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Over 80 countries show political will to protect consumers in future e-commerce deal

More than 80 countries have agreed on a consumer protection article to be included in a future international trade deal on e-commerce, the World Trade Organization (WTO) [has written](#). The European Consumer Organisation (BEUC) welcomes this long overdue step to enhance consumer protection in a globalised market.

The agreed article defines key consumer protection provisions countries should have in place, such as clear information to consumers, easy access to redress, and ensuring that products are safe.

This article would not create new rights for consumers but shows that governments understand the need to better protect consumers in a global online market. This is positive as it can be challenging for consumers to shop online in such a market: a [November 2020 survey](#) by German consumer group Verbraucherzentrale Bundesverband (vzbv) showed that 4 out of 10 respondents who ordered a product from outside the EU said something went wrong. Issues include non-delivery, low product quality, or problems with returns and refunds. [1]

While consumer organisations applaud today's development, our support for the overall e-commerce agreement will depend on its final version. Sensitive topics in the digital field, such as data protection and artificial intelligence, have yet to be discussed in the negotiations. The agreement, which would prevail over EU law, should under no circumstance limit how the EU regulates such topics now or in the future.

Monique Goyens, BEUC Director-General, commented:

"This bold move by the EU and its trading partners from across the globe sets a precedent that trade policy must underpin and not harm domestic efforts to better protect consumers. Today's message from more than 80 WTO members shows trade agreements can create that political will to bring authorities together on important global challenges such as product safety.

"Europeans shopping online across the world would benefit from all these countries making efforts so that consumers are informed about how to contact a trader, return a product, and get their money back when something goes wrong."

About the World Trade Organization e-commerce (digital trade) negotiations

The ongoing trade negotiations on e-commerce were launched in 2019 between 76 WTO members. At the time, the European Commission [wrote](#) that the negotiations should “improve consumers' trust in the on-line environment”. Today, 86 WTO members participate in the discussions.

The BEUC network of consumer groups [has been calling](#) for these trade negotiations to enhance consumer protection online and improve international cooperation to keep consumers safe.

[1] See also: [The challenge of protecting EU consumers in global online markets](#) (BEUC – The European Consumer Organisation & Verbraucherzentrale Bundesverband, 2017)

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