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## Consumer policy: Scoreboard shows recovery in consumer conditions, finds cross-border shopping trusted more once tried

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**IP/11/280**

Brussels, 11th March 2011

## Consumer policy: Scoreboard shows recovery in consumer conditions, finds cross-border shopping trusted more once tried

*The spring Consumer Scoreboard published today by the European Commission shows a clear recovery in consumer conditions in nearly all EU countries after the steep decline in 2009. The annual index of consumer conditions is measured e.g. by consumer trust in authorities, NGOs and retailers and the effectiveness of handling disputes. The Scoreboard also confirms a growing gap between domestic and cross-border e-commerce, despite a clear potential of cross-border purchases in terms of choice and savings. But the study suggests that consumers are much more confident in cross-border shopping once they have tried it. There are important obstacles to cross-border e-commerce on the supply side, with fewer retailers selling across national borders compared with 2009 (see also [MEMO/11/154](#) for details).*

John Dalli, Health and Consumer Policy Commissioner, said : "I want to praise all those Member States who have continued to invest in a quality environment for consumers in these tough times. We are turning the corner: the trust of EU consumers in consumer institutions starts going back to previous levels". He added: "It is also good news that consumers' worries about cross-border shopping tend to evaporate once they've actually tried it and had a good experience. But the results also confirm how much work there is still ahead of us in dismantling the remaining barriers to the benefit of European economy and European consumers and businesses alike".

### The Scoreboard

The Consumer Scoreboard provides evidence and alerts about **how the single market is performing for EU consumers** in terms of choice, prices and satisfaction. The spring edition ('Consumer Conditions Scoreboard') looks at the integration of the retail market and national conditions for consumers.

The Scoreboard data are **based on surveys of consumers and retailers as well as on statistical data such as income levels**.

### Key findings

#### Progress in national consumer conditions

The **Consumer Conditions Index** is defined by factors such as the effectiveness of resolving disputes and handling complaints, consumer trust in authorities, retailers, advertisers and consumer organisations, and the quality of regulations.

The 2010 index reveals that **consumer conditions have rebounded** after the sharp fall in 2009, with most countries matching or exceeding 2008 levels.

**The top countries** with the best conditions are the UK, Ireland, Luxembourg, Austria, Finland, the Netherlands, Italy, Denmark, Germany, Belgium and Sweden, all of which are also above the EU average.

### **The e-commerce gap**

The Scoreboard shows continued **growth of domestic e-commerce**, with **36%** of EU consumers having shopped online from national sellers in 2010 (34% in 2009).

However, **cross-border e-commerce continues to grow at a sluggish pace** (9% in 2010, compared with 8% in 2009), despite clear benefits in terms of savings and choice as evidenced in earlier studies. Efforts need to be stepped up to meet the Digital Agenda target (20% by 2015).

### **Shopping online in the Single Market: consumer perceptions v. experience**

**Consumers' perceptions** seem to be a major barrier to cross-border e-commerce. Among consumers who have not made a cross-border distance purchase:

- 62% are worried about **fraud and scams**;
- 59% cite concerns about **what to do when problems arise**;
- 49% are put off by expected **delivery problems**.

However, these concerns are **much less widespread among consumers who have actually shopped cross-border** (34%, 30% and 20% respectively).

Among consumers who have already shopped cross-border, **61% were equally confident in cross-border and domestic online shopping compared to only 33% of the general population**.

**Cross-border e-commerce appears to be at least as reliable as domestic e-commerce or even more:**

- only **16%** of cross-border purchases were delayed (18% for domestic purchases);
- the product did not arrive in **5%** of cross-border cases (6% for domestic purchases).

The findings suggest a key role for more effective information about existing cross-border advice, enforcement and redress mechanisms. These include the **Consumer Protection Co-operation (CPC) network**, which brings together national enforcers, and the **European Consumer Centres**, which provide free help and advice to consumers shopping in the Single Market.

### **Major obstacles to cross-border e-commerce are found on the supply side.**

The proportion of **retailers selling to other EU countries fell to 22% in 2010** (25% in 2009), even though the rewards for cross-border commerce are significant: 56% estimate that more than 10% of their e-commerce sales come from other EU countries.

The Commission is pursuing a strategy to end market fragmentation, including through the recent Single Market Act.

### **Consumer affordability**

In 2009, both the **disposable income** (adjusted for free services) and **household consumption** fell in most EU countries.

Large differences still exist within the EU in the consumers' **ability to afford goods and services**, taking into account both the average incomes and the price levels.

The **share of vulnerable consumers** also varies widely, but in most countries their situation does not appear to have deteriorated significantly in 2009 despite the crisis.

### **Full Scoreboard:**

[http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/strategy/facts\\_en.htm#5CMS](http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/strategy/facts_en.htm#5CMS)