

European Retail Day – a sector meeting the challenges of digital and sustainability transformation

The second European Retail Day, a joint initiative of EuroCommerce, Euro Coop, the European Retail Round Table and Independent Retail Europe, which is being held in Brussels today, heard from a range of leading retail representatives, policymakers and civil society about priorities for policy and other initiatives in these early months of the new European Commission and Parliament.

The conference focused on digitalisation and sustainability two central themes for the retail sector in Europe. These also make up two major parts of the Commission's plans for the EU legislative programme over the next 5 years. The conference debated how EU and national policymakers should pursue these objectives, the impact on a rapidly-changing the retail sector and what this will mean for consumers and their purchasing decisions.

Artificial intelligence and how data is used and shared in future, will transform all industries, and the retail and wholesale sector, particularly in view of its direct links to final consumers. Companies will continue to use data to create additional value in their businesses, but this raises important issues around ownership, interoperability, competition and liability.

With the launch of the EU Green Deal, sustainability, circular economy and climate change will affect policies across the board. Retail is a sector subject to regulation in so many areas of its activities, and will need to respond to regulation and increasing consumer demand for more sustainable products, less waste, less use of plastics, and energy efficiency. The trend towards leasing rather than buying, and legislation obliging products to be more easily repaired and recycled, will transform consumer purchasing habits and the way they live.

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Contact:

Neil McMillan - +32 2 737 05 99 - mcmillan@eurocommerce.eu

Vincent Yhuello - +32 2 738 06 48 - yhuello@eurocommerce.eu

www.eurocommerce.eu

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.