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NOTE

From:	Presidency
To:	Council
Subject:	Report from the Ibero-American Forum of Governmental Consumer Protection Agencies (Madrid, 13-14 September 2023) - <i>Information from the Presidency</i>

Delegations will find attached an information note from the Presidency on the Report from the Ibero-American Forum of Governmental Consumer Protection Agencies which took place in Madrid on 13-14 September 2023 with a view to the AOB item at the meeting of the Competitiveness Council on 25 September 2023.

In the framework of the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union during the second half of 2023, the European Commission and the Ibero-American Forum of Governmental Consumer Protection Agencies (FIAGC) held a Consumer Policy Forum in Madrid on 14 September 2023, with the aim of promoting the protection of consumer rights and strengthening cooperation between both regions, with particular attention to consumer relations in the digital environment.

Participants in the Forum underlined the importance of greater multilateral cooperation on consumer affairs as a necessary prerequisite for improving the protection and safety of consumers globally; the challenges and difficulties faced by consumers in the face of increasingly global and sophisticated commercial practices, as seen in online consumption; and the common challenges for consumer authorities in the European Union and Latin American countries in ensuring the protection of the rights of consumers.

The main conclusions of the Forum were:

1. The protection of consumers' rights is a fundamental element for sustainable economic and social development in our respective regions. It is therefore necessary for the institutions to promote policies and actions that safeguard the rights and welfare of consumers, taking into account the different contexts in which consumer actions are carried out.
2. To this end, it is necessary to promote equal access to consumption, and we therefore recognise the importance of ensuring that vulnerable consumers have equal access to the basic goods and services necessary for their quality of life. This makes it necessary to work, both in the public and private spheres, to eliminate economic, physical and social barriers that may hinder their access to these goods and services as well as the full exercise of their rights, paying special attention to the digital divide.
3. It is key to promote consumer education and awareness as fundamental tools for empowering citizens and to ensure fair, equitable and sustainable commercial transactions, especially with regard to children.

4. Consequently, and taking into account the context of the global ecological crisis and the growing interest of consumers in personally contributing to the achievement of climate neutrality, institutional action on consumer issues must have responsible and sustainable consumption as a priority, so that companies undertake the necessary changes and consumers can make informed decisions taking into account the environmental impacts of their consumption choices.
5. Consumer protection should also focus on protection against sexist practices, particularly in areas such as advertising, which are discriminatory and perpetuate gender stereotypes, negatively affecting people and undermining their dignity and rights.
6. There is a need to guarantee the safety of goods and services offered on the market, as well as the protection of consumers' personal data, and it is therefore appropriate to strengthen cooperation in supervision in order to guarantee high standards of quality and safety, as well as the protection of consumers' privacy.
7. Conflict resolution mechanisms and access to justice for consumers are of outmost importance. Therefore we need to work on sharing experiences on the efficiency and effectiveness of these mechanisms, including the promotion of mediation and arbitration as alternative means of dispute resolution.
8. International cooperation on consumer protection is absolutely necessary in a globalised world. . Given that many of the challenges we face are transnational in nature and that some problems are too large and complex to be solved at the level of a single country, cooperation between the European Union and states and organisations in other regions such as Latin America is essential. European legislation is often a reference and a driving force, but the EU can also learn from the experiences of these other regions. The exchange of good practices, experiences and knowledge between the European Union and Latin America can be very fruitful, especially with regard to new commercial practices and new market players that require greater attention due to their disruptive nature

9. Government consumer authorities and agencies play a key role in the implementation and enforcement of consumer protection policies. It is crucial that they are independent and have the capacity and resources to carry out their functions effectively.
 10. Cooperation between the public and private sectors in the protection of consumer rights is important. Dialogue and collaboration with relevant stakeholders in this area, including industry, consumer organisations and other key players, are necessary to address emerging challenges and promote joint solutions.
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