

Integrated parcel delivery market for the growth of e-commerce in the EU

2013/2043(INI) - 14/01/2014 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection adopted the own-initiative report by Pablo ARIAS ECHEVERRÍA (EPP, ES) on an integrated parcel delivery market for the growth of e-commerce in the EU.

The report noted that e-commerce is a channel with enormous potential to combat the economic and financial crisis, strengthen the single market, and create economic growth and employment across the European Union. The [Commissions communication on e-commerce and online services](#) of January 2012 identified the delivery of goods purchased online as one of the top five priorities for boosting e-commerce by 2015, and its importance has been reiterated by the Council and by Parliament. The EU e-commerce market grew by over 20% in 2012 and cross-border e-commerce in particular is predicted to multiply by a factor of four.

Integrated delivery services in Europe: a pillar for the Digital Single Market: Members recalled that the parcel delivery market is undergoing radical transformations, with new providers entering the market, investment oriented towards innovation, and new services emerging. Therefore, efficient and reliable delivery services are a critical pillar of a real and effective digital single market, having a substantial impact in terms of facilitating e-commerce and building trust between sellers and buyers. Delivery concerns (including product returns) and high delivery costs are the top two concerns of consumers in relation to online shopping, contributing to low consumer confidence in cross-border e-commerce.

Members noted cross-border weaknesses in competition between delivery operators in some Member States and deplored the lack of transparency on the pricing conditions and performance of the services concerned.

Putting consumer interests at the heart of the delivery process: Members considered more transparency and better and more readily comparable information on available delivery options, prices and conditions to be paramount for consumers, specifically with respect to the conditions under which consumer orders are shipped and the procedures to follow in case of damage to or loss of goods or delay in their delivery or return. They emphasised that it is necessary to promote measures aimed at ensuring consumer choice at the time of purchase.

In addition, the reliability of delivery services is crucial and it is essential to offer efficient systems that guarantee that parcels effectively reach the requested destination within a reasonable timeframe.

The report pointed out that the high cost of cross-border delivery or delivery to remote areas or the outermost regions is one of the main reasons for consumer dissatisfaction. More affordable delivery options for consumers and sellers, SMEs included, are imperative to ensure a genuinely single market. Geographical coverage and accessibility to universal service for delivery of parcels in rural and remote areas should be improved.

Members stressed the importance of consumers being properly informed on the applicable legislation in this sector. They proposed the creation of a European network of national problem-solving centres like Solvit would help reassure consumers, as would an alert system like RAPEX, which could warn consumers of sites found to be using fraudulent practices.

The Commission is called upon to:

- adopt EU guidelines on minimum standards for comparison websites, structured around the core principles of transparency, impartiality, quality, information and user-friendliness;
- draw up joint delivery service quality indicators, enabling consumers to compare different offers more accurately.

Creating a level playing field for SMEs: SMEs seeking business opportunities across the EU are confronted with higher costs, greater complexity and a lack of transparency when it comes to cross-border delivery. Prices for cross-border delivery are three to five times higher than domestic prices. Effective, simple and affordable delivery systems are a key driver of the sustainability of the business models of SMEs and their ability to supply products to customers.

Towards innovative and interoperable solutions for a truly European delivery market: the report highlighted the fragmentation of the European postal sector into national networks with poor interoperability and the lack of integration of road, rail and water transport.

In this regard, it called on the Commission to:

- continue to propose measures to encourage industry to improve interoperability and accelerate the roll-out of streamlined parcel dispatch and collection processes aimed at reducing costs, increasing economies of scale for delivery operators;
- explore further the potential of developing European standards to improve integrated tracking systems and to promote the quality, reliability and sustainability of integrated logistic services applied to electronic commerce;
- create platforms for cooperation and information exchange between delivery operators in order to promptly address the existing gaps in the EU delivery market in terms of innovation, flexibility, stock management, transport, collection and return of parcels, while respecting EU competition law, and discuss the possibility of infrastructure sharing by express and postal mail services to their mutual advantage;
- work together with business towards the adoption of European standards on addressing and labelling, as well as e-commerce-friendly letter-box standards;
- improve the interoperability of call-centres dedicated to consumer complaints;
- explore the possibilities of creating a Pan-European Trustmark for e-Commerce,

Monitoring market development and improving regulatory oversight: the report noted that that any legislative measures should be carefully assessed in advance in order to avoid impairing the dynamism of the parcel delivery market which should not be hampered by over-regulation. The Commission is called upon to:

- monitor the development of the market carefully, in order to identify any areas of potential market failure where further action may

become necessary in the future;

- ensure that the existing regulatory framework is fully transposed, implemented and enforced, with particular attention to the Postal Services Directive, EU competition law, the Directive on Alternative Dispute Resolution, and the Consumer Rights Directive, in particular as regards the formal requirements for distance contracts;
- submit the promised proposal on the introduction of a uniform VAT declaration as soon as possible;

Lastly, Members stressed that an optional European contract law for contracts between undertakings and consumers would result in perceptible simplification and encourage more SMEs to send parcels internationally.