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in the European Parliament**

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A new European Single Market with a strong social dimension: putting citizens and the real economy at the heart of EU legislation and policies

In 2012 we celebrated the 20th anniversary of the European Union's Single Market. 500 million Europeans benefit today from this huge marketplace without borders. Nevertheless, a new ambitious approach and new provisions are needed to enhance worker and consumer rights within the Single Market and to support the real economy by promoting competitive and socially responsible enterprises which contribute to growth and employment.

The S&D Group believes that strong leadership and vision from the European institutions and political ownership from the Member States are needed in order to boost citizens' confidence in the Single Market. In our understanding of the new social Europe, we strive for a political approach that puts people first, not the markets, and we are convinced that the Single Market still offers a great untapped potential for economic growth and social cohesion.

The S&D Group has taken the lead in the re-launch of a balanced and sustainable Single Market by targeting key provisions and achieving concrete results with tangible benefits for consumers, workers and businesses within the Single Market.

We have been in the lead on the reform of Public Procurements (PP) and Concessions (CC), aware of the huge importance that PP and CC play in the overall economic performance of the European Union. In Europe, public authorities spend around 18-19 % of GDP through PP on supplies, works and services; this represents a constant flow of public investment which has become even more important in times of economic crisis. Thanks to the recently adopted reform, the volume of investments through public procurement could be used as a powerful lever for achieving smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. This reform constitutes a relevant and consistent case of key legislation based on a balanced approach between economic freedoms and protection of social rights in the Single Market. The new provisions on Public Procurements will help to boost investments and to ensure sound and efficient public expenditure.

We have adopted new legislation to enable strategic use of PP and CC by public contracting authorities in order to award contracts on the basis of criteria promoting innovation, quality, social and environmental aspects; the lowest price is no longer the leading criterion.

We have introduced provisions to stop social dumping within the EU and from third countries: PP and CC contracts will only be awarded to economic operators which comply with social and environmental obligations set by international, European and national legislations, including obligations set by collective agreements. We have

extended such obligations to subcontracting and abnormally low tenders to foster sound public investment.

We have safeguarded the provision of quality public services, notably social services, by defining in a clear legal way that public authorities are always free to choose to organise and provide public services through in-house, public-public and public-private cooperation systems without having to apply PP and CC rules. This will allow all public authorities to organise their services of general interest according to clear rules and to avoid the risk of being brought before the European Court of Justice.

We have succeeded in excluding water provision services from the CC scope to guarantee universal access to water as a basic citizens' right and in accordance with the European Citizens Initiative on the right to water, which we have strongly supported.

We are playing a leading role in consumer protection with the reform of Product Safety and Market Surveillance in the Single Market. We have pursued the double objective of enhancing consumer protection and fostering the competitiveness of European companies and products. Strict rules have been defined for manufacturers and importers to improve the safety of products circulating in the Single Market so as to guarantee the safety and quality of consumer products. At the same time we have defended the mandatory indication of origin - the so-called "made in" - in order to enable consumers to purchase their products based on the transparent information needed to make a responsible purchasing decision. In addition, we want to avoid dumping by third countries and help EU compliant and competitive businesses to compete in the Single Market. We introduced new rules by paying particular attention to the products designed for vulnerable consumers – particularly children.

Furthermore, market surveillance authorities are obliged to organise their activities to maximum effectiveness, e.g. through sample checks, monitoring of accidents and cooperation with economic operators. The latter have to provide all data necessary to identify the product and to facilitate its tracing. Moreover, the RAPEX database has to be constantly updated. In order to allow consumers to easily identify safe products, we have introduced the "EU Safety Tested" label, which guarantees that a product has been tested by an independent third party and found safe by a competent body.

Our Group has played a leading role in ensuring a high level of consumer protection via the horizontal Consumer Rights Directive. This directive, which will be applicable to contracts concluded between a consumer and a trader from June 2014 onwards, ensures consumer protection in traditional forms of sale as well as in the increasing field of online and cross-border sales, including digital products. There are now harmonised rules on pre-contractual information to be given to the consumer, a consistent 14-day withdrawal period in all Member States, a ban on so-called pre-ticked boxes, misleading consumers especially in the travel sector, and the obligation to inform the consumer before placing an order of the full price and the main characteristics of the product.

While the directive introduces a harmonised level of consumer protection, in several significant areas the Member States remain free to maintain an even higher level of protection.

The S&D Group was decisive in the adoption of new legislation for consumer rights enforcement. To function properly, the Single Market needs the confidence and trust of consumers. Through the adoption of the directives on "Alternative Dispute Resolution" (ADR) and "Online Dispute Resolution" (ODR) we have achieved concrete results for consumers. Consumers will only feel confident buying goods and services if they can rely on European and national rules to solve disputes with traders. Consumers lose up to €50 billion in commercial disputes every year (roughly 0.4% of Europe's GDP). Without legal enforcement, consumers' rights cannot be protected. The newly adopted directives provide for the Europe-wide scheme to guarantee an affordable, rapid and accessible system of court dispute resolution.

Through ADR mechanisms, consumers will receive a proposal for solution of a commercial dispute by traders in 90 days. Through the introduction of an electronic platform for online dispute resolution - the ODR - it will be easy for consumers to have access to the most appropriate ADR scheme. This will help all consumers who wish to buy goods and services in their home country and across the EU, and at the same time it will contribute to the growth of the digital economy.

The S&D Group is also in the lead in the introduction and enforcement of new consumer rights. We are fighting for the universal right of access to a basic bank account for all citizens, independently of their origin, place of residence, economic and professional status. This new legislation is a key provision for financial inclusion and promotion of fair social and economic rights. Many people face problems when they wish to open a bank account in their new home country or when they move abroad, as there are often conditions concerning their residence and/or employment status. This frequently affects students but also those moving abroad for work. At the same time, legal residents and temporary workers from outside the EU find it almost impossible to get access to a basic bank account. Without a bank account, many fundamental daily transactions, such as social entitlements and salaries, or payment of bills, are more complicated and expensive.

We are fighting to make it obligatory for all payment services providers to guarantee access to a basic payment account for all legal residents in the EU. This will help tackle social and financial exclusion in our society, and improve the integration and mobility of workers and students in the market without borders. It will also offer a boost to e-commerce.

The S&D Group has paved the way for easier and quicker recognition of professional qualifications. At a time when more and more Europeans move within the Union to live and work in another Member State, the recognition of their respective professional qualifications is of utmost importance, and helps especially young people to find employment. The revised directive aims to facilitate mobility whilst guaranteeing a high level of professional quality and mutual trust among the Member States. The process of recognition has now clearly set deadlines for authorities issuing the recognition, making the process quicker and more efficient. Furthermore, Member States are obliged to provide information for their citizens on the recognition process in a clear and accessible manner.

Professionals will now also have the possibility to apply for a European Professional Card, which the S&D Group has been calling for since 2007. The card will further speed up administrative procedures and will allow professionals to move and work

in Europe more freely. Furthermore, the directive now covers graduates who wish to pursue a traineeship in another Member State.

The training requirements for professionals falling under automatic recognition have been streamlined and updated to meet scientific and societal developments. Training requirements of professions not covered by the automatic recognition system will be further developed by the Member States through so-called common training frameworks and common tests, which will serve as an effective link between the general and automatic recognition systems.

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