

Thursday 12 March 2009

The protection of consumers, in particular minors, in respect of the use of video games

P6_TA(2009)0126

European Parliament resolution of 12 March 2009 on the protection of consumers, in particular minors, in respect of the use of video games (2008/2173(INI))

(2010/C 87 E/21)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Communication from the Commission of 22 April 2008 on the protection of consumers, in particular minors, in respect of the use of video games (COM(2008)0207),
 - having regard to the Council Resolution of 1 March 2002 on the protection of consumers, in particular young people, through the labelling of certain video games and computer games according to age group ⁽¹⁾,
 - having regard to Recommendation 2006/952/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 December 2006 on the protection of minors and human dignity and on the right of reply in relation to the competitiveness of the European audiovisual and on-line information services industry ⁽²⁾,
 - having regard to the Communication from the Commission of 20 December 2007 on a European approach to media literacy in the digital environment (COM(2007)0833),
 - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection and the opinions of the Committee on Culture and Education and of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (A6-0051/2009),
- A. whereas video games are widely and increasingly popular in Europe and the market for video games is growing rapidly,
- B. whereas video games are predominantly non-violent and provide their users with entertainment which often contributes to the development of various skills and knowledge,
- C. whereas video games used to be mainly focussed on minors in the past, but more video games are nowadays especially developed for adults,
- D. whereas the market for video games is global,
- E. whereas it falls within the competence of the Member States to decide on measures to restrict the sale of video games or to ban them,
- F. whereas the protection of children's mental health requires zero tolerance and resolute action against violations of child protection provisions connected with videogames,

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 65, 14.3.2002, p. 2.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 378, 27.12.2006, p. 72.

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1. Welcomes the above-mentioned Commission Communication on the protection of consumers, in particular minors, in respect of the use of video games;
2. Underlines the contribution of the gaming sector to the achievement of the objectives of the Lisbon agenda, and stresses the multi-cultural facets of many games;
3. Emphasises that video games are a great stimulant which in addition to entertainment can also be used for educational purposes; takes the view that schools should pay attention to video games and informing children and parents about benefits and disadvantages that video games can have;
4. Stresses that video games are one of the favourite recreational activities of citizens of all ages and social origins; acknowledges the educational value of video games, including in helping to familiarise minors with new technologies; shares, however, the concern expressed by the Commission concerning the potential dangers of incorrect use of video games by minors;
5. Takes the view that video games can stimulate learning of facts and skills such as strategic thinking, creativity, cooperation and innovative thinking, which are important skills in the information society;
6. Underlines the benefits of videogames in medicine and, in particular, that so-called 'videogame therapy' has proven to be effective for the rehabilitation of stroke patients, people with traumatic brain injuries, people with muscular problems and autistic children;
7. Takes 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; therefore welcomes 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;
8. Notes that market conditions have changed significantly from a situation where video games were predominantly bought in shops and played on a computer or console to the present situation where games can be bought and downloaded from the internet;
9. Notes that video games can be played on different platforms such as game consoles and personal computers, but also increasingly on mobile devices such as a mobile phone;
10. Recalls that video games are becoming more interactive or even have a dynamic content that allows users to develop parts of the game themselves; notes that users can increasingly take part in forum discussions, textual as well as voice chat, and in communities which are integrated into certain video games; recalls the differentiation in the market with more games designed especially for adults;
11. Takes the view that recent trends accentuate the importance of ensuring adequate protection of minors, *inter alia* by preventing them from possibly gaining access to harmful content;
12. Recalls that parental control is increasingly difficult as online video games are not distributed in a physical package with a clear and easily legible label and due to the fact that children can, without their parents' knowledge or consent, download video games that are not suitable for their age;
13. Notes that, whilst violence in video games does not automatically lead to violent behaviour, some experts are however of the opinion that long-term exposure to scenes of brutality in video games may have a negative impact on people playing these games, potentially leading to violent behaviour; notes, therefore, that a precautionary approach should be taken when considering the impact of games on behaviour, and especially on that of young children;
14. Emphasises that addiction is a problem for some gamers; calls on producers, retailers, parents and other stakeholders to take steps to avoid any negative effects;

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15. Underlines that current developments increase the need for effective working age verification systems for games and particularly for online games;
16. Takes the view that different approaches to strengthening the control of video games should be explored, while at the same time acknowledging that none of these systems is likely to provide an absolute guarantee that children will not gain access to inappropriate video games;
17. 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;
18. 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 to systematically integrate access models for online games in order to ensure that minors are not exposed to harmful content online;
19. Underlines the importance of adequate control measures for online purchases relating to video games, including purchases using credit cards or vouchers;
20. Takes the view that developments relating to video games, and in particular online video games, call for more public awareness of the content of video games, parental control and instruments such as the PEGI system; welcomes the work done by the industry to implement self-regulation;
21. Welcomes the PEGI Online system, which is a logical development of PEGI and which deals with video games made available over the internet, such as downloaded or online games; supports its continued co-financing by the Commission under the Safer Internet programme, the aim of which is to tackle issues relating to the safe use of the internet by children and to new online technologies; calls on the Commission, in connection with the Safer Internet programme, to promote a systematic study of the effects of video games on minors;
22. Welcomes the work by the Council of Europe to establish guidelines for video games as well as to promote knowledge among children on internet safety in general;
23. Considers that national information and awareness campaigns for consumers, particularly parents, should be organised in order to help them choose video games which are suitable for the age and knowledge requirements of their children and to avoid products which are not appropriately labelled; encourages the Member States to share best practices in this respect;
24. Takes the view that the PEGI system for rating games is an important tool which has improved transparency for consumers, especially parents, when buying games by enabling them to make a considered choice as to whether a game is suitable for children; regrets, however, that many consumers and especially parents do not seem to have a sufficient knowledge of video games and the possible effects of them on children;
25. Calls on the Commission to propose measures which contribute to a safer playing environment for online video games, including innovative methods of preventing minors from accessing online video games with content which is unsuitable for them;
26. Calls on the Member States to continue to work closely together to promote the protection of minors; calls on the video game and console industries to further 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; urges the Member States to ensure that any national rating system is not developed in a way that leads to market fragmentation;

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27. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to work with consumer organisations and other stakeholders to raise, by means of information campaigns, awareness among consumers, especially young consumers and their parents, of the classification systems in place and in particular the PEGI system; underlines the importance of providing this information in schools;
28. Urges the Member States to 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;
29. Calls on the Commission to 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; calls for a regular exchange of experience and information by all parties concerned with a view to developing best practices regarding video games;
30. Underlines 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; refers to the Eurobarometer survey 'Towards a safer use of the Internet for children in the EU - a parents' perspective' ⁽¹⁾, published on 9 December 2008, that found that 3,2 % of children aged between 6 and 17 access the internet in internet cafes without adult supervision; takes the view that a common approach towards severe sanctions for retailers and internet cafe owners is required; therefore calls on the Member States 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; supports the Commission's proposal to introduce a pan-European code of conduct for retailers and producers of video games in order to prevent the sale of violent and harmful video games to minors;
31. Calls on the Member States to frame specific civil and criminal legislation on the retailing of violent TV, video and computer games; considers that special attention should be paid to online games aimed primarily at children and young people whose purpose is to generate profit;
32. Calls on the Commission to 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 (e.g. through automated subscriptions or malicious dialler programmes which dial expensive toll lines) and which send anti-competitive promotional messages (e.g. product placement or other stealth marketing techniques);
33. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to 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;
34. 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;
35. Recalls the importance of the media promoting responsibility among parents and restricting the advertisement of adult videogames to times when TV is less watched by children;
36. Takes the view that the public authorities responsible for banning videogames should inform their counterparts in other Member States and publish the ban on the PEGI system by sending an automatic alert message;
37. Calls on the Commission to support, in the framework of the MEDIA programme and national tax exemption mechanisms, new developments in this fast-growing sector of the creative knowledge economy, in particular by promoting the educational, multimedia and cultural elements of videogames and by means of corresponding training opportunities and courses of study;

⁽¹⁾ http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_248_en.pdf.

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38. Calls on the Commission to develop guidelines in order to prevent possible conflicts of interest within rating institutions and to safeguard the independence of such organisations from industry-related interest groups;

39. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and Commission and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.

Developing a Common Aviation Area with Israel

P6_TA(2009)0127

European Parliament resolution of 12 March 2009 on developing a Common Aviation Area with Israel (2008/2136(INI))

(2010/C 87 E/22)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Commission communication of 9 November 2007 entitled 'Developing a Common Aviation Area with Israel' (COM(2007)0691),
 - having regard to its resolution of 17 January 2006 on developing the agenda for the Community's external aviation policy ⁽¹⁾,
 - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Transport and Tourism (A6-0090/2009),
- A. whereas convergence of regulations is a precondition for the successful conclusion of comprehensive air agreements, especially in relation to regulations on safety, security, competition, State aid, the environment and the employment rights of workers,
- B. whereas, when negotiating a comprehensive air transport agreement with Israel, the Commission has to draw on the expertise and information of Member States and other interested parties and has to involve them before, during and after negotiations,
- C. whereas Israel is the most important aviation market in the Middle East with a strong growth potential, and whereas it has a strategic position as a bridge between Europe and the Middle East and towards regions which are further away,
1. Welcomes the commencement of the negotiations with Israel on a comprehensive air transport agreement;
 2. Stresses the importance of the agreement in terms of creating the conditions for extending the Common Aviation Area;
 3. Emphasises that the agreement should not limit the level of market access already achieved in the existing bilateral agreements;

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 287 E, 24.11.2006, p. 84.