Faster and more efficient help for disappointed shoppers


Settling a dispute over something you bought can often seem like a David vs Goliath battle minus the sling. Legal action might be just a minor inconvenience to multinationals, but small traders or ordinary people often find it a lengthy and costly process. Other methods, such as mediation, can provide them with a quicker and cheaper alternative. On Tuesday morning MEPs will debate and vote on two pieces of legislation that could help disappointed shoppers with their grievances.

Alternative dispute resolution systems aim to find a solution outside court by using a third party, such as a mediator, to negotiate between consumers and traders. This option already exists in several member states, but according to the EP report only 1 in 20 customers makes use of it. To change this, the new EU directive would create easily accessible schemes in all sectors and ensure that disputes are resolved within 90 days. They will handle complaints about both online and offline purchases, regardless of whether the product was bought in the consumer's own country or in another member state.

To help resolve online sales disputes, an online platform will be set up in all EU languages. It will include standard complaint forms and guidance to shoppers on how to find the best solution to their problem.

Watch the plenary debate live on Tuesday by clicking on the link on the right.