Single market review: tackling barriers and inefficiencies through better implementation and enforcement

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This Commission Staff Working Document covers “The Single Market Review: one year on”. Since November 2007, the Commission has been working with all stakeholders to implement a programme of concrete measures to ensure that the single market is up to the job of continuing to deliver for Europe. The Single Market Review put citizens, consumers, and SMEs at the centre of policy-making. It set out to modernise how the single market delivers these results, through more evidence based tools and through partnership with the Member States.

The Commission concludes that considerable progress has been made over the past year to implement its shared vision for the single market of the 21st century. It notes that 2009 will see a renewed effort to drive the modernisation of single market policy even further and to ensure that it can play its full part as a launch-pad for economic recovery.

Today's single market can deliver tangible results for consumers and SMEs: stronger contractual rights, better quality and a wider choice of products and services at lower prices, effective redress and simpler and better information about their single market rights. It can provide safer medicines and cheaper and safer financial products - bank accounts, savings, investment products and payments. It should over time remove those unjustified obstacles to cross-border buying that few citizens understand.

SMEs can benefit from lower costs and administrative burdens, from simpler company rules and better access to markets in other Member States. They should be able to rely on a simple and single company statute, obtain payments from their debtors more promptly, use electronic procedures instead of paperwork and deal with administrative formalities through one contact point.

Unnecessary barriers for cross-border e-business are being tackled. Public procurement rules make it easier for SMEs to bid for tenders and electronic procurement should bring further savings in costs and effort. Member States will have to screen national rules for service provision to make them simpler and more single market friendly.

All these improvements are either underway or within reach – but many depend on Member States reaching agreement quickly and implementing agreed reforms in a timely manner. The Commission will continue to work in close cooperation with Member States to ensure that the progress made is properly communicated to the public at large, to create consensus and to help rebuild confidence among market players and consumers. This is particularly important at national and local level, where all the existing tools for cooperation, including the communication management partnerships, should be deployed.

The economic crisis has vividly demonstrated the pertinence of the new approach set out in the Single Market Review: the focus on empowering consumers and SMEs, fostering investment and innovation, and developing the social and environmental dimensions of the single market. But recent events have also added a new sense of urgency to the reform process. Getting results will depend on how successfully the EU develops and manages new evidence-based tools and new working methods through a closer partnership with Member States and all stakeholders - consumers, social partners, economic actors and civil society alike.

The European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions are invited to contribute actively to the important work ahead.