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EU Google investigation: Adequate answers still not found. BEUC files complaint asserting consumer interest

The European Consumer Organisation has stepped up its involvement in the European Commission's antitrust investigation into how Google Inc. puts its preferred services atop search results while demoting rivals, particularly in price comparison searches. Currently an 'interested party', essentially having observer status, BEUC has today applied to be a formal complainant.

The European Commission has recently signalled its willingness to settle on the basis of Google's suggested remedies, but BEUC believes consumer concerns have not been suitably addressed.

Commenting, Monique Goyens, Director General of The European Consumer Organisation said:

"Adequate answers have not been found to the problem of Google stacking its search results as suits itself. Users are given the impression their searches are neutrally decided and this problem is exacerbated in price comparison searches. That is why we are becoming formally involved in this process. European consumers deserve a better outcome, the remedies currently proposed by Google do not meet users' legitimate expectations.

"The placement of three rival services beside Google's preferred results is not yet merit-based and so they are not neutral. Such stacking will lead to broader problems for the market further down the line. This kind of online real estate does not come cheap, so affording Google too much discretion to decide who is a 'rival service' is weighted in favour of those with the greatest commercial clout.

"Clearly the issue requires further examination. EU antitrust rules are there to protect fairness within the European Single Market. It is critical that a solution recognises a 'non-discrimination principle' and does its utmost to allow users to get back to searching, not being led."

Further materials:

BEUC Issue Brief;   BEUC letter to President Barroso;   BEUC response to remedy proposals

ENDS