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Disappointing vote puts some consumer rights up for the chop

Consumer protection in the EU for the purchase of goods could be weakened following a poor vote in the European Parliament Internal Market (IMCO) Committee today. Members of the committee decided to remove the free choice of remedies which currently exists in several countries when a consumer discovers a fault with a product he bought [1].

MEPs also voted to further harmonise the period when it is up to the seller to prove a product was not faulty on purchase to one year across the EU. Whilst this is good news for consumers in most countries it would mean a significant loss for others who would now have this period halved from two years to one [2]. Legal guarantee periods, which are crucial for consumers to claim their rights when a product is unsatisfactory, are now frozen at two years for all countries unless the period is already higher and, in which case, it can no longer be increased.

Monique Goyens, Director General of the European Consumer Organisation (BEUC), said: "This vote is not just a missed opportunity, it is extremely disappointing. How will consumers understand that the EU is taking away some of their rights, not improving them?"

"Member States should now make an effort to achieve better results for consumers. Where consumer rights are being weakened or frozen, countries should now reject this very disappointing vote to limit consumer rights."

The committee ignored calls from certain MEPs to improve the durability of products by making the legal guarantee match the product's lifespan.

Monique Goyens added: "With all that is being said and written about products that don't last and are being thrown away too quickly, it is unacceptable that MEPs have gone for an option that will at best maintain the status quo."

ENDS

Notes to editors

[1] The countries to lose their rights on this point are Portugal, Greece, Slovenia and Latvia.

[2] The countries where this happens are France and Portugal.