

COMMISSIONER MIMICA

EUROPEAN CONSUMER CENTRES NETWORKING EVENT

RESIDENCE PALACE, BRUSSELS

TUESDAY, 18 FEBRUARY 2014 17:30 HRS

WELCOME SPEECH

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be here today to pay tribute to the excellent work provided by the European Consumer Centres.

These centres are present in every Member State and even in Norway and Iceland. They had direct contacts with over 300 000 consumers since the start of the current Commission – informing and assisting citizens with difficulties encountered in relation to cross border purchases.

In addition, thanks to their tireless awareness-raising efforts, these Centres have been instrumental in promoting EU consumer rights and in boosting confidence in the internal market among millions of citizens and SMEs.

I am grateful to all of you for taking the time and trouble to join us today:

- Honourable Members of the European Parliament, in particular from the Internal Market committee;
- Officials responsible for consumer affairs in the national Representations here in Brussels;
- Representatives of consumers and traders; and also
- Colleagues from the European Commission.

I trust you agree with me on the indisputable value the Centres provide. They help consumers and traders reach amicable solutions in thousands of cases. And they are an invaluable source of information, for example on the most frequently raised consumer issues or on emerging threats to consumer rights.

The centres also play a key role in making the benefits of the European Union visible and tangible to citizens. They are a key success story of European consumer policy and of the Union. They are close to the citizens and touch their day-to-day life.

Such benefits merit to be widely communicated.

We all have a role to play in this regard – and I would encourage the Centres themselves not to be shy in promoting their achievements at home. Through old and new communication tools, we should all try to ensure that citizens know, understand and value what the Centres are doing for them.

The current Commission mandate will expire in the autumn. Time is short – and I intend to make full use of the months ahead to drive forward key priorities. In particular:

- I am making every effort to conclude negotiations of our legislative proposals on product safety and payment accounts.
- I am closely monitoring the implementation of the Consumer Rights Directive and of the alternative and on-line dispute resolution legislation (ADR and ODR). We aim to issue implementation guidelines this year and also complete the development of a well-functioning ODR platform.
- Plus I am also keen to strengthen enforcement of European consumer laws – to ensure that the consumer *acquis* is an animal that bites as well as barks.

Co-operation with Member States is crucial in this respect. The ECC network is one of the tools we have in place to bolster enforcement; another is the Network of Consumer Protection Authorities.

Most of you will be familiar with the screening of selected on-line consumer markets – the “sweeps” – that this Network regularly conducts within the Consumer Protection Cooperation framework.

Since last year, the Network has also been active in tackling certain widespread, cross border breaches of consumer laws through agreeing common enforcement approaches to be communicated directly to the sector concerned.

Last October, I launched a public consultation on how to deepen this co-operation framework and I plan to submit my conclusions in the spring.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before I hand over to Paola Testori Coggi to present the latest achievements of the European Consumer Centres, let me appeal for your continued support for their valuable work.

I hope that the question and answer session will be a source of ideas on how the role of the European Consumer Centres might evolve in future, especially in relation to the fast-growing areas of digital markets and cross border trade.

Thank you.

End: 590 words