

THE 12TH EUROPEAN

Retail Innovation

SUMMIT 2025

Driving Competitive Retail in Europe

10 April 2025 | Brussels



Conference Report

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THE 12TH EUROPEAN



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Introduction

The 12th European Retail Innovation Summit took place on 10 April in Brussels, bringing together over 150 participants and 24 expert speakers including policymakers, industry leaders, consumer advocates, and NGOs.

The discussions focused on the future of consumer policy and retail regulation in Europe, with key themes including evolving consumer rules and digital fairness, strengthening enforcement mechanisms to support a thriving and competitive single market, and advancing the sustainability agenda. Participants explored how innovative policies and practices can drive sustainable growth, protect consumers, and enable businesses to flourish in a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

This document provides a session-by-session summary of the top-level insights and outcomes of the discussions. We hope you find it a useful resource.

Kind regards,
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Welcome Remarks: Driving Competitive Retail in Europe

The 12th European Retail Innovation Summit 2025 was opened by Christel Delberghe, Director General, EuroCommerce. She set the scene of the conference, highlighting the sector's significance as Europe's largest private sector employer - with the industry providing 26 million jobs, and its ongoing digital transformation. She touched upon the key challenges for the sector, including fierce competition, low consumer loyalty, geopolitical impacts such as US tariffs, and the need for a level playing field against unfair competition from third countries.



Furthermore, she addressed crucial issues like enforcing EU consumer law particularly against non-EU traders, leveraging AI for improved efficiency, and fostering consumer trust, which according to the Director General is currently at 70% for retailers. Ms Delberghe emphasised the need to support sustainable choices despite economic pressures and complex supply chains, advocating for regulatory simplification to maintain EU competitiveness.



THE 12TH EUROPEAN



Retail Innovation

SUMMIT 2025

Driving Competitive Retail in Europe

10 April 2025 | Brussels

Session 1:

Ensuring a Level Playing Field in European Retail

The first session was moderated by the President of SOCR CZ, the Czech Retail Federation, Tomáš Prouza. The panel discussion included Rita Wezenbeek from the European Commission, Maria Guzenina from the European Parliament, Mechteld Fletcher from the Customs Administration, Netherlands, Stephan Tromp from HDE, the German Retail Federation and Gero Furchheim from Ecommerce Europe.

The panel explored the uneven playing field in e-commerce due to the influx of often non-compliant goods, primarily from China. It also examined how the rapid rise of AI and evolving trade dynamics has exacerbated existing challenges. Panellists discussed the limitations of current legislation, like the Digital Services Act (DSA) and Digital Markets Act (DMA), in enforcing compliance. Key issues included insufficient data from platforms, inconsistent enforcement across EU member states, and the overwhelming volume of individual packages. Proposed solutions included improved EU-national coordination, a centralised data hub for customs, incentivising bulk shipments, and increased media awareness to educate consumers about the impact of non-compliant goods. While optimism for progress exists, challenges remain in achieving a level playing field and ensuring effective enforcement, particularly given the political sensitivities surrounding "cheap goods" from competing nations.

THE 12TH EUROPEAN Retail Innovation SUMMIT 2025

Driving Competitive Retail in Europe

10 April 2025 | Brussels

Session 1: Ensuring a Level Playing Field in European Retail



Rita Wezenbeek, DG CONNECT's Director of Platforms at the European Commission, who is responsible for the enforcement of the DMA and the DSA explained how the very detailed systems used are implemented to support a level playing field, which should ensure effective compliance.

Maria Guzenina, Member of the European Parliament, expressed how 'Europe needs investments, Europe needs welfare state thinking. Europe needs a vision of the future' to support a level playing field in retail. She commended European products for abiding by regulation laws, therefore making them safer for consumers, compared to their extra-EU counterparts.



THE 12TH EUROPEAN



Retail Innovation

SUMMIT 2025

Driving Competitive Retail in Europe

10 April 2025 | Brussels

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Mechteld Fletcher, Deputy Director-General of Customs, Netherlands highlighted how enormous how the flow of e-commerce parcels is with approximately 3 million e-commerce parcels entering the Netherlands per day, which works out as approximately 2000 parcels a minute. 80% of these parcels are not for the consumers in the Netherlands, adding volatility to the market and making enforcement on e-commerce unmanageable for customs administrations.

Deputy Secretary General Stephan Tromp of HDE, the German Retail Federation, highlighted that authorities in Germany are struggling to manage the significant surge in individual shipments from third countries. The newly formed German government has prioritised enforcement measures to ensure a level playing field. Tromp urged Member States and the European Commission to collaborate more effectively. Additionally, HDE has filed a complaint against Temu with the German Anti-trust Authority. Digitalisation of government, enforcement, research and businesses is key, but we need European solutions.

The President of Ecommerce Europe Gero Furchheim, stated that a level playing field is important for making use of the common market. He explained that the industry and retail would be stronger if the common market was utilised effectively.



THE 12TH EUROPEAN

Retail Innovation

SUMMIT 2025

Driving Competitive Retail in Europe

10 April 2025 | Brussels



Session 1:

Ensuring a Level Playing Field in European Retail

While optimism for progress was expressed in this session, the need for faster implementation, increased resources, and effective communication to consumers was paramount. The discussion concluded with five key takeaways: continued collaboration, better coordination, understanding time constraints for SMEs, building a compliance culture, and simplifying the discourse around retail practices for consumers.





THE 12TH EUROPEAN

Retail Innovation

SUMMIT 2025

Driving Competitive Retail in Europe

10 April 2025 | Brussels



Session 2:

Future of Retail and AI - Leveraging Innovation for Growth

The second session explored the future of AI with: DG CONNECT's Gosia Nikowska, Katinka Worsøe from the Permanent Representation of Denmark to the EU, Decathlon's Didier Mamma, Ruben Missinne from Colruyt Group and Euractiv report Jacob Wulff Wold, who moderated the session.

The conversation highlighted the widespread adoption of AI in retail for tasks like forecasting, pricing, and personalisation, but also emphasised challenges related to data quality, resistance to change, and the skills gap. The EU's AI Action Plan was discussed, focusing on its five pillars: computing (building AI factories and gigafactories), data (simplifying regulations and creating data labs), applied AI strategy (sector-specific use cases), skills (training and education), and regulatory simplification.

While acknowledging the AI Act's importance, panellists stressed the need for a balance between regulation and competitiveness, advocating for simpler, consistent legislation and improved communication about existing support initiatives like Digital Innovation Hubs (DIHs). The discussion also touched upon the need for increased investment in European AI infrastructure, including large language models and robotics, and the importance of addressing digital inclusion challenges. Finally, the need for better communication and outreach to businesses regarding available support and resources was underscored.

Retail Innovation

SUMMIT 2025

Driving Competitive Retail in Europe

10 April 2025 | Brussels

Session 2:

Future of Retail and AI - Leveraging Innovation for Growth

Gosia Nikowska, Head of Unit for Artificial Intelligence Innovation and Policy Coordination, DG CONNECT, European Commission expressed how the numbers on industrial uptake of AI are relatively low in Europe: in the latest report uptake was just 13%. She introduced the topic of supercomputers, which feature in the AI Action Plan, and how they can be used to provide faster and better results. She went on to explain how the Unit for Artificial Intelligence Innovation and Policy Coordination at DG CONNECT are building AI factories which, contrary to the name, 'don't produce anything', rather they crunch data in a better, more optimised way for artificial intelligence.





THE 12TH EUROPEAN



Retail Innovation

SUMMIT 2025

Driving Competitive Retail in Europe

10 April 2025 | Brussels

Session 2:

Future of Retail and AI - Leveraging Innovation for Growth

Katinka Worsøe, Digitalisation Attaché, Permanent Representation of Denmark to the EU highlighted that, digital competitiveness, where innovation and AI are integral to market growth, is one of the main priorities for Denmark during their upcoming Presidency of the Council of the EU, while the other is the protection of minors online.

Vice President Didier Mamma, responsible for data in-store and circularity at Decathlon, explained how they use AI extensively across the business. AI is used for forecasting, for replenishment, for marketing, as well for personalisation and even for sport.

Ruben Missinne, Data & Analytics Officer at Colruyt Group shared how their pricing in shops uses AI, based on pricing algorithms, to provide customers with the lowest cost. He further explained how creating qualitative data and making that available in the organisation is crucial.

Retail Innovation

SUMMIT 2025

Driving Competitive Retail in Europe

10 April 2025 | Brussels

Keynote Speech: Ensuring Consumer Trust in European Retail

This keynote speech by Michael McGrath, European Commissioner for Democracy, Justice, the Rule of Law and Consumer Protection, centered on the future of EU consumer policy in retail, focusing on maintaining consumer trust in a rapidly evolving digital marketplace. The Commissioner highlighted the 2025 Consumer Condition Scoreboard, revealing increased online cross-border purchases within the EU but also persistent issues costing €8 billion annually. He discussed the upcoming Digital Fairness Act (DFA), designed to address regulatory gaps without duplicating existing legislation like the DSA, and how the Comprehensive Digital Fairness Fitness Check of the EU identified persisting issues on harmful practices like dark patterns and greenwashing.





THE 12TH EUROPEAN



Retail Innovation

SUMMIT 2025

Driving Competitive Retail in Europe

10 April 2025 | Brussels

Keynote Speech: Ensuring Consumer Trust in European Retail

He explained that the DFA aims to simplify compliance and support a competitive digital environment. The speech also covered the General Product Safety Regulation (GPSR), emphasising enforcement, particularly for online imports from companies like TEMU and Shein, and the need for improved digital literacy among consumers. The private sector's role in voluntary initiatives and collaboration with the Commission was emphasised, along with the importance of clear communication and filling regulatory gaps rather than adding layers of new rules.

Following Commissioner Michael McGrath's speech, he joined Maike Jansen from Thuiswinkel.org for a short Q&A session with questions around dark patterns and the lack of digital skills due to an ageing population.



THE 12TH EUROPEAN



Retail Innovation

SUMMIT 2025

Driving Competitive Retail in Europe

10 April 2025 | Brussels

Session 3: Digital Fairness and Consumer Trust

Moderated by Maike Jansen, Public Affairs Manager, Thuiswinkel.org, this session centered on consumer trust and digital fairness in the EU, featuring representatives from the European Commission, BEUC, EuroCommerce and bol. Key concerns revolved around declining consumer trust in online retailers (down from 80% in 2020 to 70% in 2023), estimated to cost €7.9 billion annually. Panellists identified unfair commercial practices, unclear rules, and dark patterns as major contributors.

The Digital Fairness Act was discussed extensively, with concerns raised about its potential impact on innovation and competitiveness due to regulatory burdens. While the DFA aims to improve consumer protection and enforcement, concerns remain about its complexity, potential overlaps with existing legislation (like the DSA), and the effectiveness of current enforcement mechanisms, especially the Consumer Protection Cooperation (CPC) framework. Panellists emphasised the need for clearer definitions of "dark patterns", improved cross-border enforcement, and increased consumer awareness.



THE 12TH EUROPEAN



Retail Innovation

SUMMIT 2025

Driving Competitive Retail in Europe

10 April 2025 | Brussels

Session 3: Digital Fairness and Consumer Trust

The discussion highlighted the need for a balanced approach, protecting consumers without stifling innovation, and the importance of collaboration between the Commission, businesses, and consumer organisations to achieve a fair and trustworthy digital marketplace. The upcoming Consumer Summit in May was mentioned as a platform for further discussion and potential announcements regarding the new Consumer Agenda.

Maria-Myrto Kanellopoulou, Head of Unit, Consumer Law, European Commission kicked off this panel by detailing how the Commission's evidence very much supports the current trend in consumer trust, demonstrating that when a consumer protection framework is in place, consumer confidence and trust rises. The Head of Unit also pointed out how the Consumer Protection Cooperation Framework has shortcomings when it comes to consumer law and therefore relies heavily on the coordination of 27 national systems and national authorities.





THE 12TH EUROPEAN



Retail Innovation

SUMMIT 2025

Driving Competitive Retail in Europe

10 April 2025 | Brussels

Session 3: Digital Fairness and Consumer Trust

Head of Consumer Rights at BEUC, Patrycja Gautier gave a quick overview of BEUC's role as an umbrella organisation representing more than 40 consumer organisations across Europe. In her discussions, she expressed that without consumers being confident in the market, there is no growth nor enhanced competitiveness. Upon being asked about the Digital Fairness Act, Patrycja felt positive about this initiative which will help foster better consumer protection.

Ilya Bruggeman, Director for Digital, Single Market, and Consumer Policy at EuroCommerce, emphasised the significance of a 'safe online environment' as a cornerstone for building consumer trust in digital retail. He underlined the importance of ensuring that consumers can rely on the protection of their data, as well as the safety and compliance of the products and services offered. Bruggeman highlighted that the effective and efficient enforcement of consumer protection regulations is essential to fostering consumer confidence and maintaining a fair competitive landscape in retail. He noted that the forthcoming CPC review will play a critical role in strengthening cross-border enforcement.



THE 12TH EUROPEAN



Retail Innovation

SUMMIT 2025

Driving Competitive Retail in Europe

10 April 2025 | Brussels

Session 3: Digital Fairness and Consumer Trust

Jorn Palm, General Counsel for bol shared that 'customer trust has been at the heart of our company' and 'at bol, we stand ready to cooperate with the Commission, policymakers, regulators, [and] consumer organisations by sharing our best practices, insights and even our data if that helps in creating a more safe environment for our customers'. Jorn further explained, in relation to legislation, that bol has 47,000 partners selling on their platform ranging from bigger sellers to SME companies, who work hard to comply with all the rules, but find it difficult.



THE 12TH EUROPEAN



Retail Innovation

SUMMIT 2025

Driving Competitive Retail in Europe

10 April 2025 | Brussels

Session 4:

Driving Sustainable Consumer Choice In European Retail

The conversation on driving sustainable choices in European retail explored the complexities of balancing environmental responsibility with consumer preferences and economic realities. Key themes included the need for clearer and more accessible product information, particularly regarding sustainability claims; the role of e-commerce in promoting circularity and secondhand markets; and the challenges of implementing effective eco-design regulations and Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes. Participants highlighted the importance of a harmonised approach across the EU, addressing issues like the digital product passport, VAT implications for refurbished goods, and the need for a "circular lens" in policymaking.

While acknowledging the difficulties of navigating differing national regulations and the competitive pressures of global markets (particularly from China), panellists emphasised the potential for digital solutions to improve transparency, simplify compliance, and empower consumers to make more sustainable choices. Amazon's Climate Pledge Friendly programme was cited as a successful example of how retailers can influence consumer behaviour.



THE 12TH EUROPEAN



Retail Innovation

SUMMIT 2025

Driving Competitive Retail in Europe

10 April 2025 | Brussels

Session 4:

Driving Sustainable Consumer Choice In European Retail

The Moderator William Parker, Parker Advisory EU, extracted interesting insights from each of the panellists. Aurel Ciobanu-Dordea, Director of Circular Economy within DG ENVI at the European Commission explained how voluntary measures such as the environmental footprint rules for organisations and for products need structure and further explanation so that businesses can better understand what is expected of them, and also so that consumers can make more informed choices.

Juliette Beaulaton, Ecommerce Europe, discussed one key but tricky angle, which is how sustainability information is delivered to consumers in a way they can understand clearly and appreciate its convenience, at the right time and under the right format. She also discussed the circular economy, highlighting the issue that nowadays current and future frameworks tend to be designed to support new products, leading to a drift in the suitability of frameworks for existing products; Something that Beaulaton focuses on a lot with members is 'how does that impact existing products' and 'how does that impact how we can reuse the products that are on the market?'.

Session 4:

Driving Sustainable Consumer Choice In European Retail

Amber Bechrouri from Amazon stated how Amazon has 350 logistics sites in Europe with tens of thousands of European sellers, and are delivering millions of customer orders every day. She honed in on three examples of driving sustainable choice for consumers, namely packaging, consumer choice and simplification.

The discussion concluded with a call for greater collaboration between policymakers, retailers, manufacturers, and consumers to create a truly sustainable and competitive European market.



Retail Innovation

SUMMIT 2025

Driving Competitive Retail in Europe

10 April 2025 | Brussels

Keynote Speech and Closing Remarks

To round off the conference, the European Commission's Executive Vice President for Tech Sovereignty, Security and Democracy, Henna Virkkunen, delivered a keynote address, introduced by Luca Cassetti from Ecommerce Europe. The EVP outlined that each session's discussions were key pillars in the European Union's retail sector. Executive Vice President Virkkunen focused on the EU's commitment to simplifying regulations and reducing red tape for businesses. She stated that the European Union has the strongest rules on consumer protection and product safety in the world, which is an asset since the framework applies to all products offered to EU consumers irrespective of the country of origin. The Executive Vice President also called attention to the new General Product Safety Regulation and the Digital Services Act, requiring online marketplaces to act in a responsible way when facilitating e-commerce transactions between traders and consumers.





THE 12TH EUROPEAN



Retail Innovation

SUMMIT 2025

Driving Competitive Retail in Europe

10 April 2025 | Brussels

Keynote Speech and Closing Remarks

Moreover, initiatives to boost AI innovation and investment, including the AI Continent Action Plan, and promote sustainable practices through eco-design and digital product passports, were summarised. During her speech, EVP Virkkunen encouraged companies to invest in sustainability, but also emphasised how consumers can support them by making informed choices. She highlighted Europe as a leader in retail and sees a coherent vision when it comes to fairness, competition, innovation, trust and sustainability. Virkkunen concluded her speech by expressing how the retail sector is a key part in the Commission's overall competitiveness agenda. Luca Cassetti joined the EVP for a Q&A session that was opened up to the audience. Popular questions featured the avoidance of overlapping consumer protection frameworks. The session ended on a light hearted note with Virkkunen answering a 'personal question' surrounding her own shopping habits, where she tends to shop online due to the early closing times in Belgium compared to her home nation of Finland where she could shop in person in the evenings, using the opportunity to outline how consumer law and practices can impact on consumer habits.

Ending the conference, Luca Cassetti from Ecommerce Europe briefly recapped the day and provided some key takeaways:

- The need for stronger enforcement of existing rules
- Consistent AI legislation and increased funding for the European AI ecosystem
- Being mindful of increasing regulatory pressure on businesses

THE 12TH EUROPEAN Retail Innovation SUMMIT 2025

Driving Competitive Retail in Europe

10 April 2025 | Brussels

Conclusion

As the need for continued collaboration on the future of European retail is needed, we expect this to be a topic of continued interest for policymakers, industry leaders, consumer advocates, and NGOs.





THE 12TH EUROPEAN

Retail Innovation

SUMMIT 2025

Driving Competitive Retail in Europe

10 April 2025 | Brussels



Further Information

To learn more about the work of our event partners, **Ecommerce Europe** and **EuroCommerce**, the links below provide a report on 'Digital Fairness in Online Retail', the webpage on '#Compliance4All – Retailers call for a level playing field', and the open letter on level playing field:

- [Report of the study on “Digital Fairness in Online Retail”](#)
- [#Compliance4All – Retailers call for a level playing field](#)
- [Open letter on urgent need for a level playing field and effective enforcement of EU law towards all e-commerce players active in the EU Single Market](#)



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Retail Innovation

SUMMIT 2025

Driving Competitive Retail in Europe

10 April 2025 | Brussels

Thank You

We'd like to thank our speakers for their insightful contributions to the discussions, and our sponsor Amazon for making this event happen. We'd also like to thank our supporting partners, Ecommerce Europe and EuroCommerce both for their valuable support of the conference.

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