

Stronger consumer engagement helps drive the green and digital transition – Retailers will make it happen

Speaking today on the launch of the Commission New Consumer Agenda, EuroCommerce Director-General Christian Verschueren said:

“The green and digital transition is fully underway, and is being driven in large part by consumers and what they buy. The COVID-19 pandemic has further accelerated the digital transition, making the Commission’s new agenda very timely. Retailers help by providing consumers with ever more ways of making sustainable choices and by asking suppliers for more sustainable, circular, and eco-designed products.”

Retailers need to be able to innovate and respond quickly to changes in consumer behaviour and expectations. To do so, they need a stable and predictable business and policy climate: harmonised rules – and no gold-plating by national governments – , coherent national consumer polices and effective and efficient enforcement across the EU are the best ways of ensuring this.

Legislators need to be careful not to create rigid legal obligations that increase costs and administrative burdens, with only limited benefits. Our experience has shown that sustainability needs to start in the design of the product, making it attractive to consumers. The Ecodesign Directive has already proven its value in promoting better energy consumption, repairability and recyclability, and we believe that the Commission should use this as the primary vehicle for meeting Europe’s sustainability goals. Introducing a ‘right to repair’ may not fundamentally change consumer behaviour, and raises practical questions that have not been resolved yet.

A complete overhaul of the General Product Safety Directive is not necessary. We welcome the Commission’s intention to focus on unsafe products from third countries entering the EU market. Effective enforcement, harmonised interpretation and implementation of the directive will be the most effective means of tackling dangerous products and keeping EU consumers safe. It is also important to decrease the number of tests and analyses a distributor or importer is asked to perform. Competent authorities need to act more effectively against rogue manufacturers and traders and stem the tide of non-compliant or dangerous products from outside the EU, irrespective of their origin or trading channel. Verschueren added:

“As Vice President Jourova and Commissioner Reynders said, consumers will be crucial for the economic recovery. But instead of revising the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive again, its better implementation and enforcement will be key to protecting consumers and building trust.”

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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.