

Question for written answer E-000477/2020
to the Commission
Rule 138
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Subject: E-commerce: right of withdrawal and cost-free return of goods

In recent years, the e-commerce sector has grown exponentially; in 2019, turnover in Europe is expected to have risen by 14%, to EUR 621 billion. One of the reasons for this growth is the ease with which products can be both bought and returned. Article 9 et seq. of Directive 2011/83/EU on consumer rights provides for the possibility to exercise the right of withdrawal within 14 days and to return a product. The majority of online traders reimburse to customers the costs of returning products, which allows consumers to return products easily and free of charge.

As a result, up to 60% of products are returned to some traders. Of course, this has undesirable effects: extra transport, environmental impact, loss of value of goods, profitability, etc. So long as consumers do not bear these costs themselves, they will not change their behaviour. It is also difficult for individual businesses to relinquish this approach without placing themselves at a major competitive disadvantage.

Hence the following questions:

1. Does the Commission have any figures on the impact of this practice: CO2 emissions differentiated by mode of delivery, and depreciation of goods?
2. Is the Commission planning measures to address the adverse impacts? For example, requiring consumers to pay all or part of the cost of returning products or further internalisation of external costs (e.g. CO2 emissions and congestion)?