

Protection of consumers, in particular minors, in respect of the use of video games

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The Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection adopted an own-initiative report drafted by Toine **MANDERS** (ALDE, NL) welcoming the Commission Communication on the protection of consumers, in particular minors, in respect of the use of video games. It emphasises that video games are a great stimulant which in addition to entertainment can also be used for medical and educational purposes, stimulating learning of facts and skills such as strategic thinking, creativity, cooperation and innovative thinking.

Members take the view that harmonised labelling rules for video games ensure improved knowledge of the labelling systems and at the same time promote the effective functioning of the internal market, and they welcome the work of the Council and the Commission to promote the adoption of EU-wide labelling rules for video games and create a voluntary code of conduct on interactive games targeted at children.

They note that market conditions have changed significantly from a situation where video games were predominantly bought in shops to the present situation where games can be downloaded from the internet, and played on mobile devices. Current developments increase the need for effective working age verification systems for games and particularly for online games.

The report calls on the Commission and Member States, in cooperation with the industry, to explore the merit of **developing a 'red button'** which can be included on (mobile) consoles or game devices and computers and which disables a certain game or which can control access to a game during certain hours or certain parts of the game. It also calls for additional efforts in this respect, including the possibility of integrating an acoustic warning into the Pan-European Game Information (PEGI) age rating system, and counts on the professional game sector systematically to integrate access models for online games in order to ensure that minors are not exposed to harmful content online.

The committee calls on the video game and console industries further to improve the PEGI and PEGI Online systems and, in particular, to update regularly the criteria for age rating and labelling, to advertise PEGI more actively and to increase the list of signatories. Member States are urged to ensure that any national rating system is not developed in a way that leads to market fragmentation.

Members call on Member States, and the Commission, as appropriate, to do the following:

- work with consumer organisations and other stakeholders to raise awareness among consumers, especially young consumers and their parents, of the classification systems in place and in particular the PEGI system;
- conduct information campaigns for parents and schoolteachers aimed at bridging the technological generation gap and at promoting the PEGI and PEGI Online systems and promoting safer, more aware use of new technologies, including video games;
- facilitate the exchange of best practice among competent national educational authorities in the short-term with a view to integrating gaming literacy within the educational objectives of primary and secondary schools;
- **frame specific civil and criminal legislation** on the retailing of violent TV, video and computer games. Special attention should be paid to online games aimed primarily at children and young people whose purpose is to generate profit;

- discourage, through specific legislative measures, the misuse of online games for dishonest commercial activities, such as those which dishonestly induce underage users to enter into legal commitments and which send anticompetitive promotional messages;
- work with authorities in other parts of the world to encourage the adoption of international guidelines, labelling systems and codes of conduct to promote global classification systems for video games and online games;

Members underline that currently not all Member States have rules ensuring that retailers restrict the sale of violent games to adults, and calls for internet cafe owners to prevent children playing games which are rated for a higher age level in their cafes. They take the view that a common approach towards **severe sanctions for retailers and internet cafe owners** is required. Member States are asked to put in place adequate measures to prevent children buying and playing games which are rated for a higher age level, for example through identity checks.

The report holds the view that the industry should be encouraged to further develop and improve self-regulatory systems and that there is currently no need for EU-wide legislation in this field.