

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

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PURPOSE: to protect consumers, in particular minors, against the harmful effects of using video games.

BACKGROUND: video games are increasingly a cross-generation phenomenon, played by children and parents alike. As with other media, freedom of expression both for creators and gamers must be a paramount concern for policy makers who have a certain responsibility for the health of gamers. There is also a need for high protection standards for minors. Owing to the strong psychological effects of video games on minors, it is important to ensure that game-playing by minors is safe. This requires in particular graduated levels of access to video games for minors and adults. The 2002 [Council Resolution](#) on the protection of consumers through the labelling of certain video and computer games stressed the need to provide clear information as regards the assessment of contents and rating by age group. The Resolution calls on the Commission to review the various methods for assessing the content of video and computer games, as well as their rating and labelling, and to report back to the Council. In response, the European Commission has surveyed existing measures protecting minors from harmful video games across the 27 EU Member States.

In April 2003, the self-regulatory Pan European Games Information age rating system (PEGI) was adopted after very close consultation with industry, civil society, such as parental and consumer associations, and religious groups. PEGI is a voluntary, self-regulatory system, designed to ensure that minors are not exposed to games that are unsuitable for their particular age group. PEGI replaced a large number of existing national age-rating systems with a single European system. PEGI On-line, which was launched in June 2007, is the logical development of the PEGI system, designed to better protect young people against unsuitable gaming content and to help parents understand the risks and potential for harm within this environment.

CONTENT: based on the replies of a questionnaire sent out to 27 Member States, the Commission states that most EU Member States apply PEGI. The vast majority of these Member States have related legislation and quite a number have recently improved their legislation or are in the process of doing so. Some Member States have even based this legislation on PEGI. Half of the Member States consider the current measures in place to be generally effective. France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland have recently improved or are currently improving national legislation.

The situation for on-line games is different. Internet creates new challenges because of its easy access and global character. The majority of Member States do not have specific legislation for on-line video games. However, some Member States consider that legislation for off-line video games applies by analogy and some Member States use PEGI On-line, which was launched in June 2007.

In conclusion, PEGI appears to have achieved good results and PEGI On-line is also a promising initiative, making of PEGI a good example of self-regulation in line with the better regulation agenda. Consequently, further efforts should be made by Member States, the industry and other stakeholders, including parents, to increase trust in video games and improve the protection of minors.

Considering the above, and bearing in mind the value of video games in promoting cultural diversity, the Commission:

- calls upon the Member States to recognise that video games have become a front-rank medium and to ensure that high standards of freedom of expression and effective, proportionate measures for the protection of minors should apply and mutually reinforce each other;
- calls upon the Member States to integrate into their national systems the information and classification system put in place in the framework of the PEGI and PEGI On-line initiatives;
- calls upon the video games and consoles industry to further improve the PEGI and PEGI On-line systems and in particular regularly to update the criteria for age rating and labelling, to advertise PEGI more actively and to increase the list of signatories;
- recognises that on-line videogames bring new challenges, such as effective age verification systems and possible dangers for young consumers related to chat rooms associated with these games, and calls upon Member States and stakeholders to work together on innovative solutions;
- calls upon Member States and stakeholders to evaluate the possible negative and positive effects of video games, notably on health;
- calls upon all stakeholders involved in the sale of videogames in retail shops to agree within two years on a Pan-European Code of conduct on the sale of games to minors and on commitments to raise awareness of the PEGI system among parents and children, as well as to ensure adequate resources to implement the provisions of this Code;
- encourages the Member States and all stakeholders to take initiatives to improve media literacy applied to video games;
- welcomes and supports further efforts to achieve a self-regulatory or co-regulatory cross-media, pan-European age-rating system. The Commission intends in particular to organise meetings of classification bodies to exchange best practices in this field.