

Stop geo-blocking and boost e-commerce and digital innovation, says Parliament

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Geo-blocking consumers' online access to goods and services on the basis of their IP address, postal address or the country of issue of credit cards is unjustified and it must stop, says Parliament in a resolution voted on Tuesday. MEPs want Europe to seize the opportunities opened up by new technologies, such as Big Data, cloud computing, the Internet of Things or 3D-printing, and to have an innovation-friendly policy towards online platforms.

The 16 digital single market initiatives announced by the European Commission last May to boost the digital economy and innovation must be tabled without delay, MEPs insist.

"We have ensured that this report on the digitisation of the EU economy, society and public administrations determines legislative and non-legislative action to benefit consumers and to preserve Europe's competitive social market economies", said Internal Market Committee co-rapporteur Evelyne Gebhardt (S&D, DE).

"Europe has already missed two waves of innovation. First social networks, then the sharing economy. If we don't want to miss the next wave, we have to look to the Internet of Things, Big Data and machine-to-machine communication. They can radically transform our economy and our legislation needs to reflect that", said Industry Committee co-rapporteur Kaja Kallas (ALDE, ET).

Increasing consumer choice and removing barriers to innovative start-ups

Parliament's recommendations to boost the digital single market were approved by 551 to 88, with 39 abstentions. MEPs want proposals by the Commission to:

- end unjustified geo-blocking practices, so as to improve EU consumers' access to goods and services. MEPs welcome the proposal on cross-border portability of online content services "as a first step" in this direction,
- ensure equivalent and future-proof consumer protection, regardless of whether digital content is purchased online or offline,
- find innovative solutions on cross-border parcel delivery to improve services and lower costs,
- remove barriers to SMEs, start-ups and scale-ups and seize the opportunities based on new ICT technologies, such as Big Data, cloud computing, the Internet of Things or 3D-printing; an innovation-friendly policy towards online platforms (e.g. search engines, app stores) that facilitates market entry should be maintained, and
- review the ePrivacy directive to ensure consistency of its provisions with the new EU data protection rules.

Sharing economy

Parliament is concerned about the differing national approaches taken so far by EU member states to regulating the internet and the "sharing economy", which offers new business models for selling goods and services online (for example, Uber, eBay or Airbnb). MEPs ask the Commission to assess the need to protect consumers in the sharing economy and, where clarification is needed, to ensure the adequacy of consumer-related rules in the digital sphere.

Press release

Other topics addressed in the resolution include copyright, telecoms, VAT rules, audiovisual media, e-skills, e-government, and employment rights.

Next steps

The resolution will feed into the 16 initiatives that the Commission is to deliver by the end of 2016, according to its communication "[A Digital Single Market Strategy for Europe](#)". Parliament will co-legislate on equal footing with the EU Council of Ministers on the legislative proposals to boost the Digital Single Market.

Procedure: non-legislative resolution

Facts

- Only 1.7% of EU enterprises are making full use of advanced digital technologies and only 14% of SMEs are using the internet as a sales channel

Further information

- Adopted text will be available here (click on 19.01.2016)
: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/plenary/en/texts-adopted.html>
- Video recording of debate (click on 19.01.2016)
: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/ep-live/en/plenary/search-by-date>
- Video of the press conference (19.01.2016, at 15.00)
: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/ep-live/en/other-events/schedule>
- Audiovisual material for professionals: <http://audiovisual.europarl.europa.eu/Page.aspx?id=2142>
- EP Research - Towards a Digital Single Market Act
: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2016/573911/EPRS_ATA\(2016\)573911_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2016/573911/EPRS_ATA(2016)573911_EN.pdf)
- EC factsheet (with figures) - Why we need a Digital Single Market
: http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/digital-single-market/docs/dsm-factsheet_en.pdf

Political groups

- Press release by the EPP group: <http://www.eppgroup.eu/press-release/Digital-Single-Market%3A-EP-vote-to-tear-down-digital-barriers>
- Press release by the S&D group: <http://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/newsroom/commission-must-focus-jobs-and-inclusion-digital-single-market-say-sd-meps>
- Press release by the ECR group: <http://ecrgroup.eu/news/digital-single-market-plans-clear-an-important-hurdle/>
- Press release by the ALDE group: <http://www.alde.eu/nc/press/press-and-release-news/press-release/article/meps-push-for-completion-of-eus-digital-single-market-46573/>
- Press release by the GUE/NGL group: <http://www.guengl.eu/news/article/gue-ngl-news/digital-single-market-proposal-must-benefit-all-not-just-big-companies>
- News page of the Greens/EFA group: <http://www.greens-efa.eu/press/70-press-releases.html>
- News page of the EFDD group: <http://www.efddgroup.eu/newsroom/press-releases>

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