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## Article

# Consumers' Attitude towards Consumer Protection in the Digital Single Market, as Reflected by European Barometers

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## **CONSUMERS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS CONSUMER PROTECTION IN THE DIGITAL SINGLE MARKET, AS REFLECTED BY EUROPEAN BAROMETERS**

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### **Abstract**

The European Single Market is an ongoing project that will continue to further develop and adapt to changing realities. Traditional economic activities, and the administrative rules governing them, face the challenge of adapting to developments that blur the dividing lines, for example, between shop and online sales or between traditional media and Internet communication.

Convergence of this type will lead to a European Digital Single Market. A genuine Digital Single Market would generate new types of growth and also sustainable economic and social benefits for all European citizens.

There are still a number of barriers which impose obstacles for the development of the digital market in Europe. Obstacles which can be identified include national differences regarding data protection rules, e-commerce rules, consumer protection rules and other legislation pertaining to information flows.

The paper brings in discussion the advantages of a Digital Single Market, the obstacles in developing it in connection with e-commerce regulations, consumer protection and information flows legislation and also the premises for implementing a Digital Single Market. Consumers' trust in on-line commerce results as one of the driving factors in implementing a Digital Single Market.

These are some of the main obstacles for the boosting consumers' confidence in the European Single Market. Improving consumer confidence in cross-border shopping online by taking appropriate policy action could provide a major boost to economic growth in Europe. Empowered and confident consumers can drive forward the European economy.

Starting from the results of the Flash Euro-barometer survey „Consumer attitudes towards cross-border trade and consumer protection this study analyzes consumer's readiness for the European Digital Single Market.

**Keywords:** consumer's trust, consumer protection, e-commerce, digital single market, awareness of consumer legislation, cross-border shopping, consumer's certainty and decisional capacity.

**JEL Classification:** D18, L81, F15.

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**Introduction**

The European Single Market is an ongoing project that will continue to further develop and adapt to changing realities. With the digital age upon us, the integration of European markets on a digital platform is more important than ever.

The digital economy possesses great potential for growth and innovation. Global competitors, including the US, Japan, and South Korea, are undergoing vast expansion in the digitalization of their economies. Increased productivity and competitiveness are projected to follow.

On the other hand, Europe needs a new economic momentum to help its economies to exit from the economic and financial crisis and to boost long-term growth rates and competitiveness. This will be especially important for the economies of Central and Eastern Europe as the Digital Single Market could provide a large market in fields and sectors where these countries could potentially develop their competitive advantage.

The Digital Single Market can also help to address a much wider range of Europe's current socio-economic problems, including long-term problems such as demographics and climate change.

The Digital Single Market can help to make Europe's labour markets more efficient and at the same time more social. In the long run, it can help protect Europe's economic and social model and increase citizens' well-being by being a key component of the renewal of public services, which have been hit by the debt burden and long-term spending pressures.

One cannot speak about a viable, unique Digital Market unless it considers the consumer as core element. Basically, consumers will be those deciding if the unique Digital Market will be a success model or not. In order to transpose this principle into reality it is mandatory that European consumers know their rights in the UE region and trust their rights being respected in the same manner in all UE member countries.

**1. The European Digital Single Market**

After the 1992 Single Market Program, European Monetary Union and the common currency (Euro) in 1999/2002 and the 2007 Services Directive, the creation of a single market for goods and services can be seen as a fourth step of the European Union to foster growth, jobs and innovation.

The Internet has fundamentally changed the way consumers shop and businesses advertise and sell their goods and services. It has created innovative ways of organizing, accessing, sharing and evaluating information, for example on prices, technical product characteristics and quality reviews. Search engines, price and product comparison websites, online trust marks and consumer reviews are now widely used tools and are becoming embedded in consumer behaviour and business models. E-commerce can deliver considerable welfare gains since consumers have at least twice the choice when shopping online rather than offline.

As has been stated by the European Policy Centre, the Digital Single Market means:

- “A harmonized and integrated European market without barriers between EU member states hindering the use of digital and online technologies and services.
- A single market which encourages cross-border online trade.
- A single market which encourages investments in new online services and applications.
- A single market with a high level of e-skills and e-readiness.
- A single market which encourages investment in digital infrastructure.” (Copenhagen Economics, 2010)

A genuine European Digital Single Market makes it just as easy for a consumer or company in an member state to access online information, goods and services in another member state as in the country where the consumer or firm is based.

On a Digital Single Market all actors have skills and expertise to use digital resources for making purchases; exchanging information; collaborate; searching for information, and doing many other things of value to firms, consumers and society.

A genuine Digital Single Market would generate new types of growth. Its potential is immense and would bring benefits to all the territories and economic sectors of the European Union. As stated by McKinsey Global Institute Report “The Net’s Sweeping Impact on Growth, Jobs, and Prosperity” in the G8 countries, South Korea and Sweden, the

Internet economy has brought about 21% of the growth in GDP in the last five years. In France, since 2000, the Internet economy also generates 2.6 jobs for every job cut and at times accounts for 25% of net employment creation. (McKinsey Global Institute, 2011) Online services are by nature cross-border and can speed up European integration and the creation of the Single Market which has been sought for more than 50 years.

The Digital Single Market is far from achieving its full potential; the cost of the failure to complete it is expected to be at least 4.1% of GDP between now and 2020, i.e. EUR 500 billion or EUR 1000 per citizen (Copenhagen Economics, 2010). It has been calculated that, if e-commerce in goods reaches 15 % of retail sales and all Single Market barriers are removed, the overall gain for consumers would be around EUR 204 billion (1.7% of EU GDP).(European Commission, 2012) Digital Single Market has similar impact as the 1992 Single Market Program. (Copenhagen Economics, 2010)

A view, expressed by the European Commission in its paper “A coherent framework for building trust in the Digital Single Market for e-commerce and online services” is that Digital Single Market would bring benefits for all actors involved. For the consumer the tangible benefits generated by e-commerce growth will be: lower prices, more choice and better quality of goods and services, thanks to cross-border trade and easier comparison of offers. The elderly people, those with reduced mobility, those isolated in rural areas, those with low purchasing power will particularly benefit and Europe will thus be better placed to meet the demographic challenges of today.

Small and medium enterprises and micro-companies will have access to new markets beyond national and even European borders. More intensive use of online services and access to cloud computing will improve the productivity of companies. A lot more businesses will be starting up and existing companies will flourish by finding new market niches. A high-performance digital European market will make Europe better able to

compete with the rest of the world by giving it a competitive edge which is based on knowledge, a highly qualified workforce and innovative economic and social models.

The European citizens will be able to go online, including carrying out cross-border activities, in a secure, responsible and trustworthy environment. The Internet will provide a more efficient, more secure and more responsible framework for activities, allowing everyone to exercise their rights. It will reflect European values and respect the fundamental rights set out in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, such as the freedom of expression and information, the right to privacy, personal data protection and non-discrimination.

The Digital Single Market will bring benefits also for the European workers. The Internet-based services will create jobs, even in rural or isolated areas. Online services will offer a wider range of work arrangements (for example tele-working), facilitate job-hunting even outside the country, and encourage private initiative.

## **2. Main barriers to the Digital Single Market**

European Union in its report "A coherent framework for building trust in the Digital Single Market for e-commerce and online services" identifies five barriers. These are:

- the supply of legal, cross-border online services is still inadequate;
- there is not enough information for online service operators or protection for Internet users;
- payment and delivery systems are still inadequate;
- there are too many cases of abuse and disputes that are difficult to settle;
- insufficient use is made of high-speed communication networks and hi-tech solutions.

As we can see, these five obstacles regard to consumer protection, consumer's trust and technological infrastructure related with the Digital Single Market.

In Copenhagen Economics (2010) view these barriers can be put in three broad categories. The first type of barrier comes from the fragmentation of the EU legal system and in consequence suppliers have to adapt their business model from Member State to Member State

The second type stems from differences in culture between the EU countries, which lead consumers in different EU countries to demand different characteristics from their goods and services. This means that consumers may be reluctant and have difficulty navigating and understanding web pages in other Member States.

A third type of barriers encompasses the lack of consumer protection and more generally, trust in the Internet. The third type of barrier indicates that consumers will be reluctant to do business on the Internet regardless of which country they originate.

If some of these types of barrier could be eliminated through a better legal framework and further technological development, still remain psychological and cultural barriers.

Psychological barriers are mainly tied to consumer's trust in the European consumer protection mechanisms. Strengthening a single harmonized legal framework for consumer's rights protection will boost consumer's trust in e-commerce and, in the future, could grow its confidence in the European Digital Single Market.

Insufficient cognition of consumer's protection legislation is another psychological barrier for most consumers. Today they face, on one hand, the European Union legal framework and, on the other hand, each Member State's national legislation. In order to be properly empowered, consumers must be provided with clear, reliable and comparable information, and the tools to understand it.

The European Acquis referring to consumer protection is formed by a series of directives, decisions and rules, a few of them having explicit reference to e-commerce. Clear provisions for consumer's rights acting in the electronic environment are stated in the following directives:

**The Consumer Rights Directive** 2011/83/EU which repeals the Distance Selling Directive 97/7/EC applies to any contract concluded between a trader and a consumer. Article 5 and article 6 provides that certain important information has to be given to the consumer before the contract is concluded. Article 9 provides for a right of the consumer to cancel a distance or off-premises contract, without penalty and without giving any reason in a period of 14 days. If the consumer is not informed of her/his cancellation right, the cancellation period is extended to twelve months.

**The Consumer Sales Directive** 1999/44/EC is primarily concerned with the quality of goods (whether sold online or offline). In article 2 it is stated that seller must deliver goods to the consumer which are in conformity with the contract of sale. In article 3 it provided as a minimum right that a consumer can demand that goods be repaired or replaced if they turn out to be defective. If the goods cannot be replaced or repaired the consumer may have a reduction in price or can cancel the contract and have the cost of the good. If the manufacturer or seller of goods makes certain promises about goods (for example to replace or repair defective goods) this becomes legally binding (article 6).

**The Unfair Contract Terms Directive** 93/13/EEC provides that an unfair term in a contract between a business and a consumer is not binding on the consumer (article 6). It only applies to business-to-consumer contracts and if the contract terms are not individually negotiated, in other words it only applies to standard terms and conditions. An unfair term is a term which causes an imbalance in the respective rights and obligations to the detriment of the consumer. As stated in article 3, this imbalance must be contrary to good faith. However, the Unfair Contract Terms Directive does not apply to the main obligations under the contract such as whether the price is a fair price for the goods or services in question. The problem with these three core consumer Directives is that they only provide a minimum harmonization of the Member States' consumer law. This means that the Directives only established the minimum consumer protection standards which the Member States have to implement and are allowed to maintain or adopt higher standards of consumer protection. As a result, consumer law differs significantly from Member State to Member State, leading to fragmentation.

Consumer protection varies considerably between Member States, both in terms of who enforces consumer rights and the actual legal method to ensure consumer rights are respected. In some Member States, an official authority is responsible for monitoring and prosecuting breaches of consumer law. In other Member States, there is no such official consumer authority and enforcement is left to private consumer associations or even private individuals (with or without the help of legal aid).

**3. The Premises for Passing to a Digital Single Market**

One may speak about a functional Digital Single Market, if the value of Internet transactions is high. As it can be noticed in Table 1, between 2006-2013, the number of consumers who purchase products or services through Internet has doubled. Purchasing from national, internal online market has registered the highest rate (47%), followed by EC space acquisitions (15%), respectively extra-EC space purchases (8%). Compared, the percentage of products and services acquired online from the intra-community space is more than three times lower than the percentage of goods acquired from own countries. In these circumstances, one cannot speak about a functional Digital Single Market.

**Table no. 1: Evolution of Internet sales between 2006-2013**

Consumers who:	2006 (%)	2008 (%)	2010 (%)	2011 (%)	2012 (%)	2013 (%)
- purchased from internal market( own country)	23	30	33	33	42	47
- purchased from intra-community space	6	7	8	7	10	15
- purchased from extra-community space	3	4	4	4	6	8
- haven't purchased from Internet	73	66	62	63	54	47
- did not answer the questions	0	1	0	0	1	1

Source: Eurobarometers EBS 252, EBS 298, FL 282, FL 299, FL 332, FL 358

Table no. 2 presents the evolution of respondents numbers who declared they had acquired online, different products or services from their own country. Analyzing the data, there can be noticed two trends:

- In highly economically and technologically developed countries, the raise of B2C online commerce from internal market is not as significant as the raise noticed in the group of the new member countries of EU-12. The beginning of economic crisis has marked this sector through economic stagnation or even downfall, in certain years (2009 and 2010 especially).
- In the 12 new member countries of EU, there has been registered a fast pace of national B2C e-commerce development, the economic crisis affecting less this area. If, in the next 5 years, the evolution's trend remains the same as it was between 2008-2012, the new member countries may attain the average values of the EU indicators for this sector.

Analyzing the data from Table no.2, in Romania in 2012, 28% of respondents acquired online from internal market e-shops. This value is by almost 40% lower than the EU average (47% respondents). However, the increase of this indicator in Romania between 2008-2012 of 4.6 times, is much above the European average increase - 1,56 times, being hence one of the strongest evolutions in EU.

Although Romania started from poor grounds, it is now following an ascending trend in what concerns onlineB2C internal market commerce. This registered development generates the premises for aligning to the parameters required by a Digital Single Market.

**Table no. 2: The evolution of people who acquired in the last 12 months, via Internet, products and services from internal market**

Country	2008 (%)	2009 (%)	2010 (%)	2011 (%)	2012 (%)	Growth rate
European Union (EU-27)	30	33	33	42	47	+1,56
Belgium (BE)	23	18	19	25	30	+1,30
Bulgaria (BG)	4	9	9	17	25	+6,25
Czech Republic (CZ)	34	37	38	51	60	+1,76
Denmark(DK)	56	35	32	57	61	+1,09
Germany(DE)	39	50	47	55	59	+1,51
Estonia (EE)	22	22	21	26	30	+1,36
Ireland (IE)	20	21	26	29	40	+2
Greece (EL)	6	13	12	16	21	+3,5
Spain (ES)	14	24	21	25	35	+2,5
France (FR)	42	37	38	51	51	+1,21
Italy (IT)	12	13	13	22	29	+2,41
Cyprus (CY)	4	6	11	6	5	+1,25
Latvia (LV)	24	23	17	26	30	+1,25
Lithuania (LT)	7	12	17	20	31	+4,42
Luxemburg (LU)	11	13	12	13	14	+1,27
Hungary (HU)	11	20	23	24	33	+3
Malta (MT)	3	7	7	6	11	+3,66
Netherlands (NL)	62	43	52	65	72	+1,16
Austria (AT)	25	31	32	32	42	+1,68
Poland (PL)	25	40	35	46	54	+2,16
Portugal (PT)	7	8	12	15	17	+2,43
Romania (RO)	6	10	14	18	28	+4,66
Slovenia (SI)	17	22	23	27	33	+1,94
Slovakia (SK)	15	25	30	39	49	+3,26
Finland (FI)	42	38	38	49	47	+1,12
Sweden (SE)	61	51	54	61	59	- 1,13
Great Britain (UK)	52	54	53	67	66	+1,27

*Source: Data processing from Eurobarometers EBS 252, EBS 298, FL 282, FL 299, FL 332, FL 358*

In Table no. 3. is presented, in percents, the evolution of respondents who declared they had acquired in the last 12 months, via Internet, different products or services from various EU country members. It can be noticed that, in general, the number of consumers who purchased online from other EU member countries is much lower than the number of those who purchased online from their own country. Another remark would be that regarding the group of new members of EU-12: despite the fact that some of them registered high rates of growth here, their average (13.58%) is still below the EU average of 15%. If the recorded trend from 2012 will be kept further on, due to the fact that the new member countries had a two times faster growth pace (4.28 times) than the EU average (2.14 times), in the short run we may speak of convergence.



**Table no. 3: The evolution of respondents who acquired in the last 12 months,  
via Internet, products and services from intra-community space**

Country	2008 (%)	2009 (%)	2010 (%)	2011 (%)	2012 (%)	Growth rate
European Union (EU-27)	7	8	7	10	15	+2,14
Belgium (BE)	13	12	11	16	26	+2
Bulgaria (BG)	1	2	3	6	10	+ 10
Czech Republic (CZ)	3	4	4	6	7	+2,33
Denmark(DK)	23	27	24	26	33	+1,43
Germany(DE)	6	8	6	10	13	+2,16
Estonia (EE)	7	6	8	10	17	+2,42
Ireland (IE)	16	30	34	36	48	+3
Greece (EL)	5	9	8	7	15	+3
Spain (ES)	8	7	6	8	12	+1,5
France (FR)	9	10	9	9	19	+2,11
Italy (IT)	4	3	4	7	11	+2,75
Cyprus (CY)	13	22	22	24	31	+2,38
Latvia (LV)	5	8	7	10	15	+3
Lithuania (LT)	3	5	7	7	11	+3,66
Luxemburg (LU)	38	42	38	44	41	+1,07
Hungary (HU)	1	4	4	3	7	+7
Malta (MT)	23	32	39	35	42	+1,82
Netherlands (NL)	16	8	12	16	19	+1,18
Austria (AT)	19	33	30	34	37	+1,94
Poland (PL)	2	4	3	5	5	+2,5
Portugal (PT)	2	5	5	9	10	+5
Romania (RO)	1	3	2	3	5	+5
Slovenia (SI)	6	9	8	9	14	+2,33
Slovakia (SK)	2	10	8	10	18	+9
Finland (FI)	14	17	18	21	26	+1,85
Sweden (SE)	17	11	13	14	17	+1
Great Britain (UK)	12	8	9	15	20	+1,66

*Source: Data processing from Eurobarometers  
EBS 252, EBS 298, FL 282, FL 299, FL332, FL 358*

Romania, despite the fact it registered a 5 times growth between 2008-2012, at the end of 2012 still has one of the lowest values from EU for this indicator, surprisingly equally low to Poland, but much behind Bulgaria – its partner for EU integration. One explanation of the differences registered in onlineB2C commerce from European Union could be the degree of Internet infrastructure development (Table no. 4).

However, analyzing the data from Table no. 4, an interesting situation may be seen: countries with not so well developed Internet infrastructure such as Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria and Poland are ahead of countries with almost full access to Internet like Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark. Also, from this point of view, Romania is placed ahead of Italy, Belgium or Portugal.

**Table no. 4: The ratio between the respondents who had purchased, via Internet, in the last 12 months and the respondents who have access to Internet**

Country	Respondents who have:		Ratio N <sub>C</sub> /N <sub>I</sub>
	Purchased via Internet – N <sub>C</sub> (%)	Access to Internet – N <sub>I</sub> (%)	
Czech Republic (CZ)	62	59	1,05
Slovakia (SK)	56	54	1,04
Ireland (IE)	66	67	0,99
Austria (AT)	60	62	0,97
Poland (PL)	56	58	0,97
Germany (DE)	63	66	0,95
Great Britain (UK)	68	74	0,92
European Union (EU-27)	53	64	0,83
Denmark (DK)	71	86	0,83
Spain (ES)	43	52	0,83
Greece (EL)	34	42	0,81
France (FR)	58	72	0,81
Netherlands (NL)	74	93	0,80
Malta (MT)	48	61	0,79
Bulgaria (BG)	34	44	0,77
Finland (FI)	58	76	0,76
Cyprus (CY)	41	56	0,73
Hungary (HU)	37	51	0,73
Lithuania (LT)	39	55	0,71
Sweden (SE)	64	90	0,71
Romania (RO)	31	45	0,69
Latvia (LV)	43	63	0,68
Italy (IT)	35	53	0,66
Belgium (BE)	44	68	0,65
Luxemburg (LU)	50	78	0,64
Slovenia (SI)	44	70	0,63
Estonia (EE)	42	70	0,60
Portugal (PT)	26	48	0,54

*Source: Data processing from Special Eurobarometer 381  
“E-communications household survey”, p.39, p.41*

One conclusion that may be drawn regarding this particular analysis is that the willingness to purchase products or services online depends in a high extent on the trust consumers have in this form of commerce.

#### **4. Consumers’ Trust in Online Commerce**

The same upward trend describing the evolution of the online purchasers is found to describe respondents’ trust in e-commerce in Table no. 5. As a matter of fact, this is an expected result, as trust is one most influent factors upon consumer’s behaviour.

**Table no. 5: Comparison between the level of trust in national online commerce and intra-community online commerce**

Country	The level of trust in online commerce:		Difference (% points)
	National (%)	Intra-community (%)	
European Union (EU-27)	59	36	+23
Belgium (BE)	55	38	+17
Bulgaria (BG)	42	42	0
Czech Republic (CZ)	68	36	+32
Denmark(DK)	80	54	+26
Germany(DE)	64	26	+38
Estonia (EE)	40	27	+13
Ireland (IE)	76	66	+10
Greece (EL)	39	43	+5
Spain (ES)	51	40	+11
France (FR)	68	36	+32
Italy (IT)	42	28	+14
Cyprus (CY)	37	40	-3
Latvia (LV)	47	37	+10
Lithuania (LT)	45	33	+12
Luxemburg (LU)	69	54	+15
Hungary (HU)	46	25	+21
Malta (MT)	37	53	-16
Netherlands (NL)	70	36	+34
Austria (AT)	63	44	+19
Poland (PL)	62	31	+31
Portugal (PT)	44	35	+9
Romania (RO)	43	34	+9
Slovenia (SI)	58	40	+18
Slovakia (SK)	60	41	+19
Finland (FI)	68	45	+23
Sweden (SE)	71	41	+30
Great Britain (UK)	75	48	+27

*Source: Data processing from Flash Eurobarometer 358 „Consumer attitudes towards cross-border trade and consumer protection”, p.T57, p.T61*

Most of European consumers trust online acquisitions from their own countries (59%), while the level of trust decreases to 36% when referring to intra-community online sellers. Generally, in almost all European countries, the internal online sellers is much trusted than the online sellers belonging to other EU countries. However, exceptions to this are recorded (see Table no. 5). Thus Malta and Cyprus have a higher level of trust in online sellers belonging to other EU country than to their very own, issue that may be explained by the small internal markets of these two countries.

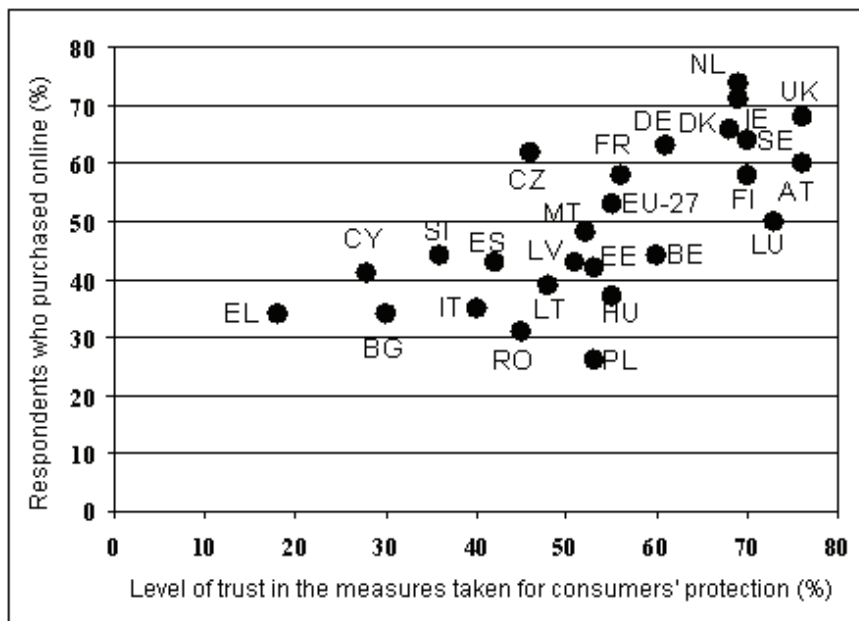
Another exception is Bulgaria, a country that has the same level of trust both in internal online sellers and in EU other member countries online sellers. Taking apart these isolated cases, it can be seen that the developed countries of EU like Germany, France, Great

Britain, Netherlands etc., have high differences (about 30-40% points) between the level of trust in their own online sellers and the level of trust in other EU online sellers- not belonging to their very own country. If this trend will be kept, it will be difficult to implement an European Digital Single Market, as these developed countries are opinion leaders in European. In Romania, the difference between the level of online internal sellers trust and the level of other EU countries online sellers trust is of 9% points – lower than the EU average.

**5. Consumers attitude towards legislation and institutions for consumer’s rights’ protection**

Consumers’ lack of trust in intra-community online commerce is mainly due to language barriers, but it is also due to psychological ones, issued by the mistrust in consumer’s protection mechanisms.

As it can be remarked in Figure 1, there is a strong connection between these mechanisms and the online, via Internet, purchasing products and services intention.



**Figure no. 1: The relationship between respondents’ trust in consumer protection mechanisms and their purchasing behaviour**

*Source: Flash Eurobarometer 358 „Consumer attitudes towards cross-border trade and consumer protection”, p.55*

In most of the cases, a high level of trust leads to high values of online commerce. Denmark and Netherlands are countries where 69% of respondents have declared that the measures taken for consumer protection were adequate and where 71%, respectively 74% of respondents had purchased online in the last 12 months. At the opposite pole, Greece and

Bulgaria are countries where only 18%, respectively 30% of respondents trust the mechanisms of protection, in the last 12 months only 34% having purchased online. Romania, with 45% respondents trusting the measures for consumer protection and with 31% online buyers is below European average of 55% trust, respectively 53% purchasers.

In European Union, consumer's rights and interests are defended by both governmental bodies and independent organizations. As it can be seen in Table no. 6, most of the European citizens rather trust independent organizations, the exceptions here referring only to Finland and Bulgaria.

In Romania, the difference between consumers' trust in public institutions (50%) and their trust in independent organizations (55%) is only of 5% points, one of the lowest registered, as it seems that Romanian consumers trust almost equally the two types of institutions. Unfortunately, the trust of Romanian consumers is in both cases lower than the European average of 59% trust in governmental bodies and 74% trust in independent organizations. It looks that from this point of view, of consumers' trust in those institutions that have to protect their rights, the premises for creating a Digital Single Market are promising.

**Table no. 6: Respondents' trust in institutions for consumers' right protection**

Country	Trust in :		Country	Trust in :	
	Public institutions (%)	Independent organizations (%)		Public institutions (%)	Independent organizations (%)
EU-27	59	74	Lithuania	39	59
Belgium	64	80	Luxemburg	83	85
Bulgaria	56	54	Hungary	70	72
Czech Republic	40	69	Malta	71	78
Denmark	67	80	Netherlands	80	90
Germany	59	76	Austria	75	84
Estonia	56	62	Poland	46	64
Ireland	70	86	Portugal	58	78
Greece	41	57	Romania	50	55
Spain	51	75	Slovenia	34	58
France	59	87	Slovakia	51	62
Italy	48	68	Finland	83	77
Cyprus	54	59	Sweden	77	80
Latvia	62	68	Great Britain	78	87

*Source: Flash Eurobarometer 358, p.T1, p.T2.*

Not the same thing may be said about knowing European legislation for consumer's rights. Asked four questions about European Directives, on average, only 12% of respondents managed to answer correctly to all the questions, while 3% did not answer correctly to any of them (see Figure no. 2).

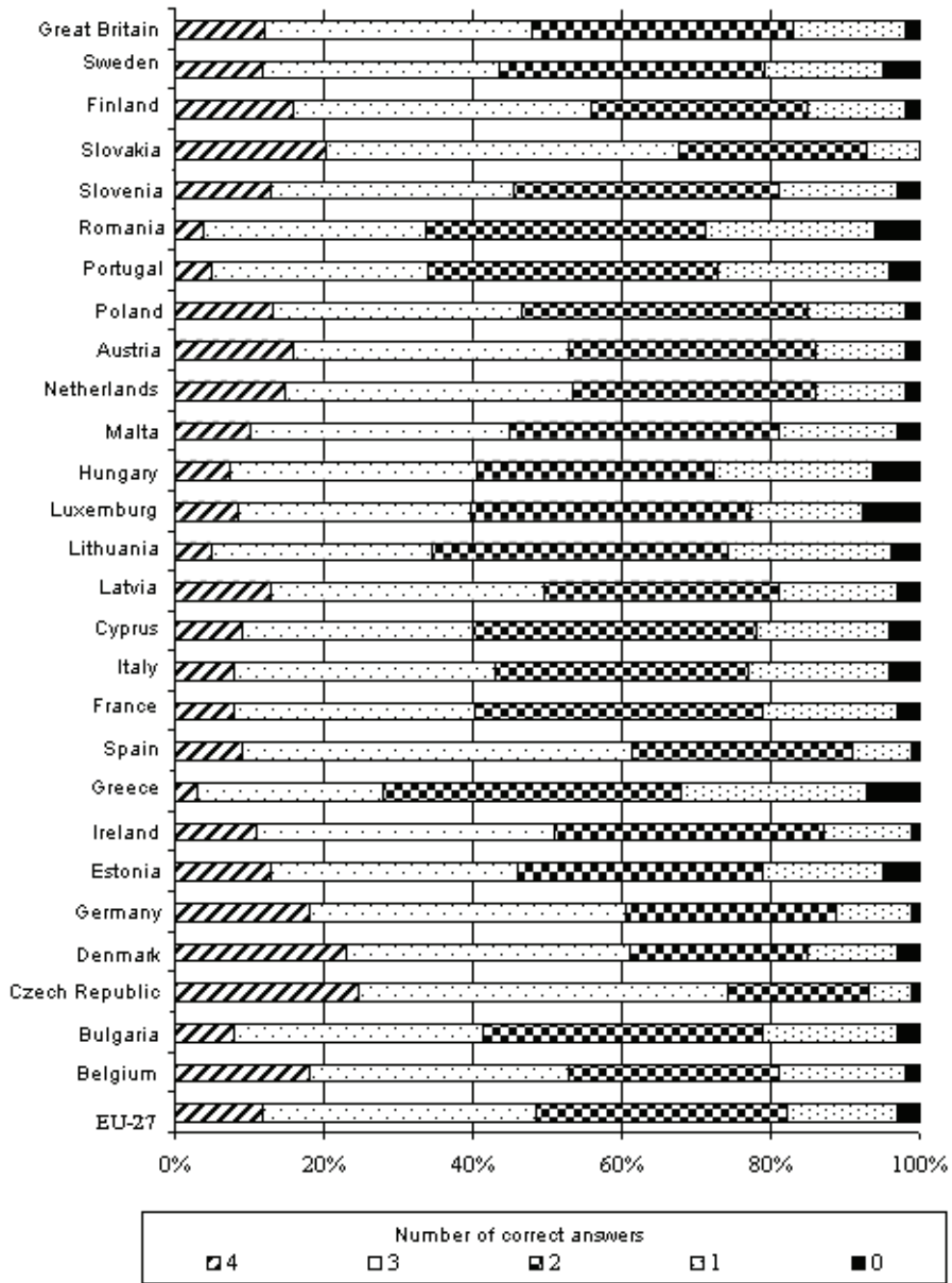


Figure no. 2: The level of knowing European legislation about consumer protection  
 Source: Flash Eurobarometer FL-358, p.6.

Romania is second last, ahead of Greece, in this ranking, proving to be an alarm signal for authorities who need to focus more on informing and promoting consumers' rights on all media channels. To this purpose, the National Authority for Consumer Protection and Non Governmental Organizations have to adopt a proactive behaviour and to go beyond just solving consumers complaints attitude. The fact that EU established only a general legal framework for consumer protection, allowing the countries to set their own rules, is reflected by the poor results of this part of the questionnaire. This issue may be a serious problem in creating a functional European Digital Single Market.

### Conclusions

A functional Digital Single Market will be viable only when consumers will acquire products and services from Internet with the same confidence as they would purchase from traditional sellers, regardless of their origin country: own country or intra –community member. At this moment, there are still important differences about the trust consumers have in their internal, national online commerce as compared to the trust they have in intra-community online commerce. This is mainly due to the lack of knowing the European legislative framework for consumer's rights and interests' protection. Taking into account all these, the authors of the present paper consider that European Union faces a dilemma and a challenge in the same time: would it be better for the integration process to restrain the sovereignty attributes of the member countries in what concerns their power to have their own legislation or to continue with the very general legislative framework for coordinating the policies of the member countries. The first option will lead to a Digital Single Market, with the advantages already mentioned, while the second option leads to a status-quo, with no real benefits for none of the parties involved.

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