

Is Europe defending our consumer rights?

Q It's your job to protect European consumers' rights. What would you say you've achieved so far?

A The Consumer Credit Directive will be a big step forward. It is a concrete example of where consumers will get more choice and more competitive prices when taking out a loan. At the moment, trying to compare different credit offers across Europe is like trying to compare apples and pears. Comparable information for all EU credit loans will make the market more transparent. We want consumers to be able to compare online and choose the best rate for them, with a standard set of information in every country.

Q You took a strong stand against Apple, saying that it's unacceptable that songs bought on iTunes play only on iPods. Would you like to see more pressure put on Apple?

A The fact that iTunes plays only on iPods limits competition. But I believe Apple is a forward-thinking company and it will change that. I was recently told that a Hungarian was not allowed to buy music from Britain [via iTunes]. He was told that there are no equal rights in Europe, so you see the political consequence of this market behaviour. It's a matter of equality, equal rights and equal access. For this reason, I also support the Which? stand against overcharging

Meglana Kuneva, European Commissioner for Consumer Protection, tells us how new EU laws will protect British consumers



Meglana Kuneva: 'We need to put more effort into the digital world'

of UK customers by iTunes, which the EU is currently investigating.

Q At the start of the year, a cross-border scam-busting network was set up to help consumers. How will it deal with internet fraud?

A We need to put more efforts into dealing with the digital world. The revision of the e-commerce directive [which covers online shopping] is under way and the key part of this revision is looking at the distance-selling rules, which cover internet purchases.

Q How will you ensure the rogue traders don't get round the new timeshare laws, as they did last time?

A The new rules now extend the scope of the Timeshare Directive to cover new products such as discount holiday clubs. The rules ensure that consumers are equally well protected across the EU. Now the cooling-off period will be the same in every country and the trader is obliged to provide the contract in the language that's preferable to the consumer.

Q The *Keeping European Consumers Safe* report found unsafe toys on sale in the UK. How will you remedy this?

A When it comes to imported toys, the situation is improving. In Rotterdam, we have a test laboratory to check the safety of goods coming from different countries. Chinese imports are a problem. For example, there is quite a substantial number of dangerous electrical goods such as electric kettles and Christmas lights.

Q What issues will you concentrate on in the coming months?

A One of the next challenges is adapting to the digital world. How can traditional consumer protection laws apply in a world where distant markets are just a click away? The Commission aims to enable all EU citizens to shop from anywhere in the EU, confident that they are effectively protected, and to tell all retailers that they can sell anywhere on the basis of a single set of rules. I want a consumer in Bristol to feel as comfortable shopping for a digital camera from a website in Berlin as they would in their own high street.

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