



Press Release

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ANEC welcomes long-awaited European Commission proposal for web-accessibility legislation

ANEC welcomes yesterday's publication of the European Commission's proposal for mandatory provisions to ensure the accessibility of public sector web-sites by 2015¹. Many consumers with disabilities, and older consumers, are still not able to reap the benefits of the digital society, including e-government services, due to inaccessible web-sites.

"This is why we and our partners launched the 'Access Denied'² campaign in June of last year with a call for web-accessibility legislation" said ANEC Secretary-General, Stephen Russell. "Many consumers with disabilities need assistive technology, or similar help, to access the internet. For example, a blind person can access websites using text-to-speech screen reader software. But for these aids to work effectively, websites need to be designed in an accessible manner, according to accessibility standards. Unfortunately, the vast majority of websites, including public sector websites, do not apply these voluntary standards, so the information they contain is inaccessible to many consumers".

To mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities³, Mr Russell added, "Because more and more public services are delivered only on-line, several Member States have adopted national laws and standards on web-accessibility, leading to a fragmentation of the market for both consumers and business. Based on our experience in the use of standards to provide a presumption of conformity to EU product safety legislation, we proposed that web-accessibility standards should be published in the Official Journal of the European Union to ensure harmonisation of web-accessibility in the Internal Market. We also proposed a system of reporting and monitoring be set up, similar to market surveillance activities. Hence we are delighted to see the Commission has agreed with our proposals, although we regret the limited scope of the proposed Directive, as many essential services are today delivered by private bodies. We now look to the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers, who will decide on the proposal, to make sure all consumers - irrespective of age or ability - will be able to participate fully in the digital society".

ENDS

¹ <http://tinyurl.com/bodwbu4>

² <http://tinyurl.com/d2o6p7q>

³ <http://tinyurl.com/8jmb8wh>

ANEC in brief

Raising standards for consumers

ANEC is the European consumer voice in standardisation, defending consumer interests in the processes of technical standardisation and conformity assessment as well as related legislation and public policies. ANEC was established in 1995 as an international non-profit association under Belgian law and represents consumer organisations from 33 European countries. ANEC is funded by the European Union and EFTA, with national consumer organisations contributing in kind. Its Secretariat is based in Brussels.

More information: www.anec.eu

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