

BEUC vision

EU CONSUMERS IN A GLOBALISED MARKET

THE SITUATION

Open markets can benefit consumers, who can choose from more products and services. Trade deals can increase the flow of products and services between markets. These deals traditionally focused on cutting protectionist import tariffs and quotas.

But today, trade deals have gone far beyond this and increasingly impact day-to-day consumer issues. Examples are data flows, protection of intellectual property rights or the regulation of chemical substances. Because of this, people have started to question them.

Consumer organisations have monitored trade negotiations for years. We now make recommendations for the EU to make global markets benefit and protect consumers.

③ CONDITIONS FOR OPEN MARKETS TO BENEFIT CONSUMERS

A global market must be ① Truly open ② Trustworthy ③ More consumer-friendly

How can these conditions be met ?

Trade deals should focus on trade



Trade deals nowadays set rules for almost all areas of economic life. They prioritise making trade easier, and can limit the ability of a country to regulate in the future. This move of 'trade deals' beyond 'trade' has resulted in public opposition to them.

Trade deals should focus on tariffs, enforcement and rules that must be respected, such as on sanitation or product conformity. They should not define the regulatory (law-making) process through which these rules are made. A 'consumer chapter' must also be added to any agreement. This ought to demonstrate that trading partners commit to maintain consumer protections and envisage benefits (cheaper telecom prices, for example).



How regulators should cooperate



Modern trade deals go beyond just eliminating tariffs. They plan dialogues between regulators so as to make legislative standards match. But the primary aim of such exchanges is to make trade easier. This can put a break on effective government action in the public interest. Domestic regulatory processes should not be tampered with.

Regulators must focus on exchanging info and cooperate outside the trade context. Examples of this exist between the EU and US, in the fields of financial services and manufacturing of medicines for example. Such exchanges could help find solutions for emerging problems, or identify risks at an early stage. This should not turn into cooperating on regulations (law-making) themselves.



Trade deals for who ?



Trade negotiations are still not transparent. This sparks suspicion among consumers. EU citizens do not feel that they are crafted to their benefit.

Any regulatory dialogue and trade negotiation should be developed in a manner that is transparent, inclusive and open to external contributions. Legislators, stakeholders and citizens must be able to monitor what is on the table and provide input.



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