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**Smart and better regulation but not at the expense of consumers**

The EESC supports cutting red tape and constraints on small, medium and micro-enterprises through better regulation, but at the same time this process should not mean complete deregulation, warned the EESC during the European Consumer Day on 10 March. Better regulation aims to make rules simple, workable and less costly for users and taxpayers but it is not a dispensation from complying with regulations designed to protect consumers and workers, or from upholding environmental standards. During the European Consumer Day the EESC urged the Commission to take better account of civil society's views via public consultations and impact assessments. Representatives of consumer organisations, policy-makers and European institutions gathered at the 18th annual conference, organised by the EESC, to discuss better regulation and its impact on consumers.

*"Better regulation should not mean no regulation",* said in his opening speech the President of the European Economic and Social Committee Georges Dassis. *"The EESC encourages explicit and effective measures for protecting consumers who have been hit the hardrest by the economic crisis."*

Better and smart regulation is a common task for all European institutions and Member States, the main aim being to improve the quality of European legislation to the benefit of the public, businesses, consumers and employees. According to the EESC, the Commission should focus on quality rather than quantity and prioritise cutting red tape, which is expensive for businesses and is a brake on their competitiveness and an obstacle to innovation and job creation, especially for SMEs. At the same time, the Think Small First principle is not intended to exempt micro-enterprises and SMEs from legislation. The EESC has always insisted on the protection of the 500 million European consumers who have legally binding rights enshrined in the Treaty. Consumer protection is one of the greatest and most tangible achievements of the EU and it should not be compromised. Participants in the European Consumer Day agreed that consumers should be aware of their rights and should realise their power.

In the spring of 2015, after the announcement of the European Commission’s "Better Regulation" reforms, more than 60 civil society organisations, including trade unions, environmental groups and the BEUC (The European Consumer Organisation) created a [Better Regulation watchdog](http://www.betterregwatch.eu/) to ensure that private interests do not take precedence over the public interest and to protect the interests of consumers, workers and citizens in general.

In the her message the European Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality Věra Jourová and other representatives from the Commission insisted that in the Commission's agenda on Better Regulation listening to consumers is a priority and it is not about putting the needs of business above others. *"Better regulation means keeping consumers in mind each time we draft legislation",* said Věra Jourová.

However, representatives from various consumer organisations expressed their concerns that in the current climate there is a "regulatory chill" when it comes to consumer-friendly initiatives. "*Better Regulation is in itself a huge bureaucratic machinery. It is moving into the wrong direction – there is unilateral focus on costs for businesses which creates major risks for weakening consumer protection",* said Monique Goyens, the Director-General of the BEUC (The European Consumer Organisation). She urged the Commission to take further actions to protect consumers in the fields of country of origin labelling of food, trans fats, alcohol labelling, financial services regulations, endocrine disruptors and consumer remedies under contract law.

**EESC opinions:**

[**Better Regulation**](http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.int-opinions.36218) (Rapporteur: Bernd Dittmann, Employers' Group)

[**Evaluation of European Commission stakeholder consultations**](http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.civil-society-opinions-sc.36472) (Rapporteur: Ronny Lannoo, Various Interests Group)

[**REFIT programme**](http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.int-opinions.32706) (Rapporteur: Denis Meynent, Workers' Group)

[**Consumer vulnerability in business practices**](http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.int-opinions.30664) (Rapporteur: Bernardo Hernández Bataller, Various Interests Group)

[**Better regulation: implementing acts and delegated acts (information report)**](http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.int-opinions.24246) (Rapporteur: Jorge Pegado Liz, Various Interests Group)

[**Consumer product safety/Regulation**](http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.int-opinions.26806) (Rapporteur: Bernardo Hernández Bataller, Various Interests Group)

[**Smart Regulation**](http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.int-opinions.15850)(Rapporteur: Jorge Pegado Liz, Various Interests Group)

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*The European Economic and Social Committee represents the various economic and social components of organised civil society. It is an institutional consultative body established by the 1957 Treaty of Rome. Its consultative role enables its members, and hence the organisations they represent, to participate in the EU decision-making process. The Committee has 350 members from across Europe, who are appointed by the Council of the European Union.*

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