New strategy for consumer policy

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The Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection adopted the own-initiative report drafted by Kyriacos TRIANTAPHYLLIDES (GUE/NGL, CY) on a new strategy for consumer policy.

Members welcome the Commission's initiative to launch a Consumer Agenda, and emphasise the need for the Commission to propose a **proactive policy** for defining smart regulation, with the objective of achieving a **coherent legal framework**.

They emphasise the need for the **proper implementation and enforcement of existing legislation** (in particular the latest consumer rights directive) accompanied by dissemination of appropriate information concerning the rights and obligations of each party.

The Commission is invited to:

- ensure better coordination between its policies which affect consumers;
- strengthen international cooperation and the exchange of information with non-EU countries in the field of consumer protection;
- guarantee special protection for groups of consumers who are particularly vulnerable because of their mental, physical or psychological infirmity, age or credulity, or made vulnerable by their social and financial situation;
- improve the criteria and arrangements for carrying out more impact assessments, and to review, where appropriate, EU legislation which has an impact on consumer policy and establish best practices by means of which Member States can implement existing legislation correctly.

The report calls for an in-depth review among policy-makers of ways of designing smarter policies which provide consumers with information they need and can actually use, without creating additional burdens for companies.

Consumer empowerment: the report emphasises the need to empower consumers by providing them with **useful, targeted and understandable information**. It insists that the EU and national authorities, and consumer organisations and companies, need to step up their efforts to improve consumer education. Members stress the need to educate consumers, from as **early an age as possible**, so that they understand and make use of the information appearing on products.

The Commission is invited to:

- provide adequate support and capacity building to consumer organisations in each Member State, with a view to strengthening their role and resources, thereby enhancing consumer empowerment make European logos for which the recognition rate still appears unsatisfactory (in particular the CE conformity marking logo, the European Ecolabel, the Möbius strip for recycling or risk marking) more identifiable and more intuitive
- to launch information campaigns in all the Member States concerning the European 'CE' designation and the significance thereof, making it clear to consumers what it does (or does not) represent and providing them with more comprehensive information, while seeking to raise awareness of product safety in professional circles;
- to look into the remaining obstacles to bank switching by consumers and to consider ways of eliminating them, such as setting up an EU-wide bank account number portability system.

Pointing out that **consumer confidence** is a driving force in the economy with regard to both domestic and cross-border trade, online and offline, Members stress the need to inform consumers about their rights and obligations and ensure that consumers' rights are fully respected when it comes to internet use and protection of intellectual property rights, at the same time protecting personal data and privacy.

The report emphasises the need to provide consumers and traders with **more transparent and comparable information**, for example through the use of unit price indications and accurate and transparent internet price-comparison websites, as well as meaningful and effective product labelling.

Consumer protection and product safety: Members stress the urgent need to increase the general level of safety of consumer products in the EU, especially in the framework of the forthcoming revision of the General Product Safety Directive. They call for better product safety guarantees, particularly in e-commerce on the internal market. The report stresses, further, the need to increase the **safety standards for toys**, and urges Member States quickly to transpose and fully implement the new Toy Safety Directive. It also stresses the importance of access to **financial education** and financial advice, and calls for better regulation of financial advisory services.

The Commission is invited to:

- look more closely into the issues of the impact of chemicals on consumers' health, antibiotic resistance and nanotechnologies, on the basis of existing EU legislation in those fields;
- develop a common assessment and labelling system;
- continue its work on the sale of goods and unfair contract terms, a review of the rules on unfair commercial practices (UCP), the Consumer Credit Directive, the Misleading Advertising Directive.

The report calls for the **RAPEX** notification system to be strengthened and made more effective and transparent for consumers, in order to improve overall awareness of the risks posed by specific consumer products and enable companies and customs authorities to take swift and appropriate action.

It also **proposes expanding European support for research in emerging sectors**, such as green and ethical consumption, and for the pooling of everyday consumer goods (cars, bicycles, household appliances, etc.).

Towards a more social and sustainable consumer policy in Europe: in this respect, the report calls on the Commission to:

- include a consumer accessibility element in the Consumer Agenda in order to make sure that vulnerable groups have access to the essential products and services they need;
- take the gender perspective into account in the Consumer Agenda;
- ensure that the Consumer Agenda rules out all discrimination on grounds of sex in connection with access to and the supply of goods and services;
- address the issue of how private consumption can become more sustainable in order to promote innovation, economic growth and a low-carbon economy, in keeping with the objective set in the Europe 2020 strategy;
- coordinate their efforts to inform consumers better about more efficient ways to buy and consume food, in order to prevent and combat food waste.

Enforcement of consumer rights and redress: the report calls for accessible and effective redress mechanisms for European consumers, as these are essential if barriers in the internal market, particularly as regards e-commerce, are to be eliminated. It also calls on the Commission to come forward with one or more proposals through the ordinary legislative procedure, thereby ensuring the proper involvement of Parliament.

Lastly, it calls on the Commission to **draw on best practices from Member States**, such as the Nordic ombudsman model, and to consider giving ECC-Net legal authority in the area of consumer dispute resolution.