Longer lifetime for products: benefits for consumers and companies

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The Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection adopted an own-initiative report by Pascal DURAND (Greens/EFA, FR) on a longer lifetime for products: benefits for consumers and companies.

The study commissioned by the committee on the internal market and consumer protection showed that **broad-based policy measures are needed to promote a longer lifetime for products**, in particular by tackling programmed obsolescence.

In a Eurobarometer survey conducted in June 2014, 77 % of EU consumers said that they would prefer to try to repair broken goods than to buy new ones.

Designing robust, durable and high-quality products: the Commission shall encourage the establishment of **minimum resistance criteria** covering, inter alia, **robustness, repairability and upgradeability** for each product category from the design stage onwards, facilitated by standards developed by all three European Standardisation Organisations (ESOs) (CEN, CENELEC and ETSI).

The manufacturer's commercial offer shall include:

- product durability,
- extended warranties,
- the availability of spare parts,
- ease of repair and the interchangeability of component.

Members called on the Commission and the Member States to support producers of modular designs which are easy to dismantle and interchange. The pursuit of product durability and repairability should go alongside the objective of sustainability by means of, for instance, the use of environmentally friendly materials.

Promoting repairability and longevity: Members called on the Commission to carry out a series of actions in this regard, such as:

- using construction techniques and materials that render repair of the item or the replacement of its components easier;
- including the **product's repairability** among its essential features when beneficial, and by discouraging, unless justified for safety reasons, the fixing-in of essential components such as batteries and LEDs into products;
- ensuring the possibility of using **substitutes** of equal quality and performance for original parts;
- encouraging manufacturers to **develop battery technology** to ensure that the lifespan of the batteries and accumulators better matches the expected lifespan of the product ;
- encouraging the accessibility of **spare parts**;
- stimulating repairs and second-hand sales, and to develop repairs training;
- discouraging technical, safety or software solutions which prevent repairs from being performed other than by approved firms or bodies.

Operating a usage-oriented economic model and supporting SMEs and employment in the EU: Member States are invited to: (i) consult with all stakeholders concerned in order to encourage the development of a usage-based sales model which benefits everyone; (ii) adopt measures to promote the development of the functional economy, and to encourage the rental, exchange and borrowing of goods; (iii) encourage local and regional authorities actively promoting the development of economic models, such as the collaborative economy and the circular economy.

The Commission should consider how the **replaceability of LED bulbs** can be encouraged and facilitated and consider, in addition to ecodesign measures, a less stringent approach involving, for example, an extended warranty if the bulbs cannot be removed.

Measures on planned obsolescence: the Commission is called upon to propose, in consultation with consumer organisations, producers and other stakeholders, an **EU-level definition** of planned obsolescence for tangible goods and software. Moreover, the importance of sharing best practices to combat planned obsolescence and to extend the lifespan of (electrical) household appliances has been stressed.

Members encouraged transparency from suppliers and manufacturers by stipulations in product contracts of the minimum period for which security updates on operating systems are available. They proposed that a definition of a **reasonable period of use** be established.

Ensuring better information for consumers: the Commission is called on to improve product durability information via the consideration of a **voluntary European label**, covering, in particular the product's durability. Members called for measures to promote consumer awareness about early failing and non-repairable products, where appropriate through the development of notification platforms for consumers.

The report also suggested strengthening the right to the legal guarantee of conformity, a reference to the guarantee to appear written out in full on the invoice for the purchase of the product. It called for the implementation of a complaints mechanism at EU level for cases in which the right to a guarantee is not implemented.