

Consumers and retailers share a common interest – sustainable living and healthy competition for fair prices

Speaking at the European Consumer Summit, hosted by EU Commissioner for Justice and Consumers Didier Reynders, EuroCommerce Director-General Christian Verschueren stressed the need for consumer organisations and retailers to seek a common approach to some of the challenges facing Europe’s citizens:

“Consumers quite rightly demand high-quality products, produced sustainably, incorporating the latest technology and delivered where and when they want them. All of that also at a reasonable and fair price. There are growing pressures on the supply chain to raise prices of food, and retailers and wholesalers need to be able to go on helping the purchasing power of families – a significant number of whom suffer, or are at risk of, poverty – to buy quality, sustainably-produced food.”

Verschueren pointed to how the retail and wholesale sector had actively embraced innovation while undergoing a fundamental transformation of its business. E-commerce had benefited consumers through increased choice, and better access to information to guide such choices. At the same time, platforms, particularly those offering direct imports from Asia, posed new challenges to consumer protection. Parcels from China were arriving in a country like Sweden at a rate of 150,000 a day, many of which contained goods not in line with EU standards. EU legislators, industry and consumer organisations needed to act together. The retail and wholesale sector supported strongly the renewed emphasis in the Commission’s 2020 work programme on enforcement, including for product safety of imports. Enforcement of EU rules across the single market, also helped by the Consumer Protection Cooperation (CPC) Regulation which entered into force in January this year, was vital to the sector’s ability to deliver safe and competitively-priced products to consumers.

Consumers also demanded sustainable products: the green deal presented a real opportunity. Retail and wholesale have seized it and integrated the principle of sustainability throughout the supply chain with their products and new business models.

In all of this, a properly working single market, not fragmented by manufacturers or governments, and reinforced application of competition law to keep the market working for consumers, were the cornerstones of the sector’s ability to continue delivering good value and service. This was an interest which fully aligned retailers and consumers’ interests – hence the call to work closely with consumer organisations to protect consumers’ choice and purchasing power. Verschueren added:

“We and consumers’ organisations worked very effectively together in the past to bring down the cost of credit cards when shopping. Consumer organisations are advocating affordable prices for the medicines patients need. We want them to work on consumer access to sustainable, healthy food at a fair price for everyone in the supply chain, but above all a fair price for them.”

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EuroCommerce is the principal European organisation representing the retail and wholesale sector. It embraces national associations in 31 countries and 5.4 million companies, both leading global players such as Carrefour, Ikea, Metro and Tesco, and many small businesses. Retail and wholesale provide a link between producers and 500 million European consumers over a billion times a day. It generates 1 in 7 jobs, providing a varied career for 29 million Europeans, many of them young people. It also supports millions of further jobs throughout the supply chain, from small local suppliers to international businesses. EuroCommerce is the recognised European social partner for the retail and wholesale sector.