

CEER welcomes the New Consumer Agenda and stands ready to engage in a wide-ranging dialogue on its priorities and actions to promote consumer protection in the years ahead

Brussels, 16 November 2020

On Friday 13 November, the European Commission adopted "[A New Consumer Agenda](#)"¹ – a blueprint for the future of consumer policy in the European Union. The Council of European Energy Regulators (CEER)² supports the Commission's objectives to adapt consumer protection across all sectors consistently and efficiently, with consideration of today's realities, notably the green and digital transitions, and to enable consumers to play an active role for their own benefit and for society overall.

Ensuring that consumer rights are promoted and protected, whilst delivering on the EU's 2050 sustainability and climate neutrality objectives, is a key priority of the [2030 Vision for Energy Consumers](#)³ that CEER and the [European Consumer Organisation \(BEUC\)](#) released last month. For its part, the energy sector has a number of specificities which over time have led to a body of sector-specific provisions for the protection of energy consumers' rights and their empowerment. These were central to CEER and BEUC when setting out our core six principles for a "Long-term Energy Transition for Sustainability: **A**ffordability, **S**implicity, **P**rotection, **I**nclusiveness, **R**eliability and **E**mpowerment" ("LET'S ASPIRE").

*"We believe our ASPIRE principles are very much in line with the Commission's New Consumer Agenda, and that they can be equally applied to other sectors covered by the Agenda" said **Annegret Groebel, CEER President**. "As stated in our Vision and the Commission's New Consumer Agenda, tackling climate change will involve a deep transformation of our economy and will significantly influence the way we use and interact with energy in our everyday life, such as to heat and cool our homes, cook our food and fuel our cars. We strongly believe that core consumer rights must be safeguarded, and adapted, as we embark on these systemic changes, underpinned by a commitment to not leave anyone behind."*

Moreover, European consumers are becoming increasingly careful about what and how they consume, and in particular are showing strong support for less carbon intensive energy choices. Consumer engagement can make a real difference to decarbonisation and reducing environmental impact but requires that **information is transparent, simple, readily accessible and comparable**. In this respect, CEER fully agrees that the reinforced energy consumer rights provisions that apply for electricity consumers from 1 January 2021 should be swiftly extended to gas and district heating consumers and supports continuing efforts to enhance consumer protection against "**greenwashing**" and proliferation of green claims.

In addition, the ever-dynamic nature of contracts in various marketplaces has raised awareness of the importance of joining forces between regulators across sectors to ensure that **comparison tools** can result in significant gains for consumers from engaging or switching. CEER has [supported high-quality and independent comparison tools for the gas sector⁴ as well as the electricity sector for some time](#) and is pleased to see this intention in the New Consumer Agenda. More broadly, this is a reminder of the need to address a range of concerns related to areas including consumer perceptions and trust, access to data, unjustified geo-blocking and degree of competition.

Digitalisation can provide significant benefits to consumers, as covered in CEER's report on [Dynamic Regulation to Enable Digitalisation of the Energy System⁵](#), although there are risks directly associated with data, competition issues and cybersecurity. In this context, CEER welcomes the Commission's proposal to expand consumers' ability to access and utilise their data,

while reinforcing consumer protection in these areas with several actions in line with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted that extreme situations may require the adoption of temporary and extraordinary measures. Overall, the EU regulatory framework of liberalised energy markets regulated by independent regulators working for an integrated internal energy market has shown its resilience in the crisis. Protecting essential services such as energy and mitigating the financial and legal impact of the crisis on energy consumers and the energy system, as well as preparing for possible similarly unprecedented disruptions in the future, are key concerns for regulatory authorities, in line with CEER and BEUC's ASPIRE principles. However, it is also important to not maintain extraordinary measures longer than absolutely necessary and to envisage phasing them out smoothly.

The Agenda's emphasis on **affordability** being crucial to ensuring access to products and services for low income consumers is a vision that CEER shares. CEER therefore welcomes the recent publication of the [Commission's Recommendation on Energy Poverty](#)⁶ which addresses the issue of affordability of essential energy services, considers its importance as vital for social inclusion and looks at consumer vulnerability, in general terms, as a limitation to consumers' capacity to fully access the opportunities and benefits the European energy market offers.

Dr Annegret Groebel stressed that *"In the global context of the international economy recovering from the effects of COVID-19, the transition towards a sustainable and carbon-neutral society is to be achieved in an integrated way, meaning closer interlinkages between sectors, including energy, and how consumers interact with each of them. Consumers are themselves integral participants and the main driver in this process."*

CEER agrees that the success of this Agenda will depend on a broad partnership involving all relevant stakeholders and stands ready to engage and cooperate with the Commission, Member States and all relevant actors, private and public, at local, regional and national level (i.e. governments, regulators, consumer protection and enforcement authorities, consumer organisations, companies, ...) to support the implementation of this new blueprint, to maximise benefits for both the environment and, crucially, consumers. As part of these efforts, CEER would welcome the opportunity to join the soon to be established Consumer Policy Advisory Group and further contribute in this capacity to the annual Consumer Summit discussions.

Read CEER's [full response](#) to the [European Commission's Public Consultation on the EU's new 'consumer agenda'](#)⁷.

See [here](#) for CEER's participation in the upcoming 12th Citizens' Energy Forum.

Ends – see Notes to Editors

Notes to Editors:

1. European Commission (2020), “New Consumer Agenda – Strengthening consumer resilience for sustainable recovery”, COM(2020) 696 final
2. The Council of European Energy Regulatory (CEER) is the voice of Europe’s national energy regulators. Its Members and Observers are the independent statutory bodies responsible for energy regulation in 39 European countries. CEER, based in Brussels, deals with a broad range of energy issues including retail markets and consumers; distribution networks; smart grids; flexibility; sustainability; and international cooperation. Further information on the CEER website www.ceer.eu
3. CEER BEUC 2030 Vision for Energy Consumers: LET’S ASPIRE! <https://www.ceer.eu/1932>
4. C17-CEM-107-04, CEER Guidelines of Good Practice on Comparison Tools in the New Energy Market Design 20 December 2017 <https://www.ceer.eu/1256>
5. C19-DSG-09-04 CEER Conclusions Paper on Dynamic Regulation to Enable Digitalisation of the Energy System, 10 October 2019 <https://www.ceer.eu/1740>
6. European Commission (2020), Recommendation on energy poverty, C(2020) 9600 final
7. C20-CRM-138-04, CEER response to the Commission's public consultation on the New Consumer Agenda, 14 October 2020 <https://www.ceer.eu/1932>

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