

**Question for written answer E-004302/2014
to the Commission**
Rule 117
Mitro Repo (S&D)

Subject: Online games: unexpected expenses and children's in-app purchases

Online games for mobile phones are often advertised as free, but in practice cannot be played properly without additional in-app purchases. Game app companies have also been known to charge sums to consumers' credit cards without their knowledge.

One particular problem is games based on the 'free-to-play' model. The game can be downloaded free of charge, but bonus content can be purchased, for money, during play. Such purchases are easy to make if the phone is linked to an iTunes account containing the customer's credit card details.

European competition and consumer protection authorities have received reports of purchases, especially by children, running into thousands of euros. Children may not realise that it is possible to spend so much using a mobile phone. In free games aimed at children the cost in euros of a single in-app purchase can be in double figures.

A preventive approach is needed, and in-app purchases should not be made by default. The word 'free' should be dropped from advertising if the consumer actually has to pay in order to play.

At the end of February 2014 the EU network of consumer protection authorities (Consumer Protection Cooperation, CPC) and the Commission discussed problems related to online games with representatives of Apple, Google, and the game developers' organisation (the Interactive Software Federation of Europe, ISFE).

In the light of the foregoing and of MEPs' earlier questions:

1. How will the Commission secure the necessary commitment from game app companies and in that way make them take consumer rights into account?
2. How will it deal with the matter of in-app purchases by children in particular?
3. How will it ascertain that Apple, Google, and others are changing their business practices, and how will it intervene should the need arise?