

Concept Speech Petra de Groene - European EESC Consumer Day 10 March 2016

- Ladies and gentlemen, I am very honoured to have the opportunity to briefly address you at this interesting and timely conference.
- The theme of the conference is well chosen. Better regulation is one of the key issues for future economic development. Indeed for the future of the EU itself, because it has everything to do with where and how the European Union intervenes.
- This conference is also timely because as Presidency we are currently presiding over two directly related Commission proposals dealing with contracts for the online sale of digital content and tangible goods. Two important proposals aimed at improving existing regulation as a result of new developments in our digital economy.
- When I speak with consumers and representatives of industry, they very often underline the importance of good regulation. It's a real issue in their day to day life.
- Better regulation is not about more or less rules, it is about effectively ensuring policy objectives without compromising current levels of protection and sustainability goals.
- A discussion I currently often have is whether or not for example the obligatory notification of the use of cookies is not over the top! It has become an extra action you need to take every time you open a new website.
- Various measures are being discussed such as the use of targets to measure the level of regulation, improving impact assessments and the optimal use of digital tools.

- One of the main challenges however is making regulation future proof. This requires creativity because we cannot see the future.
- New technologies are creating new markets and new ways of trading and consuming. Goods are bought and sold online more and more. Some markets are even completely virtual. I believe we may expect many more new business models, products and services even though we cannot yet imagine what they look like.

- Ladies and gentlemen,

- The theme of today is: “Better regulation for consumers?” But what would Europe look like when there is better regulation for consumers? Would there be an abundant choice of affordable products and services? Or would we have so many rights that we’d be constantly complaining?
- In most European consumer legislation we agreed that our aim is to achieve a high level of consumer protection or achieving the proper functioning of the internal market through a high level of consumer protection.
- But what does that mean? When in the Gaming or App Industry a consumer complains about a bug in the programme, the supplier will need no extra incentive to fix the problem. Competitors and alternatives are right around the corner to take his place. This would suggest that in these industries there is no need for regulation at all because there is maximum consumer empowerment.

- Future proof legislation, I believe, should allow us to remain flexible in order to quickly adapt to change for the benefit of innovation and competitiveness as well as consumer rights.
- Several questions we need to bear in mind in the process are among others:
 - Does our legislation actually achieve a high level of consumer protection?
 - How well does the consumer know his rights and can he get a trader to respect his rights without losing a lot of energy in the process?
 - Have we taken into account the price related to the consumer rights? Because depending on the market conditions this protection can lead to higher costs and to lower margins which could eventually lead to fewer market players, thus leading to less choice.
- The Netherlands is a proponent of so called goal-oriented legislation. In order to improve the development of regulation policy and law makers should start with the idea behind the rule: its goal. This should be more important than the exact steps leading to that goal.
- For the development of this type of regulation it is important to involve not only law makers, but other experts and stakeholders as well.
- I already mentioned we need to be creative. As you may know most innovations come about when actors from different backgrounds with different qualities and expertise come together. The cross overs between Medicine and High tech for example have resulted in innovations such as imaging and robotics in surgery.

- Ladies and gentlemen,
- Looking at all of you present today, I see an abundance of ideas, competences and expertise gathered together. This should lead to a lot of creativity and new ideas. Therefore I look forward to today's discussions and very much welcome the recommendations we can take on board as Presidency.