

## ECU General Assembly

29 January 2021  
from 10:00 to 12:40 CET

### Welcome address and keynote presentation

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Never before has the whole of humanity shared the same tragedy, at the same moment, regardless of social and geopolitical conditions.

2020 was probably the worst year we have known since the end of World War II. But, for the European Union, it was a year of extraordinary progress, confirming the prophecy of Jean Monnet, according to which Europe would be "the sum of the solutions that will be found for its crises".

It began with the green turning point of the green deal, announced by Ursula Von Der Leyen in her inauguration speech as the new Commission President.

Then, there was the Copernican revolution of the Next Generation EU, the 750 billion euro program to get out of the economic crisis triggered by the epidemic, which involves the creation of a common European debt and the imposition of common European taxes to finance it.

The authorities have finally moved to counter the excessive power of Big Tech and fight tax evasion. The approval of rules to protect the rule of law in all member countries, extended to the majority of them, has confirmed that the Union is a community founded on liberal values and determined to defend them for all its citizens, even against the will of this or that government.

Finally, the coordination of the Covid containment measures showed a new awareness of the need to work together. Overall, therefore, great progress. But none of these results are acquired.

The Commission will have to launch a European tax system to finance the debt contracted on the markets.

The green deal is called to demonstrate European leadership in the green economy and the pandemic reminds us that one cannot remain "healthy" by inhabiting a sick planet.

The Digital Service Act and the Digital Market Act will be tested by a tug-of-war with the masters of the web. But if we want to defend democracy it is urgent to hand over power to the public, entrust the management of our data to the institutions and at the same time increase our digital skills.

The Covid vaccination campaign will have to beat the epidemic as quickly as possible, allowing the European economy to restart. Furthermore, the pandemic implies setbacks for many of the 17 sustainable development goals contained in the 2030 Agenda, from the fight against poverty to health and education, from income and employment development to business conditions, from reducing inequality to quality of life.

For these reasons, citizens' associations, trade unions and businesses must engage with their energies and resources and, if possible, coordinate with each other.

#### Contact person

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In particular, consumer associations can:

- i) play a role of proposal towards the European and national institutions, coordinating, where possible, with the companies and the competent regulatory authorities;
- ii) carry out monitoring and control of services, upon which to report any breaches by companies or gaps in legislation or regulations, also and above all in relation to the digital economy;
- iii) actively participate in conciliation mechanisms to exercise an active role also in the protections;
- iv) train and inform operators and consumers to create awareness of the issues, rights and solutions;
- v) organize collective actions in defence of citizens, of course when the new European directive is adopted by the individual states.

ECU will put the issues of sustainability and digital democracy, which concern the present but above all the future of the new generations, at the center of its design strategy. To this end, it will be necessary that all members make their contribution:

- by providing data and information on its own reality and initiatives;  
representing one's point of view on an ethical, social and economic level and of course participating in the governance of ECU in the ways that we will decide together.

Basically, the problem we face is that of building an association that is able to contribute to the defense of the European institutions and consumers. So far we have managed to bring together 23 associations from 16 countries and produce some significant initiatives.

It was not easy, but now, in front of us, we have the most difficult task and today we start talking about it.

Thanks.

Sergio Veroli  
President of *European Consumers Union*

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