Consumer protection in online video games: a European Single Market approach

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The Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection adopted the own-initiative report by Adriana MALDONADO LÓPEZ (S&D, ES) on consumer protection in online video games: a European single market approach.

The European video game sector is the fastest growing cultural and creative sector in Europe, with an estimated European market size of EUR 23.3 billion in 2020 and with a higher worldwide turnover compared to music and movie companies. Video games are a highly innovative digital sector in the EU with the sector being responsible for more than 90 000 direct jobs in Europe. The sector represents an important potential for growth and job creation and contributes to Europe's digital single market.

Online video games in the EU

The report recalls the importance of SMEs in the European video games value chain and the global prominence many European companies developing for console, PC and mobile gaming markets enjoy. The sector faces problems including talent development and retention, a complex and fragmented regulatory framework in a global marketplace, access to finance and the social and cultural impacts of video games.

Bolstering consumer protection in online video games

The report notes that consumer protection should be further improved to ensure a safe and trustworthy online environment for video games and gamers. A consistent and coordinated approach between Member States and consumer protection authorities is needed in order to avoid fragmentation of the single market and to protect consumers in Europe.

Regulatory measures are called for to protect users, especially minors and young children, from illegal practices in which these platforms may be engaged. The report also calls for the development and implementation of **parental control tools** that help to filter content and video games by age, monitor time spent playing games, disable or limit online spending and restrict communications with others or the viewing of content created by other players.

Additional benefits and risks for consumers

The report emphasises the importance of mental health, particularly that of minors and young children. It notes that online connectivity provided relief during strict lockdown periods during COVID-19. Many people use video games not only as a leisure activity, but also as mental exercises, such as by solving demanding tasks and puzzles, engaging in contests with other players that require a high level of concentration and developing skills such as problem-solving, spatial and hand-eye coordination, teamwork, visual acuity and speed. Members propose a yearly EU online video game award at Parliament in Brussels to highlight the importance for the European digital single market of companies producing online video games, many of which are SMEs, in terms of jobs, growth, innovation and the promotion of European values.

On the other hand, the report stresses that playing online video games excessively can have a negative impact on social relations, work, school drop-out rates, physical and mental health and poor academic performance. Therefore, it is imperative to strike a healthy balance.

Ensuring a safe online environment for online video game users

The report welcomes industry-led initiatives, such as PEGI, which is used in 38 countries. However, more awareness should be raised of its existence. Members call on the Commission to assess how the PEGI system is being implemented in the different types of games available on the market and across the EU and to explore the possibilities for enshrining it in EU law in order to make the PEGI system and its Code of Conduct the harmonised, mandatory age-rating system applicable to all video game developers, app stores and online platforms in order to avoid fragmentation in the single market and provide legal certainty for the video game industry.