



Political Consultation on the future EU 2020 strategy Contribution from ECC Sweden

The EU2020 Strategy acts as the successor to the Lisbon Strategy and intends to focus on “key policy areas where collaboration between EU and Member States can deliver the best results.” Here consumer policy has a central role to play as consumers account for 58% of EU GDP¹. A confident and empowered consumer market offers strong incitements for economic growth and job development.

The objective of the Lisbon Strategy was to make Europe “the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth, with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, and respect for the environment by 2010.” Consumer policy has made a key contribution to the achievement of these goals, as well as to the completion of the European Internal Market.

The EU Consumer Policy Strategy of 2007-2013 has the instruments to ensure a more effective consumer policy strategy at EU level. There are key areas which should be focused upon concerning consumer policy in the period to 2020.

Online commercial activity becomes increasingly more important. Adequate legal protection framework in this area is crucial for the continued growth of e-commerce. New business models offer digital content to consumers for example in the form of downloading and streaming and existing consumer protection legislation is not well prepared to protect consumers in these new business models. A European Digital Agenda would be a good start for the work concerning legislation in digital rights.

Another key area that needs to be addressed in the EU2020 strategy is e-commerce market fragmentation. The priority should be to focus on and eliminate obstacles to online cross-border consumer transactions as the gap between domestic and cross-border e-commerce appears to be widening as a result of barriers to the internal market.

There are regulatory barriers that appear increasingly unjustified to consumers and business; these include for example consumer law, VAT rules, selective distribution law, intellectual property protection, the national transposition of EU legislation on waste disposal for example. Barriers undermining consumer confidence – in particular reluctance linked to

¹ Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament and the Economic and the European Economic and Social Committee, *EU Consumer Policy Strategy 2007-2013, Empowering consumers, enhancing their welfare, effectively protection them*, COM (2007) 99 final

issues of payments, delivery, complaints, application of guarantees, requests for refunds as well as privacy issues. Difficulties are perceived to be aggravated in cross border transactions.

There are widespread problems with refusals of orders for EU consumers trying to purchase goods online in another Member state, according to the European Commission report on cross border consumer e-commerce 2009. Consumers should be confident that if they have a problem with a foreign trader they will have easy access to redress. The proposed Consumer Rights Directive and the Services Directive should make important contributions to the establishment of a retail internal market.

Role of the ECC Net

The European Consumer Centre Network plays a crucial role in enhancing consumer confidence in the area of cross-border consumer transactions. In 2008 the ECC-Net assisted over 60,000 consumers, an increase of 22% in the figures for the previous year, showing that the ECCs have consolidated their role as a unique direct channel of communication with consumers, contributing to increased consumer confidence in the Internal Market.²

DG SANCO has acknowledged that ECC-Net can play a key role in connecting Europe and national governments with their citizens. Its proposal to upgrade the network from a support service for cross-border complaints to an effective consumer rights promotion and protection network at the service of European and national consumer policies is to be welcomed.

ECCs could play a key role in identifying issues related to the implementation of a piece of legislation in the consumer field. Also check whether or not a possible revision of legislation would work in practice and in raising awareness about stronger consumer rights deriving from a revision of legislation.

Better cooperation and mutual assistance between ECC-Net and CPC-Net has the potential to offer real returns in the form of enhanced consumer protection from rogue traders. It is very important to boost cross-border enforcement and to coordinate EU-led actions such as "Internet sweeps" to stamp out illegal practices and increase consumer confidence in cross-border shopping. It would be desirable to provide for an instrument which specifically addresses cooperation and mutual assistance between ECCs and enforcement authorities.

All parties consumers, traders, and enforcement bodies must assume the responsibility of ensuring that education, enforcement, and effective dispute resolution channels are developed, and efficiently put into practice.

Concerning the key priorities for EU 2020 we fully support the proposition of the Commission that the key drivers of EU 2020 should be thematic, focused on the mentioned priorities below. But we also want to point out the consumer issues.

1) *Creating value by basing growth on knowledge.* Opportunity and social cohesion will be enhanced in a world where innovation makes the difference in both products and processes, harnessing the potential of education, research and of the digital economy;

² ECC Net, *The European Consumer Centres Network 2008 Annual Report*, European Communities 2009

(2) Empowering people in inclusive societies. The acquisition of new skills, fostering creativity and innovation, the development of entrepreneurship and a smooth transition between jobs will be crucial in a world which will offer more jobs in exchange for greater adaptability;

(3) Creating a competitive, connected and greener economy. The EU should compete more effectively and increase its productivity by a lower and more efficient consumption of non-renewable energy and resources in a world of high energy and resources prices, and greater competition for energy and resources. This will stimulate growth and help meet our environmental goals. It will benefit all sectors of the economy, from traditional manufacturing to new hi-tech start ups. Upgrading and inter-connecting infrastructure, reducing administrative burden and

To achieve a sustainable social market economy, a smarter and greener economy, Europe needs to promote key, agreed priorities and to work on delivering them over several years. By acting together on a common vision, we can make much more.

A Europe that is open to the world will continue to be a model for others to follow, projecting its values and fostering stronger labour, environmental and safety standards around the globe. The EU can show global leadership in demonstrating that it is possible to combine the openness needed to ensure ongoing economic dynamism with respect for the social and environmental concerns of our citizens.