

Digital Agenda

Commission presents plan to boost e-commerce

By Manon Malhère | Wednesday 11 January 2012

Giving a boost to electronic commerce and online services at European level to help stimulate growth and employment is the ambition of a new European Commission action plan, presented on 11 January ⁽¹⁾.

Commissioners Michel Barnier (internal market), Neelie Kroes (Digital Agenda) and John Dalli (consumers) are convinced that in today's gloomy economic context, this initiative will "create new opportunities for citizens and businesses and bring Europe much needed growth and employment".

With this plan, which fits into the wider context of the Single Market Act and the Digital Agenda, the Commission intends to double the share of e-commerce in retail sales (currently 3.4%) and that of the internet sector (less than 3% at present) in Europe's gross domestic product, by 2015. The executive estimates that the internet economy creates 2.6 jobs for every 'offline' job lost.

"Each year, 200 million Europeans – 40% of all citizens – buy over the internet. But faced with different national rules and systems, less than one quarter of that number do so across national borders," explained Kroes.

FIVE PRIORITIES

The plan aims to eliminate barriers to the creation of a digital single market and identifies 20 actions based on five priorities, starting with development of the legal and cross-border offer of online goods and services. Although Directive 2000/31/EC on electronic commerce gives consumers and businesses greater legal certainty and does not require revision at this stage, its implementation should be enhanced, according to the Commission. Directives on protection of online consumers could also be better implemented. The Commission proposes better administrative cooperation with member states through an extension of the Internal Market Information (IMI) System and the Consumer Protection Cooperation (CPC) Network.

Ensuring the development of the legal offer of goods and services also means tackling intellectual property rights. The Commission confirms that Directive 2011/29/EC on copyright and related rights in the information society will be revised and the results of the consultation on online distribution of audiovisual works published in 2012. It also stresses the need for adoption of a legislative initiative on private copying in 2013.

The second priority is to improve operator information on rules governing e-commerce and to enhance consumer protection. On the first point, the majority of businesses are still reluctant to expand their online sales activity beyond national borders due to a lack of information on their obligations. To address this problem, the Commission proposes to develop training actions through the Enterprise Europe Network. On the second point – consumer protection – the EU executive intends to boost the

capacities of the CPC Network. It also plans to present, in 2012, a “European consumer agenda” to strengthen consumer policy.

Boosting e-commerce also requires an effective mechanism to combat abuse and illegal information that often are not stopped and/or removed, notes the Commission. It plans to present, in 2012, a horizontal initiative on notice and action procedures, ie those followed by intermediary internet providers. Combating abuse, including cyber attacks, will also require stronger internet security. A strategy will be presented in 2012 and a European cyber crime centre will be put in place in 2013.

“Cross-border deliveries are too expensive and not adapted,” commented Barnier. This problem, which represents, together with electronic payments, an additional barrier to the development of e-commerce, will be the subject of a public consultation in 2012. A green paper on improving electronic payments was published on 11 January (see separate article).

The Commission’s fifth priority is the deployment of high-speed networks and advanced technological solutions. In 2012, the institution intends to draft guidelines for the preparation of broadband infrastructure projects in the context of the Connecting Europe Facility. It will also present a strategy on cloud computing. This concept uses the memory and computing capacity of remote computers and servers via the internet. According to the EU executive, it represents tremendous potential for the internet economy.

⁽¹⁾ The communication is available at www.europolitics.info > Search = 306836