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

2022/2014(INI) - 18/01/2023 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 577 votes to 66, with 15 abstentions, a resolution 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

Members recalled that the video games sector is increasingly opening up **new employment opportunities** for many creators in the cultural sector, such as game developers, designers, writers, music producers and other artists, which should be taken into account in any EU action in this field, especially in terms of funding.

The resolution underlined the importance of the video game sector in supporting innovation in Europe and recalled 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; expresses disappointment that such international success and cultural appeal is often overlooked when considering European leadership in digital technologies and services.

Bolstering consumer protection in online video games

Parliament notes that consumer protection should be further improved to ensure a **safe and trustworthy online environment** for video games and gamers. Members called on the Commission and the national consumer protection authorities of the Consumer Protection Cooperation Network to ensure that EU consumer law is fully respected and enforced in the video game sector.

While welcoming the development and application of parental control tools, Members call for mechanisms to be put in place to exercise **stricter parental control**, in particular over the amount of time and money spent by minors, including young children, on gaming, while respecting the rights and development of minors. They encourage platforms to raise awareness of the existence of such tools and ask the Commission to support the promotion of public and private education and information campaigns for parents and carers.

The resolution stresses that the way in which some **in-game purchase systems** are designed is deliberately aimed at manipulating and deceiving the user, as they rely on aggressive marketing practices that hinder the consumer's freedom of choice and induce him or her to take financial decisions that he or she would not otherwise have taken. Members believe that in-game purchase systems should be in line with the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive. They call on the Commission to take the necessary steps to establish a common European approach to **loot boxes** and to assess user traps in video games.

The Commission is invited to present a **legislative proposal** to adapt the current EU legal framework on consumer protection to video games, or to present a separate legislative proposal on online video games to

establish a harmonised EU regulatory framework to ensure strong consumer protection, in particular for minors and young children.

Additional benefits and risks for consumers

The resolution 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 resolution 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. Pointing out that video game addiction, also known as ‘gaming disorder’, is a problem for some gamers, Members suggested launching awareness campaigns to ensure that parents and young gamers are aware of the risks associated with gaming disorders. They called for developers to avoid relying on mechanisms designed to be manipulative, which can lead to game addiction, isolation and cyberbullying.

Ensuring a safe online environment for online video game users

Parliament welcomes industry-led initiatives, such as PEGI (Pan-European Game Information), 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.