Towards a more sustainable single market for business and consumers

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The European Parliament adopted by 395 votes to 94, with 207 abstentions, a resolution entitled ‘Towards a more sustainable single market for business and consumers’.

Faced with the scarcity of natural resources and the proliferation of waste, Members stressed the need to establish sustainable patterns of production and consumption that take account of global limits, with priority being given to a more efficient and sustainable use of resources. The crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the need for new and more resilient business models and support for European companies.

Strategy for a sustainable single market

In the context of the adoption of the European Green Deal, Parliament called for a research-based strategy to increase the sustainability, reusability, upgradeability and repairability of products. Such a strategy should create jobs, generate growth and innovation for European businesses, support their global competitiveness and ensure a high level of consumer protection.

Parliament called on the Commission to

- demonstrate strong political ambition when designing, adopting and implementing the upcoming proposals, in particular to ‘empower consumers in the green transition’;

- demonstrate a sustainable product policy initiative that would be aligned with the EU's climate and environmental objectives to improve the circularity of value chains, resource efficiency and the use of secondary raw materials, minimise waste generation and achieve a circular economy free of toxic substances.

Members stressed that completing and deepening the single market, including by implementing existing legislation and removing remaining unjustified and disproportionate barriers, is a precondition for more sustainable production and consumption in the EU. They called for more transparent governance of the internal market, with more effective monitoring.

Consumer rights and clamping down on planned obsolescence

Parliament called on the Commission to develop, in consultation with all interested parties, a broad strategy including measures to, inter alia (i) specify the pre-contractual information to be provided on the estimated lifetime and on the reparability of a product; (ii) introduce mandatory labelling clearly informing consumers about the estimated lifetime and reparability of a product at the time of purchase; (iii) reinforce the role of the EU ecolabel; and (iv) determine which categories of goods could be fitted with a usage meter, on the basis of a cost/environmental-efficiency analysis.

Consumers and businesses should be informed throughout the EU about their rights and means of redress.

Repair strategy

Parliament called for information on repair and maintenance services concerning the availability of spare parts, software updates and the reparability of a product to be made available in a clear and easily readable manner at the time of purchase. It invited the Commission to establish a consumer ‘right to repair’ to ensure that repairs become systematic, cost-effective and attractive, taking into account the specificities of different product categories.

Global strategy to promote a culture of reuse

Parliament welcomed the Commission's consideration of binding measures to prevent the destruction of unsold or non-perishable goods in good working order so that they can be reused, as well as quantified targets for reuse. It stressed the importance of:

- boosting circular and sustainable business models to minimise the destruction of goods and promote repair and reuse;

- providing incentives for consumers to buy second-hand goods;

- clearly defining the concepts of reconditioned and refurbished goods;

- developing national campaigns and financial mechanisms to encourage consumers to prolong the life of products by repairing them and using second-hand products.

A digital strategy for a sustainable market

Parliament welcomed the announcement of a common European data space for smart circular applications and the Commission's ambition to develop a digital 'product passport' to improve traceability and access to information on a product's production conditions, durability, composition, reuse, repair and dismantling possibilities and end-of-life treatment. It called for increased funding for research and innovation in the field of sustainable technologies under the new multiannual financial framework.

Public Procurement

Stressing the role that green and social procurement could play in shortening supply chains, Parliament called for the uptake of environmental, social and innovation public procurement in the transition to a sustainable and climate-neutral economy, by introducing sustainability criteria and targets into public tenders.

Responsible marketing and advertising

Consumers are faced with misleading claims about the environmental characteristics of products and services, both online and offline. Members called for clear guidelines and standards for environmental claims and commitments that result in ecolabels. They welcomed the announced legislative proposal on substantiating green claims.