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Date: 25/05/2016
Reference: BEUC-PR-2016-008

Consumers to benefit from geo-blocking overhaul

Proposed new rules on geo-blocking will benefit consumers, BEUC said today, following an announcement from the European Commission on a package to boost the online market within the EU.

Under the proposal, retailers will no longer be able to refuse to sell goods and services to people living in other EU countries.

Monique Goyens, Director General of The European Consumer Organisation, commented:

"This proposal to stop geo-blocking is great news for European consumers. It flies against the logic of a single market when consumers are prevented from buying a tablet, a sweater or a video game because they live in another EU country or because they are paying with a foreign credit card. Consumers are often frustrated when they have to read "This product is not available in your country".

"Today's proposals are another step towards creating an EU-wide digital single market. The Commission's initiative shows that it has finally recognised that consumers must benefit from opening up national markets. People expect the EU to break down online barriers and allow them to profit from a borderless market place across 28 countries.

"The single market has greatly benefited businesses in the EU. Consumers on the other hand still face hurdles when they try to take advantage of better offers and deals available from retailers based in other countries. This is wrong and it is right that it is corrected.

"It is however regrettable that consumers can still be blocked from buying digital products such as ebooks and music from sellers based in other countries. TV series, films and sport events will also stay off-limits. It is time the EU puts the final nail in the coffin of geo-blocking."

Other digital single market proposals and action plans

In addition to a proposal on geo-blocking the Commission plans to update a 2006 law on cooperation between national consumer protection authorities and to introduce new rules for the cross-border delivery of parcels. New guidance on the application of a major unfair commercial practices law, particularly relevant for the digital market, shows how it plans to deal with online platforms.

Monique Goyens commented:

"It is great to have solid laws to protect consumers against geo-blocking and unfair practices but without enforcement they mean nothing. The more people shop across borders the better consumer authorities need to cooperate. National silos do not work for a market place of 500 million consumers. It is reassuring that the EU wants to strengthen cooperation between national authorities. Consumer organisations should be recognised as partners in tackling unfair and illegal business practices which harm consumers as well as the EU's economy."

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