Progress on the European consumer rights front

- News on legislation [1]

Thu, 06/23/2011

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Following an agreement between the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, on 23 June 2011 the European Parliament adopted the Directive on consumer rights that the European Commission proposed in October 2008. This text will be submitted to the Council for formal approval during the month of September, prior to being published in the Official Journal of the European Union this autumn.

To recap, the Directive aims to create a sound balance between consumers' interest in stronger rights and businesses' interest in taking full advantage of the EU's Single Market. The new Directive includes many improvements for consumers. It will abolish hidden internet charges and fees. Price transparency will be improved through prior information of the total cost of the product or service and any additional fees. Pre-ticked boxes on websites will be banned. The period for withdrawing a sale contract will be increased from the current period of 7 days to 14 days and refund rights will be improved to include delivery costs. Credit card Surcharges and telephone hotlines will be abolished. For businesses, the European institutions believe that common rules applied to them under the Directive will enable them to trade more easily all over Europe. These rules include a single set of core rules for distance contracts (sales by phone, post or internet) and off-premises contracts (sales away from a company's premises, such as in the street or the doorstep) in the European Union, creating a level playing field and reducing transaction costs for cross-border traders, especially for sales by internet.

These new provisions must be transposed into national law before the end of 2013.

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