

The automotive aftermarket needs rules to ensure fair competition. Decisions in the coming months could make or break them

Legislation key for competitiveness

Competition is a fundamental principle in the automotive aftermarket, ensuring quality, choice and affordable service and maintenance for consumers. The legislator and the European Court of Justice have developed a robust legal framework that fosters competition. However, this framework requires permanent adaptation to keep pace with a changing market environment.

The message from the community of automotive suppliers is clear, most recently articulated at CLEPA's Aftermarket Conference, which took place in Brussels on 20 and 21 March: the most relevant legislation, especially for the independent automotive repair and service market, is the provision for access to vehicle repair and maintenance information (RMI), including the authorised access to the vehicles' on-board diagnostics (OBD) ports as regulated in the type-approval regulation EU 858/2018.

CLEPA is contributing to the ongoing work at the European Commission on potential amendments to the existing regulation. Such amendments should reflect a variety of technical and regulatory developments and the views and interests of the entire value chain, including vehicle manufacturers, equipment suppliers as well as independent aftermarket operators. To foster competition, CLEPA calls for a balanced and comprehensive amendment, including access to all vehicle interfaces and RMI provisions, rather than a solution that would cover only particular aspects.

An equally important legislative pillar is the Motor Vehicle Block Exemption Regulation (MVBER), which allows vertical agreements for repair and maintenance services as long as they do not breach competition laws. This provision ensures that aftermarket parts are available from many providers, offering consumers freedom of choice and a large number of up-to-date service solutions. The MVBER was last extended until 31 May, 2028, and CLEPA expects that the legislation will continue beyond this period.

In a sector where change is happening at such a high pace, and technologies including artificial intelligence and connectivity, continue to open new opportunities for business practices, both large and small actors must adapt and be capable of doing so. In this context, a clear and robust regulatory environment, including access to in-vehicle data, is mandatory for creating a level playing field for all stakeholders who are involved and willing to invest further in the automotive service and repair market.

Challenge ahead

It is no secret that the automotive industry as a whole is facing challenges. Europe is currently at a cross-roads where it must decide on the best ways to revitalise a once thriving industry. CLEPA's recent "[Data Digest](#)" report on market developments shows the concerning trend of growing job loss and a shift in investments away from the supply industry in EU countries, while other regions,

including China and the US, are seeing more positive projections as well as political resolve – e.g., the Inflation Reduction Act, which has boosted the US’ attractiveness for investments.

These developments call for a recalibration of Europe’s industrial and competitiveness policies. This will in large part be done by maintaining and implementing legislative practices that nurture a fair and competitive market, delivering on the EU’s transition and growth targets.

We see fresh attention on European competitiveness in the public policy debate. The coming months will show if policy makers fill the abstract commitment with life.

Benjamin Krieger

CLEPA Secretary General