European Parliament: Resolution on Video Games

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On 12 March 2009, the European Parliament (EP) adopted a resolution on the protection of consumers, in particular minors, in respect of the use of video games. This non-legislative resolution deals with the restriction of the sale or banning of video games, which falls within the area of Member State competence. It does not propose particular EU-wide legislation.

The Members of Parliament (MEPs) derive their considerations from a report drafted by Toine Manders, rapporteur of the political group Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE). The report stresses that video games have a value of not only in entertainment, but also for educational and medical purposes. The report concluded that not all games are suitable to all ages and video games can have harmful effects on the minds of children. Therefore, to help parents choose to make a decision on which videogame to buy for their children, MEPs welcome the adoption of EU-wide labelling rules for video games.

Furthermore, the MEPs note that currently video games can be downloaded from the internet and be played on mobile devices. These developments necessitate an effective age verification system for online games in particular. The EP calls on the video game industries, as well as the Commission and Member States, to improve the self-regulatory Pan-European Game Information (PEGI) age rating system by, inter alia, regularly updating the criteria for these ratings, as well as the labelling on the videogames.

In order to ensure that minors are not exposed to harmful content in (online) video games, Parliament calls for additional efforts. One of these efforts is to explore the merit of a “red button”. This “red button” can be included on game devices and should have the ability to disable a game in the case of inappropriate content for minors or control access at certain hours.

Lastly, Parliament holds the view that a common approach is needed towards retailers who sell video games to children which are rated for a higher age level. Members States should put in place measures to prevent this kind of sales. Sanctions are also required for internet café owners who let children play video games in their café which are rated for a higher age level. Also, the industry itself should be encouraged to further develop self-regulatory systems.

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The history of the adopted resolution dates back to 22 April 2008. On that date the European Commission (EC) initiated its document on the protection of consumers against the harmful effects of using video games (see IRIS 2008-6: 3).

Non-legislative resolution, "Protection of consumers, in particular minors, in respect of the use of video games", INI/2008/217

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