

WORLD NEWS

France Eliminates Midseason Retail Promotional Periods

Law Would Prohibit Sales Outside of the Long Winter and Summer Sales

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By MARION HALFTERMEYER
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PARIS—French consumers like getting a good deal as much as anyone. But now they'll be getting fewer of them, possibly curbing the government's efforts to increase consumer spending.

Just a day after the summer sales kicked off, the French government on Thursday announced a law eliminating midseason sales. In France, like in many European countries, the dates of sale seasons are regulated by the government, and stores aren't allowed to hold sales outside those dates.

The new law, which would take effect in January, would prohibit sales outside of the long winter and summer sales.

The law illustrates the government's delicate balancing act as it tries to jump-start economic growth. It is set to please retailers, many of whom found the midseason sales costly and hard to implement. But it isn't likely to be popular with consumers.

"I wait for the sales to do all of my shopping and only buy at full price if I need something specific," said Juliette Herbonnez, a 23-year-old Parisian. Ms. Herbonnez said she developed a habit of shopping during all the sale periods and was happy with the two extra weeks of sales.

In 2008, the former center-right government added two weeks of sales to the season, that retailers could decide to hold when they want. It gave retailers a chance to lure shoppers in more frequently.

But the extra sales, dubbed floating weeks, were less popular with retailers.

Fewer retailers took advantage of the midseason sales because of the cost of staging them, the secretary of state for retail said in a statement. Consumers were also confused by the sales, the government said.

"We found ourselves with sales all year round, it didn't make any sense," said Patrice lochem, who runs the French Federation of Retail Associations.

Customers began expecting sales in every store all year round instead of occasionally buying at the full price, Mr. lochem said. The introduction of floating sales forced stores to sell more of their merchandise at a discount, weighing on revenue, Mr. lochem added.

French commerce secretary of state Carole Delga officially kicked off the start of the summer sales Wednesday with a ribbon-cutting at the Galeries Lafayette, Paris's famous department store. Crowds of shoppers streamed in starting early in the morning to snag discounts, with price discounts as much as 50%.

"The sales were something exceptional, and then became commonplace," Mr. lochem said. "This new law will turn things back the way they were, where stores can sell their collections at full prices and sell off the rest during the sale seasons."

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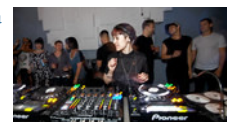
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