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Consumer groups welcome new EU consumer policy strategy for the next five years

Today the European Commission adopted the "Consumer Agenda", its consumer policy strategy for the next five years. It lays down the Commission's consumer policy objectives and will serve as guidance to include consumer interests in all policy areas. Focus areas are the green and digital transition as well as the post-COVID economic recovery.

Key actions include an upcoming law to better inform consumers about how sustainable a product is and to be better protected against greenwashing and early obsolescence. The Agenda also announces rules on the use of artificial intelligence and a plan to revise the EU's product safety law to address the challenges from new technologies and online selling.

A new strategy for EU consumer policy is urgently needed, not only because the pandemic has caused an economic downturn but also because of the ever-increasing speed of market developments and the profound digital and green transformation of our society. The European Consumer Organisation (BEUC) therefore welcomes this milestone document, which should be the lodestar for policy makers to address consumer needs in all relevant EU policies. We agree with the Commission that consumer policy is vital to instil trust and to recover economically from the COVID-19 pandemic.

From law-breaking airlines to online scams and price gouging for essential health products, consumers have been let down too often in recent months. The Commission is therefore right to stress the vital need for cooperation between EU, national authorities and consumer organisations to overcome this health and economic crisis. In fact, since the start of the pandemic, consumer groups from Lisbon to Helsinki and from Dublin to Athens have assisted hundreds of thousands of consumers with advice, legal actions and product tests.¹

Monique Goyens, Director General of BEUC, commented:

"The EU has rightly set the bar high with its new Consumer Agenda. Consumers' concerns and expectations need to be central to any policy plan be it in health, energy, finance or the digital and green transition. We urge all European and national policy-makers to work together to meet its objectives.

"Just as the second COVID-19 wave is hitting the EU hard, consumers need reassurance that the EU and national governments improve protections that people can rely on. The consumer agenda is the right road map for this to happen.

"We expect the European Commission to deliver on the objectives of the consumer agenda. Consumers face enormous transformations because of the digitalisation of our societies and the consequences of climate change. Consumer organisations will certainly keep policy makers on their toes.

“The Commission has announced that it will play its role in boosting enforcement. This is welcome news. Lack of enforcement is the Achilles heel of EU and national consumer policy. One way to improve this would be for national authorities to work better together with consumer groups.

“Across the EU, consumer organisations have demonstrated that their role as market watchdogs is crucial to weed out illegal and unfair business practices. In many countries, they rank among bodies that citizens trust the most. Consumer protection authorities have not yet tapped the full potential of this precious resource.”

Other European Commission plans for consumers include:

- In 2021, review laws on consumer credit and the distance marketing of financial services.
- Strengthen the ability of consumer organisations to play their part in enforcing consumer rights and enabling access to justice via the upcoming Directive on Representative Actions.
- As of 2021, support EU Member States’ initiatives to provide local advice to consumers, including those addressing new and other forms of vulnerability.

ENDS

¹ <https://www.beuc.eu/covid-19-and-consumer-policy>

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