



2022/2198(INI)

18.7.2023

OPINION

of the Committee on Culture and Education

for the Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection

on virtual worlds – opportunities, risks and policy implications for the single market
(2022/2198(INI))

Rapporteur for opinion: Laurence Farreng

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SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Culture and Education calls on the Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

1. Believes that virtual worlds or ‘metaverses’ represent a significant step in the development of the internet and have the potential to impact all areas of citizens’ lives, namely in education, culture, arts and design, music, entertainment and social activities and interactions; stresses that, although there is no standardised definition, they can be understood as a real-time simulation of immersive 3D or 2D spaces in which users can interact; takes the view that virtual worlds can generate synergies with Web 3.0;
2. Calls for the European Union to adopt a comprehensive strategy for virtual worlds; believes that this strategy must be sustainable and human-centric, while safeguarding the values of the EU and fundamental rights; stresses that this strategy should aim at harnessing and promoting the innovation and progress of relevant sectors such as video games, including technologies such as virtual reality (VR), extended reality (XR), game engines, haptics, which are key building blocks for digital skills and for the metaverse(s), as well as the cultural, economic and educational benefits that emerge from them; stresses the need to adopt an interdisciplinary approach to the development of European metaverses, which combine technology and content;
3. Calls for the EU, in view of the strategic autonomy considerations raised by virtual worlds, to ensure adequate and efficient investment in this field; welcomes the Virtual and Augmented Reality Industrial Coalition launched by the European Commission as part of the Media Audiovisual Action Plan; notes that the Horizon Europe and Creative Europe programmes both fund augmented- and virtual-reality projects; acknowledges the need to increase the budgets of these programmes, in order to foster a prominent EU strategy for immersive technologies and to address the challenges of inclusivity and accessibility to virtual worlds;
4. Emphasises the importance of developing metaverses for the EU’s cultural and creative ecosystems, as new spaces for creativity and expression, which can be used to promote European cultural and linguistic diversity; insists on ensuring society-wide accessibility of metaverses in order to make them truly democratic spaces, fostering digital literacy and the basic right to quality and affordable internet access, ensuring connectivity and accessibility for all, particularly people living in rural areas, and to facilitate the inclusion of vulnerable groups;
5. Welcomes the impact that virtual worlds can have in terms of safeguarding and promoting European cultural heritage, by making it possible to offer personalised experiences to users, for educational or tourism purposes; recalls the need to protect European strategic cultural assets and their integrity, including European cultural heritage, in virtual worlds;
6. Notes that ‘metaverses’ or virtual worlds can be subject to economic speculation, monopolistic tendencies or market concentration; underlines the need to move towards a

decentralised approach to European virtual worlds, comprising both larger and smaller operators at the various levels of the value chain; stresses that SMEs, which make up the vast majority^{1,2} of Europe's cultural and creative ecosystems, must therefore also be able to take advantage of immersive technologies, without being held back by barriers to entry that would only benefit large digital companies; calls for increasing access to funding for SMEs and start-ups; stresses that this can contribute to reduced dependency on third countries and strengthen European leadership;

7. States that virtual worlds and augmented and virtual reality technologies can have a significant impact on education and research by transforming how we acquire knowledge; stresses that metaverses can allow for better visualisation of educational content, awareness raising and increased possibilities for collaboration between learners and educators, as well as being a form of promoting distance and lifelong learning; highlights the potential of virtual worlds to empower individuals and bridge the digital divide through education, promoting digital literacy among all society groups and reducing inequalities;
8. Believes that the development of virtual worlds should coincide with raising European citizens' awareness of their responsible use; calls for the EU to ensure sufficient investments in the field of digital literacy in order to promote the development of critical thinking among users in the digital world;
9. Emphasises the pressing need to foster STEAM education, skills connected to cultural and artistic creation, training and upskilling of workers in the field of virtual worlds, including artificial intelligence (AI), all of which are key for the building of metaverses, in order to create and keep talent within the European Union, avoiding a brain drain towards other markets and facilitating the harmonisation of training and mutual recognition of qualifications across Member States;
10. Underlines the importance of supporting teachers and educators in the process of equipping students with the necessary basic knowledge to safely navigate virtual worlds; calls on the Member States and the EU in this regard to encourage upskilling of teachers to become digitally competent and proficient with technology;
11. Stresses that an EU strategy for virtual worlds must be aligned with an appropriate framework to ensure the protection and promotion of intellectual property, in particular authors' rights and copyright, and stresses the need to protect artists and their creations, European cultural heritage and landscape in the virtual worlds; notes that most intellectual property systems in the metaverses are based on blockchain technology, and believes that non-fungible tokens can represent a new source of revenue for the EU's cultural ecosystem;
12. Notes that metaverses and ancillary digital technologies can be characterised by high levels of energy consumption; stresses that an EU strategy for virtual worlds must assess the environmental impact and sustainability of these new technologies, including by raising citizens' awareness on such impact;

¹ Resolution of 11 December 2018 on the New European Agenda for Culture (OJ C 388, 13.11.2020, p. 30).

² EY, [*Rebuilding Europe: The cultural and creative economy before and after the COVID-19 crisis*](#), 2021.

13. Considers that virtual worlds can also create risks, and that these spaces should be regulated to prevent any abuses linked to harmful behaviour, such as any form of harassment, bullying, discrimination and surveillance of people, in a digital environment or due to inappropriate use; emphasises the need to ensure a safe and healthy environment where cybersecurity, privacy, transparency and the rights and needs of users are properly preserved and protected; stresses the importance of protecting children and minors in virtual worlds, through a thorough implementation of the existing European legislation and strategies such as the Digital Services Act³ and the new European strategy for a better internet for kids (BIK+), to tackle cyberbullying, safeguard physical and mental health, ensure online safety and promote positive use of the metaverses;
14. Invites the Commission to consider the impact of its horizontal digital legislation, such as the AI Act, on culture, including the definition and ownership of cultural and academic works, and to present, if necessary, initiatives in this area to safeguard and promote the European cultural and creative ecosystem;
15. Notes that future developments of virtual worlds should be guided by ethical and human-centric principles, in line with EU legislation such as the General Data Protection Regulation⁴, the Digital Services Act, the Digital Markets Act⁵ and the Copyright Directive⁶; calls on the Commission to ensure close and continuous monitoring on the development of virtual worlds, to identify issues and challenges that may arise and that are not addressed by the current legal framework or that may need further harmonisation among Member States;
16. Recognises the importance of multilateral forums in topics of global significance such as this, and encourages the Commission to take a coordinated approach with the Member States as regards contributing to important international standardisation efforts, such as ‘The Metaverse Standards Forum’, as well as other related initiatives within the OECD and other international organisations such as the ITU and ISO;
17. Underlines the value of the recommendations by the European citizens’ panel on virtual worlds and recalls the currently ongoing European Parliament Pilot Project ‘A space for the metaverse’, which will contribute to create an interdisciplinary European network of experts, thinkers and leaders, for an ethical and democratic development of metaverses.

³ Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (Digital Services Act) (OJ L 277, 27.10.2022, p. 1).

⁴ Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation) (OJ L 119, 4.5.2016, p. 1).

⁵ Regulation (EU) 2022/1925 of 14 September 2022 on contestable and fair markets in the digital sector and amending Directives (EU) 2019/1937 and (EU) 2020/1828 (Digital Markets Act) (OJ L 265, 12.10.2022, p. 1).

⁶ Directive (EU) 2019/790 of 17 April 2019 on copyright and related rights in the Digital Single Market and amending Directives 96/9/EC and 2001/29/EC (OJ L 130, 17.5.2019, p. 92).

INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

Date adopted	18.7.2023
Result of final vote	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> +: 25 </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> –: 0 </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> 0: 3 </div>
Members present for the final vote	Asim Ademov, Christine Anderson, Andrea Bocskor, Ilana Cicurel, Laurence Farreng, Tomasz Frankowski, Romeo Franz, Sylvie Guillaume, Hannes Heide, Irena Joveva, Petra Kammerevert, Niyazi Kizilyürek, Predrag Fred Matić, Martina Michels, Niklas Nienass, Peter Pollák, Marcos Ros Sempere, Massimiliano Smeriglio, Michaela Šojdrová, Sabine Verheyen, Theodoros Zagorakis, Milan Zver
Substitutes present for the final vote	Isabella Adinolfi, Ibán García Del Blanco, Rob Rooken, Marc Tarabella
Substitutes under Rule 209(7) present for the final vote	Angel Dzhambazki, Erik Marquardt

FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

25	+
ECR	Angel Dzhambazki, Rob Rooken
NI	Andrea Bocskor, Marc Tarabella
PPE	Asim Ademov, Isabella Adinolfi, Tomasz Frankowski, Peter Pollák, Michaela Šojdrová, Sabine Verheyen, Theodoros Zagorakis, Milan Zver
Renew	Ilana Cicurel, Laurence Farreng, Irena Joveva
S&D	Ibán García Del Blanco, Sylvie Guillaume, Hannes Heide, Petra Kammerevert, Predrag Fred Matić, Marcos Ros Sempere, Massimiliano Smeriglio
Verts/ALE	Romeo Franz, Erik Marquardt, Niklas Nienass

0	-

3	0
ID	Christine Anderson
The Left	Niyazi Kizilyürek, Martina Michels

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention