European Commission: Communication on Video Games

IRIS 2008-6:1/2

Christina Angelopoulos
Institute for Information Law (IViR), University of Amsterdam

On 22 April 2008, the European Commission issued a Communication on the protection of consumers, in particular of minors, in respect of the use of video games. The Communication was adopted in response to the booming prospects of the European gaming market, which, in the words of Commissioner Reding, is "welcome, but implies greater responsibility for the industry". The European video games market is the fastest growing and most dynamic sector of the European content industry, with an expected revenue of EUR 7.3 billion by the end of 2008. This growth is in part due to a rapid expansion to older age groups, with the average age of gamers now exceeding 23 years. This shift is accompanied by a growing need for increased protection for minors: already, video games have been blamed for incidents such as the Helsinki school shootings in November 2007, raising public concern that they encourage violent behaviour. The Communication, therefore, was intended as a review of the various methods used for assessing the content of video and computer games.

According to the information received during the consultation phase, as things now stand, PEGI (Pan European Games Information), an age rating system developed by the ISFE (Interactive Software Federation of Europe), with the support of the Commission, is applied in 20 European States. This applies with or without the support of additional specific legislation. Four countries have heretofore banned games for having violent content and most do not have any specific legislation on online video games. Half of the Member States consider the current measures to be generally effective, while, as far as the introduction of a cross-platform, pan-European rating system is concerned, most Member States agree that such a move would contribute to the smooth operation of the internal market and help avoid consumer confusion.

In its conclusion, the Commission called, among other things, for Member States to integrate PEGI and PEGI On-line into their national systems, as well as on industry to regularly update and actively advertise both systems. In addition, it called for a Pan-European Code of Conduct for retailers on the sale of games to minors and on raising awareness of the PEGI system among parents and children; this should be drawn up within two years. It especially emphasised the new challenges brought by online video games. The Commission urged Member States and stakeholders to encourage media literacy in respect of video games, in line with the Communication of 20 December 2007. Finally, it supports further efforts

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026

to achieve a self-regulatory or co-regulatory cross-media, pan-European age-rating system, as opposed to parallel systems which bring about confusion.

The Communication comes a couple of weeks after the Byron Review, which dealt with similar matters on the national UK level. The Byron Review recommended a hybrid classification system, in which the logos of the BBFC (British Board of Film Classification) are placed on the front of all game packaging and PEGI pictograms on the back.

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the protection of consumers, in particular minors, in respect of the use of video games - 22 April 2008 - COM(2008) 207 final

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2008:0207:FIN:EN:PDF

"Video Games: Commission welcomes progress on protection of minors in 23 EU Member States, but asks for improvement of industry codes", Brussels, 22 April 2008

http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/08/618&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026