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Tuesday, 24 September, 2002, 15:48 GMT 16:48 UK

[News Front Page](#)



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[Americas](#)
[Asia-Pacific](#)
[Europe](#)
[Middle East](#)
[South Asia](#)
[UK](#)

[Business](#)
[Entertainment](#)
[Science/Nature](#)

[Technology](#)

[Health](#)

[Talking Point](#)

[Country Profiles](#)
[In Depth](#)

[Programmes](#)

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[Daily E-mail](#)

Reprieve for Greek gamers



Some internet cafes were closed down

The Greek Government has backed down over its blanket ban on computer games.

The law, rushed through the Greek parliament in record time, was intended to tackle the problem of illegal gambling.

But the failure to distinguish between electronic gambling and computer games outraged the gaming community.

Now the government has decided to clarify the law, issuing guidelines that make it clear that only games related to gambling are covered by the legislation.

No problem

Previously any game played on a computer or a mobile phone in a public place was subject to the ban.

The new guidelines are being distributed to all police

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stations in Greece in an effort to reassure internet cafe owners and tourists.

"The installation and use of games in public or privately owned spaces with no connection to paid services, and their usage, will in no way incur debts by or on behalf of the user, the management or any third party," say the guidelines.

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"It is clarified, finally, that there is no problem with any citizen, or tourist visiting Greece, using or owning electronic or other games such as Playstation, Gameboy, Xbox etc."

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Obviously it is unconstitutional and in breach of EC law and it is absurd

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Professor Drossos

To date around 50 people have been arrested in connection with flouting the law and cyber-cafes have faced ruin.

Campaigners have accused local prosecutors of deliberately delaying legal proceedings in a bid to force cafes to shut down.

The police have been accused of using Taleban tactics by one of those arrested under the draconian law.

Petros Titis of Greek gaming site, Reload Entertainment, said this new move could be a step in the right direction.

"I think this will help the police to be more flexible," he said.

"Up until this time the police haven't known exactly what they must do."

'Absurd' law

Although any move to clarify the law is welcome, the ban must be overturned legally to make a real difference, said Yianis Drossos, professor of law at Athens University.

"It will be difficult to make this law obsolete because it is one of the few laws in Greece to be voted by unanimity by both the government and the opposition," he said.

Either the Supreme Court in Greece would have to overturn it or the European Union would have to act.

"Both would take time and that time is very critical to the businesses involved," he said.

"Obviously it is unconstitutional and in breach of EC law and it is absurd."

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