



Video games: a red button for parents

Parents should have a "red button" to disable a game they feel is inappropriate for their child, says the EP Internal Market Committee. The aim is not to demonise games, which have a broadly beneficial effect on the mental development of children, but to help parents choose suitable content for their offspring.

Video games do not only have a recreational value. They can also be used for educational and medical purposes, stresses a report by Toine Manders (ALDE, NL) adopted by the Internal Market Committee on Wednesday. However, not all games are suited to all age groups and the possibility of harmful effects on the minds of children cannot be ruled out. To help parents choose, MEPs would like to see more public awareness of the content of video games, parental control options and instruments such as the Pan-European Game Information (PEGI) age rating system.

Different approaches to strengthening control of video games should be explored, argues the committee, but it does not propose specific EU legislation. MEPs believe Member States should ensure their national rating systems do not lead to market fragmentation. Harmonisation of labelling rules would be of help. Member States should also agree on a common system based solely on PEGI.

Stricter controls on games

Members of the committee are particularly worried about on-line games, which are easy to download onto a PC or a mobile phone, making parental control harder. Until PEGI on-line is up and running, the report proposes fitting consoles, computers or other game devices with a "red button" to give parents the chance to disable a game or control access at certain times.

Video games and violence

The presence of violence in video games does not automatically lead to violent behaviour, according to the report, which draws on recent studies. However, prolonged exposure to scenes of violence can have an adverse effect on the player and even potentially lead to violent behaviour. An amendment tabled by the Civil Liberties Committee calls on the Member States to frame specific civil and criminal legislation on the retailing of violent TV, video and computer games and argues that special attention should be devoted to on-line games.

Internet cafés singled out

Controls on video games need to be tightened up so that children do not have access to inappropriate games. For this reason, and also to prevent the potentially harmful effects of games, especially the danger of addiction or violent behaviour, retailers and parents should take appropriate steps. MEPs back the idea of a code of conduct for re-

tailers and producers of video games. But above all, internet café owners are singled out and reminded of their responsibilities. A Eurobarometer survey shows that 3.2% of children aged 6-17 access the internet without adult supervision in internet cafes.

N.B. :

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