The Commission will need to reconsider, at the appropriate time, what conditions will be necessary to move to the definitive system. It is clearly too early to say what these will be, but it should be stressed that the zero-rating system applied in the United Kingdom is a transitional measure pending the adoption of the common VAT system.

(1) COM(96) 328 final.

(2001/C 72 E/111)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-1645/00
by Armando Cossutta (GUE/NGL) to the Commission
(29 May 2000)

Subject: Video games and depleted uranium

In the 'Starcraft' video game (marketed in Italy by Blizzard), which — like all too many products of this type — is basically a war game, players can use uranium 238 to upgrade their weapons. An entry on page 43 of the Italian manual reads: 'U238 ammunition research; this depleted uranium ammunition can improve the range of Gauss guns.' A further entry on page 41 reads: 'Radiation: an enemy unit hit by one of these weapons will be bathed in highly radioactive particles capable of inflicting considerable damage (...). The radioactive field will create serious problems (...). Eventually radioactivity levels will decrease'.

1. Does the Commission believe that it is right for young people and little children to become accustomed to the idea of using nuclear weapons?

2. Does the Commission agree that it should take steps to prevent the concept of nuclear weapon use becoming commonplace in Europe's youth culture?

3. Does the Commission agree that it would be appropriate to stem the flood of violence to which young children are being exposed by video games?

Answer given by Mr Byrne on behalf of the Commission
(14 July 2000)

At Community level the main legislative instrument specific to toys is Directive 88/378/EEC on the approximation of the laws of the Member States concerning the safety of toys(1). However, the prime purpose of this directive is to is to protect toy users from the risk of physical injury, by establishing safety requirements in terms of the physical, mechanical, chemical, electrical and other properties of toys.

The psychological development of the child, and the influence which certain games currently on the market may have on this development (games which trivialise and encourage the imaginary use of nuclear weapons or violence), or on morality in general, is primarily a matter for the Member States.

The Commission shares the Honourable Member's concerns and would point out that the national authorities do, in principle, have at their disposal the necessary powers and instruments for the protection of children. At Community level, Article 30 (ex Article 36) of the EC Treaty leaves it open to Member States, in the absence of Community harmonisation measures, to adopt national measures to restrict the marketing of this type of product on grounds of public morality, public policy or public security, or of the protection of the health and life of humans, provided that the measures that they adopt are commensurate with the objectives of protection.

So far, the idea of harmonising the provisions governing the protection of the psychological development or morality of children with regard to video games has not been considered.