

On. Dott.ssa Caterina Chinnici

Deputato al Parlamento europeo
Commissione per il Controllo dei bilanci, Vice-Presidente
Commissione per le Libertà civili, la giustizia e gli affari interni, Titolare
Commissione Giuridica, Sostituto
Intergruppo per i Diritti dei minori, Co-Presidente

National Day Against Pedophilia and Child Pornography

5 May 2025

Good morning to all the participants of this important *National Day of Reflection and Awareness against Pedophilia and Child Pornography*, and a special thanks to the SoS Foundation - Telefono Azzurro for promoting this important event.

I am sincerely sorry not to be with you “physically” today, but concurrent commitments related to my activity at the European Parliament, which is meeting today in Plenary Session in Strasbourg, do not allow me to be in Rome.

However, I would like to make a brief contribution to the meeting, as I have always been committed to the protection of children, first as a magistrate, and since 2014 as co-founder of the first *Intergroup on Children’s Rights* of the European Parliament. This is a working group composed of Members of the European Parliament from different countries and different political groups, aimed at promoting a child-friendly perspective in European legislation and policies, with the primary goal of promoting the legitimate demands of children, and in particular of the most vulnerable children and adolescents.

Who, today, could be more fragile and in need of protection than a boy or girl who has been the victim of abuse, whether perpetrated offline or online?

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For this reason, and considering that paedophilia and child pornography are not merely national problems - in particular, child pornography is predominantly transnational - the European Union has taken strong action.

Thanks also to the commitment of the Intergroup on the Rights of the Child, a series of legislative instruments has been adopted to combat what is undoubtedly one of the most atrocious crimes, whose devastating effects rob children of their childhood and mark them for life.

I refer in particular to the proposal for a Regulation laying down rules for preventing and combating child sexual abuse and the proposed recast of European Directive 93/2011 on combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child sexual abuse material, two very important legislative texts currently under review by the European Parliament.

With respect to the new Regulation on preventing and combating child sexual abuse, through our work in the European Parliament, we have already adopted our position, significantly improving the text, and we are now in the final stage of interinstitutional negotiations.

While the proposal for a revision of the 2011 Directive, presented in February 2024, aimed at strengthening criminal law on the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children, broadening the definitions of offences and introducing higher penalties and more specific requirements for prevention and assistance to victims, is currently being analysed by the European Parliament.

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This revision has become absolutely necessary and urgent in order to adapt the EU criminal law framework, in particular in the light of the major technological changes of the last decade and the exponential increase in the phenomenon of online abuse and child pornography.

The figures, in fact, leave us dismayed. The European Commission estimated that as many as 85 million images and videos of child abuse were reported worldwide in 2021 alone,¹ and one in five children in Europe suffers some form of sexual violence, often online. Behind these figures, there are real, not virtual, children. Young lives irreparably scarred.

This is why the proposal for a directive aims to establish a “future-proof” regulatory framework to avoid having to present a revised text every time a new technology is introduced in what is now a true online criminal market. This broadens, for example, the definition of child sexual abuse to include the production and dissemination of "deepfakes", the material generated by artificial intelligence, and also the live streaming of violent acts.

As the Intergroup on the Rights of the Child, we have strongly welcomed this Commission proposal, which is certainly a step in the right direction, but we have nevertheless tabled a number of essentially complementary amendments, aimed at

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/it/ip_22_2976

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improving and strengthening the text. For example, by introducing rules against the exposure of children to pornography, given the very serious damage that increasingly early exposure to this type of content entails on the physical, psychological and emotional development of children and adolescents.

We also called for Member States to be able to take the necessary measures to block access to online platforms and internet service providers that knowingly disseminate pornographic content online, making it likely that minors may access it.

Furthermore, we have also called for stronger investigations into cyber-grooming, and the very serious phenomenon of self-generate abuse, i.e. the abuse in which minors are manipulated by unscrupulous predator networks into abusing themselves.

The legislative procedure is currently in the process of drafting compromises to summarise the many amendments tabled, and a demanding workload still lies ahead. But the goal is to provide the European Union with a truly impactful legislative text, which can enter into force by the end of this 10th Legislature, to fight these serious crimes and bring to justice the unscrupulous criminals who continue to profit from such horrors.

Precisely to learn more about the gravity of this phenomenon and the measures adopted in other countries, I will be on a mission to the Philippines at the end of May, a dramatically famous destination for ‘sex tourism’, invited by the *International Justice Mission (IJM)*, an organization that has worked for years on combating the online sexual exploitation of children.

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However, legislation alone is not enough. Given the scale and drama of the phenomenon, there is certainly a need for a holistic approach and a broader response: one that is not only repressive toward the perpetrators of these horrific crimes, but also cultural, educational, and based on values. This response must involve institutions, law enforcement authorities, the scientific community, schools, civil society, the vast world of youth associations, and industry.

Because, and I am convinced of this, it is the responsibility of all of us, each in our own role, to ensure that every child, in Europe and around the world, can grow up peacefully and harmoniously, adequately protected from the risk of violence and abuse both online and offline.

Ms Caterina Chinnici

Member of European Parliament