



"The voice of crafts and SMEs in Europe"

Consumer rights: Parliament's Committee vote a huge step back for SMEs

Brussels, 1 February 2011 – Today's vote at the European Parliament's Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee on the Consumer Rights Directive is a significant step back compared to the "general approach" adopted last week by the Council, according to UEAPME, the European craft and SME employers' organisation. In fact, MEPs reinserted in the text two chapters that were rightly scrapped by the Council. Moreover, they failed to introduce a distinction between solicited and unsolicited contracts in the directive, which will create more burdens especially for small entrepreneurs who tend to work often outside their business location, despite the insertion of some safeguards in this respect. On the positive side, MEPs inserted some exceptions to the general principle of withdrawal rights, the only piece of good news in an otherwise unhelpful vote for SMEs.

Enterprise Policy Director **Luc Hendrickx** offered the following comments:

"Today's vote on the consumer rights directive is overall a setback for SMEs. The reinsertion of the two chapters that were deleted by the European Council defies reason, as according to Member States it will increase the burden on authorities that will have to transpose the directive without clear benefits. MEPs should have concentrated on where Europe is able to provide added value, rather than pretending to regulate every single aspect, including those on which a full harmonisation of national legislation is simply impossible. This is not 'better regulation' by any stretch of the imagination."

"The issue of 'off-premises contracts' was also left unsolved. Under the current text, small entrepreneurs and craftsmen who must visit consumers' homes to assess what needs to be done and make an offer are still subject to heavy information requirements, which will lead to more burdens for SMEs and less choice, higher prices and longer delivery times for consumers. Despite the insertion of some safeguards on the text, solicited and unsolicited visits are still subject to the same rules after today's vote. This is a shortcoming that must be redressed in the plenary vote. Failure to do so would give birth to a one-sided directive that puts all burdens on companies. We trust that MEPs will not let this happen."

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EDITORS' NOTES: UEAPME is the employers' organisation representing exclusively crafts, trades and SMEs from the EU and accession countries at European level. UEAPME has 80 member organisations covering over 12 million enterprises with 55 million employees. UEAPME is a European Social Partner. For further information: <http://www.ueapme.com/>

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