

Consumer Rights: unanimous adoption in committee paves way for more security for consumers and traders alike

Published at: 16-06-2011

Source: [Portal Europe](#)



With no votes against, the European Parliament's Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection today approved a first reading agreement between Council and Parliament on the Consumer Rights Directive, bringing more security for consumers when shopping online, harmonised rules for traders and no decrease of consumer protection.

"With this broad harmonisation of consumer rights, we have succeeded in taking a big step forward in the internal market for both traders and consumers", said Andreas Schwab MEP, Parliament's Rapporteur and chief negotiator on this dossier: "Our common Europe has advanced another step and strengthened the internal market. The added-value of this European law will be clearly noticeable for all citizens in their daily lives - an important success for Europe in these times", said the EPP Group's Internal Market Spokesman.

Over the last months' intensive negotiations with the Council, Schwab managed to push through Parliament's main positions: "We wanted to regulate mainly off-premises and distance contracts, as these situations would have a clear cross-border aspect, thus bringing an equally clear advantage for the internal market", underlined Schwab.

Increased information requirements will require online traders to provide the consumer, before concluding the contract, with exact information on the total price, the goods ordered and the contact details of the trader. The often frustrating search for a contact phone number on many websites will be a thing of the past. With this Directive, consumers will also have to clearly confirm that they are aware of their obligation to pay a price. This puts an end to dangerous online fraud, where services like horoscopes or recipes are apparently offered for free, threatening consumers afterwards with bills and lawsuits. When concluding either a distance or off-premises contract, consumers all over the EU will also benefit from a harmonised right of withdrawal of fourteen days, starting with the delivery of the goods. "The new Directive will thus be a good example where more Europe brings more benefits to both consumers and traders alike. It is a good compromise between necessary consumer rights and justified business interests", said Mr Schwab.

Not fully satisfied with the rules established for craftsmen, Andreas Schwab said: "Parliament wanted more for craftsmen. Unfortunately, too many Member States were not interested in supporting practice-oriented regulations for craftsmen which would reduce barriers and cut red tape." The EPP Group Rapporteur nevertheless highlighted the definitions found for distance and off-premises contracts

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as an important success for small and medium-sized enterprises: "A majority of craftsmen contracts would not fall under the regime of this Directive. At the same time, we have agreed on a light regime for information requirements for certain types of smaller contracts, contracts for amounts up to €50 are completely exempt from the Directive. These are rules with an eye for reality and common sense, which will work", concluded Mr Schwab.