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EU policy on smart energy future must take consumers onboard

In the context of the EU Sustainable Energy Week, the European Commission today publishes its Communication on 'Smart Grids: From Innovation to Deployment' which outlines actions to promote faster and wider deployment of smart grids¹ and smart meters in Europe.

Monique Goyens, Director General of BEUC, the European Consumers' Organisation, commented:

"The energy sector is enthusiastic about smart grids and smart meters' potential. To ensure consumers are equally eager, it is indispensable that smart meters are user-friendly and that consumers receive clear explanations on how to make full use of this tool.

"Smart meters will also supply energy suppliers with a truckload of personal data. It is therefore essential that consumers' data is protected and that privacy and security measures are in place.

"One thing is clear, the smart meter roll-out across Europe will cost plenty of money and these costs must be borne by those who benefit from it, not just consumers."

Consumer-proof smart meters deployment

As the Commission, national governments and industry prepare for a sweeping roll-out of smart meters, BEUC calls on all parties involved to take measures to make sure that the roll-out works for consumers too:

- At national level, strategies must be developed to ensure consumers know how to utilise smart meters correctly to make use of their energy saving potential. Special attention is needed to help low-income energy consumers reap the benefits;
- Consumers' energy data must be safeguarded from abuse and consumers should have control of their data. We call for a privacy impact assessment before the smart meter roll-out and for 'privacy-by-design' and 'data minimisation' as rules;
- Households will not benefit equally from smart meters. Depending on the household size or number of appliances in use, consumers' savings will vary. Having a smart meter should be the consumer's choice.

ENDS

¹ Smart grids can be considered as the application of ICT technologies to the management and use of electricity networks.