

Contact: Sébastien Pant: +32 (0)2 789 24 01
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European enforcement of consumer law enters new era

New rules become applicable [1] across the EU on Friday 17 January which will give national authorities more teeth to go after companies which break consumer law across national borders and to act jointly, and thus more efficiently, in case of infringements in several countries.

The EU's Single Market has made it possible for traders to operate across borders. Yet enforcement is still a national issue. This means that national authorities have different powers and it is up to each authority individually to go after companies breaking the law, even if the company deploys the same unfair or illegal practices across many countries or the entire EU.

Now, all authorities will have at least the same minimum powers, such as being able to access any information they need for their investigation and being able to enter any premises, even if abroad.

Authorities will now also be able to remove or restrict access to an online interface in another country, or ask hosting services to do so, as a last resort, if the company is found to be breaking consumer law.

Monique Goyens, Director General of The European Consumer Organisation (BEUC), said: "The Single Market is a terrific opportunity for consumers if they can be certain all authorities police rogue traders effectively. It is a big step that now the authorities can take joint action against a trader that harms consumers in several EU countries.

"With the new powers of national authorities and of their network, we now have high expectations that national authorities will be able to work better together and take common binding decisions against illegal practices."

BEUC also welcomes the official alert system where consumer organisations will be able to send alerts to consumer authorities when they suspect foul play by a trader who is based in another country.

Monique Goyens added: "Consumer organisations will have an important role to play by being able to send alerts directly to authorities in relevant countries and we are looking forward to playing our part."

ENDS

[1] This is the revision of the Consumer Protection Cooperation Regulation of 2004.

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