Consumer confidence in the digital environment

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Zuzana ROITHOVÁ (EPP-ED, CZ) on consumer confidence in the digital environment. The report called on the Commission to back the development of an e-commerce regulatory framework that would boost the "current low level" of consumer confidence, reinforce consumer rights and the position of small business operators and stop the fragmentation of the internal market in the digital environment. As well as seeking to improve the quality of consumer legislation, the Commission should focus on developing appropriate rules for cross-border e-commerce in the form of voluntary standards.

The committee wanted to see a new e-confidence strategy which should include:

- educational and information campaigns and projects verifying online services in practice and supporting small and medium-sized businesses' awareness of their obligations when they supply or provide goods, services or content across a border in the digital environment;

- standardisation of EU rules on cross-border electronic invoicing (e-invoicing);

- strengthening traditional consumer protection instruments;

- supporting the mandatory use of the securest kinds of technology for online payments;

- creating a European early-warning system, including a database, to combat fraudulent activities in the digital environment;

- the launch of a European information campaign stressing the dangers of counterfeit medicines sold on the internet.

On the question of voluntary standards, the Commission was urged to come up with European standards designed to bridge language differences and variations between national laws, thus facilitating cross-border e-commerce**.** MEPs in the committee also wanted the Commission to define the conditions and a logo for a European trustmark to guarantee greater certainty in the area of cross-border e-commerce and in this connection to ensure a general legal framework for voluntary trustmarks, as it was called on to do in the e-Commerce Directive. This system should be inexpensive, be based on the self-regulatory principle and involve penalties for improper use**.** The committee warned, however, that effective trustmark schemes could be difficult to implement, inter alia because of the dangers of fraudulent use**,** and stressed that the most effective ways of encouraging consumer confidence were sector-specific schemes and codes of conduct, as well as independent consumer references posted on websites to assist new consumers when making choices**.**

Other recommendations in the report included drawing up a European charter of users' rights to clarify the rights and obligations of information society players, including consumers, notably users' rights relating to digital content, those guaranteeing basic interoperability standards and the rights of particularly vulnerable users. The Commission, along with the Member States and organisations concerned, should disseminate this charter widely to all internet users, so that they know their rights and have the mean to assert them.

The committee also called on the Commission to propose measures to stop the fragmentation of the internal market in the digital environment, "which significantly affects consumers mainly in new and small Member States solely on the basis of their nationality, place of residence or whether they own a

payment card issued in a particular Member State"**.** It added that the Commission should propose a provision for access to products delivered cross-border in line with Article 20 of the Services Directive. The report also called for the harmonisation of certain aspects of consumer contract law and urged the Commission to propose that the rules governing distance contracts be extended to cover contracts between consumers and professional traders in online auctions and contracts for tourist services ordered individually over the internet**.**

Lastly, MEPs called for the creation of a European e-consumer information system which would offer all European e-consumers detailed guidance and information about consumer and business rights and obligations in the digital environment as well as practical orientation regarding alternative dispute resolution (ADR) opportunities**.**