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European Commission objects to Google's unfair practices – Consumers should be misled no longer

The European Consumer Organisation commends the European Commission's 'Statement of Objections' today in its antitrust investigation of how Google Inc. calculates online search results - specifically its 'Google Shopping' service - and presents them to European users.

For 4 years the Commission has been investigating whether Google infringes EU competition law by 'stacking' search results with its own services and demoting those of rivals. The case is critical given the important role Google plays in consumers' everyday digital lives as a gatekeeper to online content, products and services as well as its overwhelming market dominance in Europe. BEUC is one of the formal complainants in the antitrust investigation.

Last year the Commission signalled readiness to settle the case based on Google's proposed terms, but following widespread objections including from competitors, MEPs, consumer organisations and media outlets for example, the new Competition Commissioner Margrethe Vestager today announced that Google with its 'Google Shopping' service is presumed to be in breach of EU competition rules. This is a very important first step and we hope the Commissioner holds her promise to continue investigating other Google services.

Monique Goyens, The European Consumer Organisation's Director General commented:

"We are pleased by the European Commission's assertions that Google unfairly boosts its own product comparison services and deliberately demotes those of rivals. We need to correct such misleading malpractices, not just in this instance, but also for the future.

"The European Commission must rigorously enforce a 'non-discrimination principle' to ensure European consumers get fair and neutral search results. Google must hold all services - including its own - to the same standards, applying exactly the same ranking, indexing, crawling, display and penalty principles in its algorithms. This should apply across services, not just with Google Shopping.

"Search engines play a crucial role in Europe's Digital Single Market. They are consumers' entry points for product information and price comparisons. Manipulating search results leads to broader problems for Europe's digital economy as Google's market share means it essentially decides which companies are placed in the shop window. Such control restricts access, thereby reducing competition and resulting in less consumer choice.

"BEUC is formally involved in this investigation and we are pleased to see the European Commission accommodating consumers' concerns. This case is relevant not only for regulating the practices of a single company, but also to set European Digital Single Market standards for online businesses."

ENDS

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