

Prof. Dr. Christian Kastrop, State Secretary
*German Federal Minister of Justice and
Consumer Protection*

Mr João Torres, State Secretary
*Portuguese Ministry for Trade, Services and
Consumer Protection*

Mr. Simon Zajc, State Secretary
*Slovene Ministry of Economic Development
and Technology*

By email

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14 October 2020

Subject: Presidency Trio initiative for the Consumer Agenda and COVID-19 consequences.

Dear State Secretaries of the Presidency Trio,

We are writing regarding the Presidency Trio event that you will hold on 16 October and your initiative to adopt a **Joint Trio Paper**, which focuses on the **impact and first experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic on consumer policy**. We very much welcome this initiative and thank you for providing an opportunity for BEUC to contribute to the event.

We see BEUC's role in offering the experience and expertise of our 44 member organisations, who are in daily contact with consumers in all countries across the EU and who have dealt with thousands and thousands of consumer calls for support related to the pandemic, particularly during the lockdown and continuing to this day.

As you know, **European consumers have been severely** hit by the pandemic and will further suffer from the economic downturn. Many have lost money, are at risk or struggle to repay credit, they worry about the availability and cost of medicines, the safety of the forthcoming COVID-19 vaccines and treatments, the protection of their privacy when using COVID apps, about future travel across borders, the rise in fraud online, the potential insolvency of travel operators or the value of vouchers imposed on them for travel or leisure services etc.

In response to the pandemic, the European Commission proposed a **recovery plan for Europe** to support Member States in their efforts to rebuild the economy and help businesses, citizens and consumers in need. Member States have also been asked to submit national recovery plans. At the same time, the consumers have to undergo a profound transition, be it for the green or digital aspects of our markets and societies.

It is therefore a fortunate coincidence and **a unique opportunity**, that just in the moment when it is most necessary to provide strategic guidance to re-orient policies at EU and national level, the European Commission will adopt its new consumer strategy, the **Consumer Agenda 2021-2027**.

As an input for your impulse discussion, BEUC would like to provide you with our recommendations to the new challenges, be it on how to tackle the direct consequences of the pandemic or further ahead for the longer term transition. Please find [BEUC's paper on the Consumer Agenda](#) attached to this letter for your information.

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BEUC's recommendations:

We propose to make consumer policy a driver of **a sustainable recovery and a fair digital society**. Consumer policy is essential to bring about the needed systemic changes in how we produce and consume and ensure the buy-in of people in the green transition.

In addition, BEUC recommends adapting EU consumer law and addressing the challenge of people facing permanent digital vulnerability. EU and national decision-makers should consider establishing a principle of 'protection by design and by default'.

Another focus of our paper is on enforcement, where we advocate for increased interdisciplinary co-operation between sector authorities and in favour of cooperation among consumer organisations and national public authorities.

Last not least, we would like to underline that **consumer protection measures are needed most in times of crisis and uncertainty**. This is a period when we need not to get rid of consumer rights but strengthen them. The pandemic has shown the vulnerability of consumers (for example as patients, as borrowers, as young families, elderly persons, as travellers and passengers, as on-line purchasers, platform users...) but it has paradoxically also shown a real risk of reduction due to suspension of well-established consumer protection that people rightly expected for granted and the fragmentation of our markets due to such diverging national measures.

Consumer organisations have done their utmost to support consumers in these difficult times and they have and still play a central role in helping them. In only a few weeks, many organisations had to re-organise their work and carried out a variety of actions: from personal and direct assistance to consumers, to undertaking awareness campaigns, to monitoring and providing recommendations for national policy measures and - as a last resort - bringing court actions.

The COVID pandemic illustrated the need to design policies and initiatives that are 'future-oriented' to **promote resilience to future shocks and disruptions** as well as adequate and reliable **protection**. Finally, it so clearly demonstrated that **a vibrant consumer movement is an essential stabilising factor for society**, particularly in difficult times.

We therefore hope that this contribution will inform your very timely and appreciated efforts about shaping the future of consumer policy in the EU and nationally and we look forward to co-operating with you throughout the Presidency Trio term.

Please do not hesitate to get back to us should you require any further information,

Yours sincerely,

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BEUC President

Klaus Müller
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