consideration, the right to be heard and taken seriously, and recognition of the evolving capacities of children and young people. It is unlikely ever to be possible to remove all the risks to children and young people that exist in the online environment. Moreover, beyond a certain point, attempting to do so could threaten the very essence of the internet and its multiple benefits.

It must be kept in mind that there are major differences between risk and harm online as well as offline. Teachers, parents as well as the society as a whole need to keep these distinctions clear. Certain types of activity may involve risks that do not necessarily result in harm to children and young people. This is relevant to both real and digital world. Swimming or riding a bicycle may confer benefits but also involve risks and, under certain circumstances, might expose a child to harm. Most significantly, as regards the internet, there is no easy line that can be drawn between activities leading to benefits and those leading to risks[12].

It seems that online risks can be minimized provided there are external mechanisms to regulate the environment, strong and supportive parental relationships, together with knowledge, skills and awareness that enable the child or young person to navigate the online environment effectively.

The responsibility to protect children in the online environment should not be borne only by parents and children. Policymakers, professionals, such as teach-

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private social-welfare institutions. This is, of course, a fundamental message of the Convention, the implementation of which is a major challenge.

[12] B. Lobe et al. (with members of the EU Kids Online network), *Cross-National Comparison of Risks and Safety on the internet: Initial analysis from the EU Kids Online survey*.

ers and social workers, law enforcement agencies and the private sector all have a role in creating a safe external environment that allows children and young people to benefit from the use of modern technologies without experiencing harm.

Children's access to the internet should neither be excluded nor marginalized. The demand on children to accommodate to supervision, to rules, to procedures must go along with education about their rights, rights of the others and above all the threats. Children's use of the internet and their behaviour and vulnerabilities online differ according to their age. To be effective, protection strategies need to incorporate measures and messages appropriate to different ages and levels of understanding. It is nonetheless the case that by and large children and young people are often the best experts in relation to their own ICT usage.

There is no question that effective protection strategies require children's participation, particularly that of adolescents, in both their design and implementation, as well as the empowerment of parents and other adults who work closely with young people, such as teachers, to enable them to support and understand children's use of ICT and the risks and hazards that they may encounter. This is both a pragmatic recognition of reality and a position based on human rights principle. A rights-based approach to participation requires that children are assisted in not only expressing their views but also in forming them.

In general, there are widely differing perceptions among children and young people of the dangers associated with the internet. While there is little comparative research available to provide clear evidence on how different perceptions arise, these seem to relate to availability of information, location of use and awareness of safe reporting mechanisms.

From the point of view of children's rights cutting them off internet is not acceptable, since it is not in the best interest of the child to be cut off from modern media. Children do not analyze such situation thoroughly from the standpoint of hypothetical (according to them) threat of participation. This is a very significant sign that should lead us to the conclusion that as children are able to access the internet in more and more ways, it is important to realize that e-safety is not about banning them from using certain types of modern technology. It is about empowering them and providing the learning situations that will enable them to develop the behaviour they need in order to stay safe when they are online.

Absolutely crucial in combating children's rights in internet is prevention through empowerment. Empowerment should be founded on a balance approach between protection and participation where children are the drivers of a safe and participatory digital world. Empowering children, teachers and parents in the new media environment is essential. This is about prevention through a learning process and not the hard way, by a bad experience. Prevention is a key element of a comprehensive, rights-based child protection strategy. Preventive measures are effective if they tackle the multiple facets of child vulnerability, building in a sustainable manner on the full range of policy instruments, including legislation, social policy,

international cooperation and capacity-building. Many awareness raising and educational initiatives to protect children online are implemented in most European countries with the aim to empower children, parents and other relevant groups. A large variety of means are used to reach out and convey messages to selected populations such as children, educators and parents. They include, for example, outreach programs, websites, online games and other interactive tools, brochures, press, radio and TV ads.

A premise which is common to all recommendations concerning the issue of safe internet is that children have the right to be protected with as much determination in a virtual environment as in the physical world, therefore, public authorities are responsible for making decisions, designing laws and policies and/or ensuring that they are enforced. They must become involved in the development and implementation of public policies and institutional good practices which seek to protect and defend the rights of children in this context.

In Europe it is recommended that national awareness-raising campaigns be carried out, targeting parents, teachers and organizations of underage persons, or those who work with them, and the general public, in order to create an awareness of the advantages of using ICTs safely and responsibly, as well as of the risks entailed by careless and abusive use.

According to the EU and Council of Europe recommendations children must be provided with information regarding how to protect them, and the strategies which children are already using for their self-protection must be strengthened and disseminated. It is also recommended that education for the media should be carried out in schools and homes, training teenagers to adopt a critical attitude as receptors and producers of content in the various formats the means of communication make available. The responsible use of technology should be included in the school's programs in order to mainstream the problems arising from its use.

Examples of preventive measures include the organization of educational and awareness campaigns focusing on how children can protect themselves receiving help to understand harm associated with internet use. Awareness-raising is a central element of European internet safety policy. Insafe's extensive network of Awareness Centers is the principal platform by which internet safety is make known. Many of the issues arising from findings in the EU Kids Online survey[13] unsurprisingly relate to awareness-raising activities, relating variously to the form and content of internet safety messaging, priority target groups and areas of risk that require particular attention.

An important conclusion coming from the EU Kids Online annual reports is that empowerment rather than restriction of children's usage and activities online is likely to be a more effective focus of internet safety messaging. Given the increasing trend towards more independent and privatized uses of the internet through

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[13] See: http://www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/EU%20Kids%20III/reports/D64Policy.pdf.

increasing mobile access, as well as the ever younger age of children's first internet use, Awareness Centers may need to focus efforts on fostering a sense of self-responsibility among children while targeting. Specific safety messages with regard to mobile devices and other platforms are required as is a special focus on younger children as internet users and with appropriate resources tailored to their needs.

It is above any doubt, that we need to guide our children to become responsible, informed and critical participants – users, creators and distributors of content – on the internet and in the information society in general. In order to provide a comprehensive and practical approach to the role of the internet in educational process on the continent, the European Union as well as the Council of Europe has adopted a number of initiatives to raise awareness about the new challenges and opportunities in fighting online threats and to help share best practices across different sectors. Let me refer to one of the oldest and the most experienced initiative – the *Safer Internet Program*.

The Council of the European Union undertook its first initiative against illegal content on the internet in 1996, by adopting the action plan for combating racism and xenophobia[14]. In 1997 the EU Telecoms Council adopted the resolution on illegal and harmful content on the internet[15]. In 1999 the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union adopted the Action Plan on promoting safe use of the internet followed by the Council *Decision on a multiannual action plan on promoting safer use of the internet[16]*. The first edition of the *Safer Internet* program was scheduled for the years 1999–2002. One of the major goals of the *Safer Internet* project has been to raise the awareness among all internet users on how to use the web safely and efficiently. Within the program national awareness nodes[17] have been set up across Europe, focused on raising the internet users' awareness of the threats which may be potentially encountered in the web. Another initiatives funded under *Safer Internet* program have been *Hotlines* dedicated to receiving reports about illegal content on the internet. *Hotlines* from different countries are united in the INHOPE (International Association of Internet Hotlines) that was founded in 1999[18].Since then the project has been running in cycles[19]. In 2014 a new program

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[14] European Commission (1996) Illegal and harmful content on the internet. COM(96) 487. Brussels.

[15] Green paper on the protection of minors and human dignity in audiovisual and information services, COM(97) 570. Brussels.

[16] See www.europa.eu.int/comm/information_society/. See also Commission, *An action plan on promoting safe use of internet (*COM (97) 582) and Council recommendation 98/560 on the development of the competitiveness of European auduio-visual and information services industry by promoting national frameworks aimed at achieving a comparable and effective level of protection of minors and human dignity 9and Commission Reports thereon – COM (2001) 106, COM (2003) 776).

[17] See: https://www.betterinternetforkids.eu/portal/practice/awareness.

[18] See: https://www.inhope.org.

[19] For more detailed information on the EU's Safer Internet Programs see: http://ec.europa.eu/safeinternet ; see also: ICT Coalition (2012) Principles for the safer use of connected devices and

cycle in the EU has started which runs until the year 2020. For the next years the instrument which allows funding Safer Internet activities is the *Connecting Europe Facility* (2014–2020)[20]. It is a mechanism for investing into EU infrastructures in the areas of transport, energy and telecommunications networks. By the end of the year 2014 the European Commission concluded a study which benchmarks Safer Internet policies in the Member States. It was the first time that such national policies were evaluated on the EU level. The logic of the *Connecting Europe Facility* is to slowly increase funding for central European services in the Safer Internet area and to decrease funding for the national service infrastructures; the latter concerns primarily the Safer Internet Centers. It is therefore necessary that member states become aware of their political and financial role in this respect.

Safer Internet policy is, however, not only a task of the European Union. Protecting children when using media is an integral part of national youth protection policies. Due to the transnational nature of the internet there are issues which can be better dealt with at EU level; that is where the Commission takes its responsibilities. For example, child sexual abuse images are being spread widely over the internet; international cooperation to tackle this crime is crucial. But, in many areas the EU is not the competent body. For example, the best place to make all children acquainted with a safe use of the internet is school. This implies modifying curricula and training a high number of teachers. This is a national task.

There exist considerable differences across Europe in terms of the frequency with which children and youth use the internet and the incidence of risks that children encounter in relation to their internet use. Over and above country differences, an important finding is that the more they use the internet, the more they gain benefits but also the more they encounter risks[21]. Therefore, there is a big task faced by the policy makers, to find ways in which they can encourage more use of the internet not resulting in greater harm.

I would like to address a couple of issues relating to children and youth's safety online in Poland, because Poland is one of the European countries that have seen a massive growth of the internet use, particularly after entering the EU in 2004. Since then, keeping children safe online has become the subject of intensive activity of nongovernmental organizations, as well as public institutions, and Poland took solid steps towards dealing with illegal content and harmful behaviors online on a European scale.

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online services by children and young people in the EU. www.gsma-documents.com/safer_mobile/ICT_Principles.pdf.

[20] European Commission Information Society, 'Safer Internet Programme: The main framework', Brussels, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/sip/policy/programme/index_en.htm.

[21] More information, see S. Livingstone, L. Hadddon, A. Gorzig (ed.) *Children Risk and Safety Online: research and policy challenges in comparative perspective.* The Policy Press, Bristol, 2012.

This problem has been widely considered an important social issue, and has been generating more and more interest among parents, teachers, professionals working with children, and the media.

Polish civil society foundations have been actively engaged in the process of building European framework of protecting children's rights in digital world. From awareness-raising campaigns to hotlines, a wide range of actions have been undertaken to equip children, their families and schools with the skills and tools against the risks of abuse or to report web sites with harmful content.

Almost twenty years ago The Polish Forum for Children's Rights was created. Since its inception, this non-profit organization has been monitoring and implementing the CRC nationally. Children's human rights education and education for democratic citizenship has been at the heart of its work. Forum mission is to advocate for the protection of children's rights as set out in the CRC. Forum has been coordinating numerous actions addressing a wide variety of issues relating to children's and young people not just safer but also better internet, such as privacy in social networking sites, managing online identity, educational strategies and new trends online.

I will just refer in brief to the most important participants of the Polish safe and better internet network. The Polish Safer Internet Centre was established in 2005 and has been run by National Initiative for Children Hotline (NCHF), the team acting within the framework of the Research and Academic Computer Network (NASK). The Centre undertakes activities aimed at improving the safety of children and youth using the internet and new technologies. Every year the special program *School of safe internet* certifies schools which have implemented a safe online environment for their students. This program has been created to prevent online harassment, sexual offenses, and access to harmful content and inadvertent release of personal data. The aim is to educate children, teachers and parents. It offers field events and educational workshops for young people. A number of actions related to the problem of child abuse, including conferences, training programs and social campaigns have been implemented. One of these actions is organization of an International Safer Internet Day[22], an initiative of the European Commission *Safer Internet Program*. It has been organized annually for already eleven years and aims at voicing the problem of online safety and at promoting initiatives fostering safe access of children and young people to the internet resources. The Polish Safer Internet Day organizers encourage schools and other institutions to undertake educational actions locally for promoting children's internet safety. In 2014 the day was organized under the motto *"Let's create a better internet together"*, marked an annual opportunity to engage in making the internet a safe and a better place for children and young people. It is just one example that shows the engagement of numerous partners in one aim – education of the most vulnerable members of the society – children. Safe and security online program brings special educators to

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[22] More information see: www.saferinternetday.org.

schools to help children learn how to protect themselves online. Consultants offer schools e-safety training to promote *'a better internet together'*.

Within the European Commission's program *Safe Internet Plus*[23] the project Polish '*Safeinterent*' was launched in 2006. Since then the program has been conducted by Consortium Awareness. In its activities the Coalition has been cooperating with a number of public institutions, such as: Ministry of National Education, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administrative and the Ombudsman for Children's Rights. The project aims at raising awareness of the public, as well as reducing new media related threats in Poland (linked mainly to the internet). For that reason one of the most important Consortium's objectives is to educate children, teenagers and parents on safe internet use, as well as to enhance the professional's competence at improving the internet safety.

The Polish Coalition for Child Online Safety is a multi-stakeholder online forum that gathers about 750 members such as schools, NGOs, governmental institutions, as well as industry partners who support activities of the Polish Safer Internet Centre[24]. Its aim is the wide possible dissemination of knowledge about safe use of the internet and promotion of educational resources on online safety. This online forum has been able to share expertise and best practice on key policy areas related to child online safety in order to become more effective in promoting a child's rights protection focus in relation to the internet and new emerging technologies. Two key guarding principles as relevant to the way the Polish authorities progresses decision making in relation to children and cyber safety have been identified by the coalition:

– The best interest of the child: laws and actions affecting children should put their best interest first and benefit them in the best possible way,
– Children and youth participation: children and young people have the right to have their say in decisions that affect them and to have their opinions taken into account.

In order to inform young users about the risks of interference with their physical and moral welfare in online environments which necessitates special protection, a number of the Polish non-governmental organizations are directly involved in providing young internet users with child-friendly and accessible means of reporting alleged abuse and exploitation on the internet and making complains through information services such as telephone and the internet help-lines. In this way the young users are provided with advice and support in using these services with due regard to their confidentiality and anonymity.

The issue of safe internet for children and their rights to information is a very topical and closely connected with the activity of the *Nobody's Children Foundation (NCF)*[25]. It is a non-profit non-governmental organization which provides

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[23] More information see: https://plus.al/en/safe-internet.
[24] See: http:www.canee.net/files/safer_internet_program.
[25] More information see: www.fdn.pl.

a broad scope of assistance for abused children, their families and caregivers. NCF mission is to advocate the effective protection strategies that require children's participation, particularly that of youth, in both their design and implementation. The empowerment of parents and other adults who work closely with young people is also required to enable them to support and understand children's CT use and the risks but also opportunities they may encounter online. Since the child's right to be heard and taken seriously is one of the fundamental and guiding principles of the CRC, the NCF set special emphasis on that wherever possible, children should be supported by independent counseling such as *kids help lines.* The Foundation runs several advocacy centers for abused children and has organized and implemented a large number of projects related to the problem of child abuse, including conferences, training programs, and social campaigns. Since 2003, in the response to the increasing popularity of social networking services among very young children the *Nobody's Children Foundation* has undertaken a variety of initiatives aimed at reducing internet-based threats, targeted primarily at the youngest internet users. *Sieciaki* is an educational project targeted at internet users aged 6–12. It aims at promoting knowledge in the field of the internet use and its users take part in the educational games, quizzes and competitions, which offer field and educational events. *Sieciaki on Holidays* is an important part of this project. Running annually since 2006, the campaign consists of a team of young animators travelling around Poland, organizing outdoor events on internet safety in popular holiday destinations. The main goal of the campaign is to teach young children, through games and other activities, how to be safe online as well as how to deal with dangerous situations on the net and where to seek help in case of online-related problems. FDN, in conjunction with the Orange Foundation has also created a new educational project for even the younger children. The *Necio* project targets 4- to 5-years-old children and their parents. The project main component is a special web side with the child-friendly animation videos, games and the basics of computer use. The host of this site is Necio, a friendly robot character who guides young users through the process of learning what the internet is, how to surf safely, how to communicate safely online and where to find secure web side. The *Be-friend your child* project is dedicated to parents of primary school children. The educational tool consists of several animated cartoons which describe some internet-related issues that may be encountered in daily parental life. The tool addresses such topics as dangerous contacts, malicious online content, parental control tools, balance between a child's online and offline, and mutual learning of new technologies.

The Foundation has also conducted numerous surveys on children's behavior on the internet, as part of FDN's research program. Since February 2004 the Foundation has carried out a national social campaign: *Child in the Web*. It was the first attempt to convey message on internet safety to the Polish society. Simultaneously the media part of the campaign was carried out under the slogan "*You never know who is on the other side*". The campaign was aimed at drawing the

public attention to the threats related to the internet use by children and at promoting, among the children, young people and parents attitude fostering the safety of young internet users. The first edition of this campaign run in 2004–2005 and was noticed by over 70% of Poles. It provoked public debate on the problem of child grooming on the internet. The campaign was acclaimed not only in Poland, but also in other countries. It was successfully replicated in Bulgaria, Albania, Czech Republic, Moldova and Latvia. Since 2005, the *Child on the Web* campaign has been a part of the European Commission's safer Internet Program. Moreover, FDN has provided numerous training programs for professionals – police officers, prosecutors, judges-focusing on the problem of internet-based child sexual abuse, and has published a range of materials related to this issue.

All of the above activities have been conducted within FDN's program: *Academy of Internet Safety* and in the close cooperation with the Polish Safer Internet Centre and the Polish Coalition for Children online. The ground for their mode of action has been has been the European Commission's program *Safer Internet* and *Safer Internet Plus.*

These available programs aim at helping children to understand the basic concept of human rights and how to respect the rights of others. Special school materials have been prepared and used by young people themselves to train other students on the safe use of the internet. This has been an interesting experience of peer education and child participation launched in the awareness-raising campaign *Child in the Web*. This campaign has been wide spread all over the country due to the exceptional engagement of eight national and local TV stations, nineteen radio stations, over thirty newspapers and four biggest Polish internet portals.

These programs are intended to help young users of the digital communication to develop sufficient knowledge about democratic values, human rights and the importance of solidarity, tolerance and participation in a democratic society. It is necessary to look at education through this modern technology as an important part of civic education. Through human rights education online, young people are becoming more able to practice skill and attitude that empower them to enjoy and exercise their rights, and to respect the rights of others. The guideline adopted by the Polish school system play a central role in preparing young people to understand, cherish and claim human rights.

The overriding goals of the Polish non-governmental organizations working on the use of children and youth rights to express their views, to participate in society as well as in the decisions affecting them by means of the internet and other ICTs cover the following areas: internet governance and online child protection, fight against any material violating child rights online, identification and protection of child victims of sexual and other abuse online, protection and prevention measures in children's use of interactive technologies and children's participation in policy development.

Conclusion

This paper sought to outline the key issues focused on protecting child safety and child rights, and empowering youth through digital citizenship. In my opinion we should view youth as participants and ultimately stakeholders in positive internet use rather than potential victims. For that reason it is so crucial to empower them to protect themselves. Giving children the tools to protect themselves against threats on the internet and become more aware of their responsibilities is probably the most effective way of safeguarding children's rights on the internet. However, equally important is to act preventatively by raising their awareness about potential risks and long-term consequences of sharing personal information on the internet. We, as the democratic society, are obliged to teach young generation and help them to understand their responsibilities when it comes to cyber-security.

Nowadays it is crucial to redefine online safety. It needs to be seen in the context of participatory culture and democracy, and should not be equated with the "deleting predators". For the reason that online safety for so long has been made equal with the "deleting predators", such attitude can't really help youth deal with the complexities of their online/offline social, cultural or political lives, it's in danger of becoming irrelevant to them. That places "online safety" in danger of becoming a barrier rather than a support for young people's constructive and enriching use of social media and technologies. If that happens, it also becomes a barrier to their full participation in participatory democracy and culture. Although the social web itself isn't participatory democracy it has clearly become an important tool of it, and, as such, needs to be part of citizenship and media literacy education An important part of democratic education must be what it means to be a good citizen, whether 'digital' or otherwise. Any discussion of digital citizenship needs to include rights as well as responsibilities. When it comes to children, those rights are actually codified by the UN CRC. The rights outlined in the CRC cover a wide variety of issues but are very clear when it comes to child's free speech, right to access media, right of assembly and right of privacy.

We need to keep in mind that teaching new media literacy must include critical thinking about what is said, produced and uploaded. The important element of this policy ought to be encouraging the social media industry to engage in best business practices, including promoting good citizenship in the communities they run being responsive to user complaints, and making their response process transparent to users.

While observing the line of ongoing discussion relating to education for democratic citizenship one can notice that more and more attention has been given to the rights. The basic idea is to explore how to protect children against potential harm online in ways that don't take away their free speech rights, their rights to explore all the amazing resources available online. Nevertheless, still too often, in

the interest of protecting children, they are denied the right to access certain content and express themselves online.

In sum, more attention to the youth's civil and political rights in a digital context is needed. Governments can, through policy initiatives, help to further awareness of the implications of the internet for the exercise of rights of freedom of expression, protection and safety in a digital context. Support for international efforts to secure better realization of children's digital rights, for example, in the Internet Governance Forum and in the work of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child should be facilitated through inter-governmental cooperation. It is also important in this context to ensure effective and meaningful representation of young people's perspectives in debates on emerging models of internet governance.