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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL,
THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND
SOCIAL COMMITTEE**

EU Consumer Policy strategy 2007-2013

Empowering consumers, enhancing their welfare, effectively protecting them

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(Text with EEA relevance)

1. SUMMARY

The 493 million EU consumers are central to the three main challenges facing the EU: growth, jobs and the need to re-connect with our citizens. They are the lifeblood of the economy as their consumption represents 58% of EU GDP. Confident, informed and empowered consumers are the motor of economic change as their choices drive innovation and efficiency. But it is also in their role as consumers that the EU can most directly connect to the daily lives of our citizens and demonstrate the benefits of the EU.

The response to these challenges lies in equipping the consumer with the skills and tools to fulfil their role in the modern economy; in making markets deliver for them and in ensuring effective protection from the risks and threats they cannot tackle as individuals.

The internal market has played a central part in meeting Europe's economic challenges and delivering tangible benefits for EU citizens. But the consumer dimension of the internal market and retail markets in particular needs to be further reinforced. The new economic, social, environmental and political context calls for a change in focus of EU policy towards consumers.

The place of EU consumer policy will be at the heart of the next phase of the internal market, as set out in the Commission's communication to the Spring European Council on the Single Market Review¹.

The internal market has the potential to be the largest retail market² in the world. Today, it remains largely fragmented along national lines, forming 27 mini-markets instead. The advent of the e-commerce revolution, which has still not reached critical mass, has transformed the potential for integration of retail markets in the EU to give a major stimulus to competitiveness and expand the opportunities for EU citizens. While the technological means are increasingly in place, business and consumer behaviour lags far behind, restrained respectively by internal market obstacles and a lack of confidence in cross-border shopping.

¹ A SINGLE MARKET FOR CITIZENS Interim report to the 2007 Spring European Council Brussels - COM(2007) 60, 21.2.2007.

² Retail market covers economic transactions made between economic operators and final consumers (consumers operating outside their professional life), sometimes called the B2C (business-to-consumer) market. Businesses, however small, in their role as purchasers are not addressed in this strategy.

As well as tackling the fragmentation of the internal market, a stronger consumer dimension is needed to improve the functioning of consumer markets. Final outcomes for consumers in economic and non-economic terms are the ultimate arbiter of whether markets are failing or succeeding in terms of citizens' expectations. Markets that respond more efficiently to consumer demand will perform better in competitiveness and innovation terms and be more in tune with the lives and goals of EU citizens. EU consumer policy can do much to shift the focus of regulation towards citizen-focused outcomes. It can also address market failures that harm consumer welfare and social and economic inclusion by guaranteeing access to essential services at affordable prices. It can provide the market tools to empower citizens, as consumers, to make sustainable environmental choices. It can also play a part in guaranteeing core European values of fairness, openness, solidarity, sustainability and transparency and exporting them internationally.

This is an ambitious agenda for a relatively young EU policy. But the tools are available. In the period 2007-2013, consumer policy is uniquely well placed to help the EU rise to the challenges of growth and jobs and re-connecting with its citizens.

The EU will know if it has succeeded if by 2013 it can credibly demonstrate to all EU citizens that they can shop from anywhere in the EU, from corner-shop to website, confident they are equally effectively protected, whether from dangerous products or rogue traders; and to be able to demonstrate to all retailers, but especially SMEs, that they can sell anywhere on the basis of a single, simple set of rules.

In April 2005 the Commission adopted a joint strategy for health and consumer policy from 2007-2013³. In order to respond to a demand from stakeholders, the Council and European Parliament, this strategy develops the strategy for consumer policy further. An analysis of the main outcomes of the Consumer Policy Strategy 2002-2006 together with an Impact Assessment are set out in staff working papers.

2. INTRODUCTION AND MAIN CHALLENGES

2.1. Complex markets, confident consumers

Consumer policy is increasingly at the crossroads of the main challenges that face our citizens, economy and societies. The sophistication of retail markets is increasing the role of consumers. The greater empowerment of consumers has also led to greater responsibilities for them to manage their own affairs. While many can benefit, the most vulnerable are less well equipped – and the growth in consumption by children and an ageing population are increasing the number of more vulnerable consumers. Our need for confident consumers to drive our economies has never been greater however.

Services in general and liberalised services in particular are set to grow, as electricity, gas, post and telecommunications liberalisation develops further. While considerable benefits can be expected, the transition will pose challenges for consumers and regulators to ensure consumer welfare is maximised. Goods and services will be increasingly interlinked.

³ "Healthier, Safer, more confident citizens: a health and consumer protection strategy" - COM(2005) 115.

The technological revolution brought about by the Internet and digitalisation will also grow even faster. The key driver is the rollout of broadband technology, which is likely to give a significant boost to e-commerce. E-commerce has great potential to improve consumer welfare, by making a greater range of products available, boosting price competition and developing new markets. It also brings significant new challenges for consumers, business and consumer protection. In particular it weakens the grip of traditional advertising and retail mediums over consumer markets. This will challenge traditional modes of regulation, self-regulation and enforcement. SMEs will have more direct access to consumers and goods and services will be increasingly tailored to the individual. But traditional consumer rights will be less and less adapted to the digital age.

Globalisation of production will also continue; leading to ever more goods consumed in the EU being imported. Traders will increasingly sell to EU consumers via e-commerce from anywhere in the world. This increases the challenge, but also the need to ensure effective market surveillance.

2.2. The role for EU consumer policy

The internal market has the potential to be in economic terms the biggest retail market in the world. EU Consumer policy is therefore central to addressing the changes set out under 2.1. It can address problems that individuals lack the capacity to tackle. It ensures goods and services are safe and that markets are fair and transparent, so that consumers can exercise informed choice and rogue traders are excluded. Consumer policy can equip consumers to make rational choices and take on responsibility to promote their own interests. Consumer confidence in the operation of the internal market will also serve to make the EU a trusted destination for e-commerce from the rest of the world.

The EU's role in managing these changes will continue to increase. The internal market remains the fundamental context for consumer policy. Consumer policy is also key to improving the functioning of the internal market. The 2004 and 2007 enlargements of the internal market have brought specific new challenges. The relatively recent development of open markets and adoption of consumer protection rules in these Member States mean that the rights and obligations found in EU consumer policy are less deeply ingrained in the behaviour of consumers, enforcement agencies and businesses.

Retail markets remain predominantly fragmented along national lines, although for a growing number of sectors, for example air travel and music, technological obstacles to an integrated EU retail market no longer remain. The potential therefore exists for deeper EU-wide retail markets. Opening up cross-border retail markets is the key to unlocking the potential of the retail internal market. As cross-border shopping develops as a credible alternative to national markets, consumers both have greater choice and national markets are subject to greater competition. This 'integration effect' does not require all or even most consumers to do most of their shopping across border. The Commission's experience in removing obstacles to the cross-border sale of new vehicles shows that it is enough for cross-border shopping to be a credible alternative for competition to be enhanced in domestic markets.

There are some signs that the cross-border retail market is growing in the EU. In 2006, 26% of consumers made at least one cross-border purchase in the previous twelve months,

compared to 12% in 2003⁴. E-commerce is becoming a more popular sales channel: in 2006 27% of all consumers made a purchase through e-commerce but only 6% did so across borders. 50% of consumer with an internet connection at home made e-commerce purchases but only 12% of them across borders. 57% of EU retailers (mostly SMEs) sell through e-commerce and 49% of them would be prepared to sell cross-border in at least one EU country⁵. But only 29% actually do so. The figures for financial services are even more striking: 26% of consumers have bought a financial service at a distance from a seller or provider based in their home country, but only 1% have done so cross-border. These figures show the need for action to increase consumer confidence in the retail side of the internal market.

The obstacles to a fully-fledged retail internal market are numerous – as well as a lack of confidence there are also regulatory obstacles. National consumer policy cannot resolve these issues alone. A start has been made to tackle the most important – the Unfair Commercial Practices (UCP) directive⁶, the Regulation on Consumer Protection Cooperation (CPC)⁷ and the European Consumer Centre (ECC) Network⁸ provide a solid start. The euro has also greatly facilitated cross-border price comparison for consumers. However, significant obstacles remain, notably in the area of consumer contracts and redress.

The Treaty also mandates the integration of consumer interests into all EU policies. As set out in the Commission's communication on the Single Market Review, the consumer dimension should play a greater part in the development of all single market related policies.

3. OBJECTIVES

In the period 2007-2013, consumer policy is uniquely well placed to help the EU rise to the twin challenges of growth and jobs and re-connecting with its citizens. The Commission will have three main objectives over this period:

- To empower EU consumers. Putting consumers in the driving seat benefits citizens but also boosts competition significantly. Empowered consumers need real choices, accurate information, market transparency and the confidence that comes from effective protection and solid rights.
- To enhance EU consumers' welfare in terms of price, choice, quality, diversity, affordability and safety. Consumer welfare is at the heart of well-functioning markets.

⁴ Special Eurobarometer No 252 "Consumer protection in the Internal Market", http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/topics/eurobarometer_09-2006_en.pdf

⁵ Flash Eurobarometer No 186 "Business attitudes towards cross-border sales and consumer protection" http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/topics/flash_eb_186_ann_report_en.pdf

⁶ Directive 2005/29/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 May 2005 concerning unfair business-to-consumer commercial practices in the internal market (OJ L 149, 11.6.2005, p. 22).

⁷ Regulation (EC) No 2006/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 October 2004 on cooperation between national authorities responsible for the enforcement of consumer protection laws (OJ L 364, 9.12.2004, p. 1).

⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/redress/ecc_network/index_en.htm

- To protect consumers effectively from the serious risks and threats that they cannot tackle as individuals. A high level of protection against these threats is essential to consumer confidence.

The Commission's aim is to achieve in this way by 2013 a more integrated and more effective internal market, in particular the retail dimension. Consumers will have an equally high level of confidence in products, traders, technologies and selling methods in retail markets throughout the EU based on an equally high level of protection. Consumer markets will be competitive, open, transparent and fair. Products and services will be safe. Consumers will have access to essential services at affordable prices. Traders, but especially SMEs, will be able to market and sell simply to consumers throughout the EU.

In achieving these three objectives the Commission will be guided by the relevant articles of the Treaty which are also reflected in the operational objectives of the new consumer financial programme 2007-2013⁹ which sets out the legal framework for EU consumer policy expenditure in the period covered by the strategy:

- (a) To ensure a high level of consumer protection through a simple legal framework, improved evidence, better consultation and better representation of consumers' interests.
- (b) To ensure the effective application of the rules notably through enforcement cooperation, information, education and redress.

Although the financial resources for consumer policy are limited, the programme provides a number of different instruments to support the priorities set out below, notably on consumer enforcement, information and education.

4. PRIORITIES

These objectives reflect a high degree of continuity with previous EU consumer policy goals. 2007-2013 will however see a change in gear from the past and different priorities for action. In particular EU consumer policy will interact more closely with other policies both at EU level. Much closer cooperation with the Member States will also be pursued, reflecting the growing interdependence between EU and national consumer policies. There have been suggestions that the circumstances of consumers in the 12 new Member States call for a completely separate strategy¹⁰. In its consultations on the present document the Commission found little support for this view. To attain the objectives set out above, EU consumer policy will focus on the following priority areas:

Better monitoring of consumer markets and national consumer policies

Better Regulation and the need to re-connect with EU citizens call for the greater development of monitoring tools and indicators to assess market function in consumer terms. Policymakers also need to develop a more sophisticated understanding of consumer behaviour to devise better regulation. Tools are needed to monitor markets in terms of core outcomes such as safety, satisfaction, price and complaints but also to monitor better the integration of

⁹ Decision No 1926/2006/EC of 18 December 2006 (OJ L 404, 30.12.2006, p. 39).

¹⁰ European Parliament resolution of 15 December 2005 on the promotion and protection of consumers' interests in the new Member States.

the retail internal market and the effectiveness of national consumer policy regimes. To reflect the significant contribution of national consumer policy to competitiveness, consumer policy should be recognised in the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy at EU and national level. Consumer and competition policymakers and enforcers at EU and national level should cooperate more closely to further their common goal of consumer welfare.

Better consumer protection regulation

The existing consumer protection rules at EU level guarantee core consumer protection in all Member States. In many, they are the cornerstone of national consumer protection regimes. However, the EU contribution is not widely known by consumers, although, it is a reality in their daily lives. For example, as many as 15% of consumers have returned a defective product in the previous twelve months¹¹ a right which is guaranteed by the EU rules. The EU rules are also increasingly ill adapted to the digital economy revolution in products, services and retail channels. The Commission has recently launched a major consultation¹².

Most of the existing EU consumer rules are based on the principle of ‘minimum harmonisation’. Legislation explicitly recognises the right of Member States to add stricter rules to the EU rules which set a floor. This approach was entirely valid at a time when consumer rights were very different between the Member States and e-commerce was non-existent. The previous strategy¹³ set out a new approach based on “full harmonisation”. This simply means that, in order both to improve the internal market and to protect consumers, legislation should not, within its given scope, leave room for further rules at national level.

The Commission’s recent Green Paper set out the three main options: full harmonisation, possibly complemented on a case-by-case basis by mutual recognition for certain non essential aspects not fully harmonised; minimum harmonisation with mutual recognition; minimum harmonisation with the country of origin approach.

In future, each regulatory problem and the need for any proposals will continue to be judged on its own merits and the full range of regulatory instruments considered. If legislative proposals are identified as the appropriate response, targeted full harmonisation of consumer protection rules at an appropriately high level will tend to be the Commission’s approach. The Commission will also carry out a robust Impact Assessment of any legislative proposals and work closely with stakeholders to understand fully the impact of the different options and to build consensus on the way forward so that consumer policy is a model of Better Regulation.

The choice the EU faces is a clear one: if it is serious about the growth and jobs agenda, it needs a well-functioning Internal Market. A well-functioning Internal Market requires harmonisation on certain issues. Harmonisation is not possible without Member States’ willingness to adjust certain practices and rules. At the same time, the Commission will not instigate a race to the bottom. It will always strive for a high level of protection.

¹¹ Special Eurobarometer No 252 "Consumer protection in the Internal Market", http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/topics/eurobarometer_09-2006_en.pdf

¹² GREEN PAPER on the Review of the Consumer Acquis - COM(2006) 744.

¹³ Consumer policy strategy 2002-2006 - COM(2002) 208.

Better enforcement and redress

The previous strategy placed a strong emphasis on enforcement and this will continue. The application of consumer law calls for action from many actors: consumers; traders, the media, consumer NGO's, self-regulatory bodies and public authorities. Action will focus on implementing the initiatives that have been started, filling the gaps that remain and ensuring coordination and coherence. The Commission will also monitor the effectiveness of national enforcement regimes through surveys and other tools.

Better informed and educated consumers

The EU can add significant value to national, regional and local efforts to inform and educate consumers, through close cooperation with the Member States. In particular the European Consumer Centre network should develop further as the EU's interface with consumers.

Putting consumers at the heart of other EU policies and regulation

Consumers are directly affected by many EU policies such as the internal market, enterprise, environment, financial services, transport, competition, energy and trade. Progress has been made in the integration of consumer interests notably in product safety, transport, telecommunications, energy, and competition. The aim for the future is to build on these achievements in order to make integration of consumer interests more systematic.

There are two main issues to be addressed. First, while liberalisation of essential services has delivered considerable benefits for most consumers, safeguards will continue to be needed for the few for who markets do not work. Affordable access to essential services for all is both essential for a modern and flexible economy but also for social inclusion. Showing that no consumer is left behind will also help to sustain political support for measures on essential services. Second, measures at EU level also require a greater emphasis on the monitoring of key consumer markets to ensure positive outcomes for consumers. Finally, essential services also need stronger guarantees of market transparency and better complaint and redress mechanisms.

5. ACTIONS

Although these priorities are specific to EU consumer policy, an evaluation of impact of the previous strategy¹⁴ on national consumer policies showed that there is a high degree of overlap with national policies. In order to ensure close coordination with national consumer policies the existing Consumer Policy Network of senior consumer policy officials will provide a forum for policy coordination and development.

5.1. Better monitoring of consumer markets and national consumer policies

A number of new tools are needed to develop a consumer-oriented **monitoring** of the internal market. Indicators and statistics will be developed in the following area: the level of cross-border B2C trade; price convergence/divergence, legal compliance, confidence, consumer complaints, prices, access and satisfaction. In addition work will be carried out to develop a

¹⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/overview/cons_policy/index_en.htm

richer understanding of consumer **behaviour**, in particular to understand how rational consumers are in practice and how new technologies and marketing practices affect them.

The Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technology Development will also be used to increase understanding of consumer behaviour. In relation to consumer economic interests and product safety, as well as food and health, research actions and funding schemes are planned to reduce the fragmentation of research activities in consumer science, by bringing together disciplines such as economics, social and cognitive sciences. The strengthening of this discipline on its own will help the Commission to make better policies and regulation on the basis of a more empirical understanding of consumer behaviour across a range of EU policies.

A more systematic monitoring of **national consumer policies**, using benchmarks, will also be developed. Across EU policies, the Commission will seek to develop consumer-oriented, statistics and data gathering. There is a significant lack of consumer and demand-side statistics. Eurostat has a significant role to play in gathering 'hard' consumer data, such as that on comparable prices and validating 'soft' statistics.

In the safety area, the main priorities will be the EU wide system for the collection of harmonised data on product and service related **accidents and injuries**; improvement of the evidence base on the risks related to the safety of products and services; and the existing joint research project EIS-Chem Risks (the European Information System on “Risks from chemical products released from consumer products/articles”).

5.2. Better consumer protection regulation

The ongoing review is designed to modernise the EU consumer rules, simplify and improve the regulatory environment for both business and consumers. The Commission's initial findings and possible options are set out in the Green Paper on the **review of the Consumer Acquis**, adopted on 8 February 2007. If further work confirms the preliminary findings, the Commission will make proposals in 2008. Any proposals would also represent the first outcomes of the Commission's work on a common frame of reference for European contract law.

The Commission will also address problems that are specific to particular directives. So far, a number of problems related to long term tourism products have been identified and a proposal will be made to amend the **Timeshare Directive**¹⁵ in 2007. Work will continue to ensure the adoption of the proposal¹⁶ for a new Directive on **consumer credit**. The Commission will report on Directive 2002/65/EC concerning the **distance marketing of consumer financial services**¹⁷.

The Commission will report in 2007 on the operation of the **General Product Safety Directive**¹⁸ (GPSD) Directive, covering: the improved traceability of products; functioning of

¹⁵ Directive 94/47/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of 26 October 1994 on the protection of purchasers in respect of certain aspects of contracts relating to the purchase of the right to use immovable properties on a timeshare basis (OJ L 280, 29.10.1994, p. 83).

¹⁶ COM(2005) 483.

¹⁷ Directive 2002/65/EC of 23 September 2002 concerning the distance marketing of consumer financial services (OJ L 271, 9.10.2002, p. 16).

¹⁸ Directive 2001/95/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 3 December 2001 on general product safety (OJ L 11, 15.1.2002, p. 4).

market surveillance; standardisation work; and Community prohibition measures. The 'New Approach' to product safety regulation and the GPSD have considerably increased the importance of **standards** as a legislative tool. Continued support for the European Association for the Co-ordination of Consumer Representation in Standardisation (ANEC) is therefore essential to ensuring consumer participation in the standardisation process. The Commission will also work to ensure that the EU consumer interest is represented in international standardisation.

European level consumer organisations need the opportunity and the capacity to make an input into EU initiatives which have a consumer dimension. The Commission will therefore continue to co-finance operational functioning of **European level consumer organisations**. The **European Consumer Consultative Group (ECCG)**¹⁹ will continue to be the main forum for the Commission to consult national and European consumer organisations, while also developing specialist user groups and forums such as the FIN-USE panel of users and the financial and competition sub-groups of the ECCG.

The consumer movement varies substantially across the EU, both in terms of strength, structure and capacity. The Commission will therefore continue support for national consumer organisations, in particular from new Member States, through **training** for them in core skills (management, lobbying, and consumer law) but also more specialised subjects. This training will continue to be organised on a multilateral basis. A strong consumer movement at national level is essential both to a strong EU consumer movement and to well-functioning national markets. As part of its monitoring of national consumer policy regimes, the Commission will pay special attention to national policy towards the consumer movement, in particular in Member States where it is weakest.

5.3. Better enforcement and redress

Implementation and Enforcement

The Commission will continue to work together with Member States to achieve timely and uniform transposition of the **unfair commercial practices Directive**.

Co-operation between the public authorities responsible for the enforcement of rules on consumer protection and **product safety** is key to the functioning of the internal market. The market surveillance and Rapid Alert System ('RAPEX') will continue to be developed as the caseload grows (67 notifications in 2003, 701 in 2005). The tool for economic operators to notify dangerous products will be further developed. The Commission will continue to promote the European Product Safety Network and co-fund joint actions between enforcement authorities in order to identify best practices in existing market surveillance.

The operation of the new **Consumer protection Co-operation (CPC)** regulation will bring about a sea change in the way enforcement authorities in the Member States cooperate among themselves and with the Commission. The main challenge for the coming years will be to ensure that the considerable legal, institutional and administrative measures already taken are implemented effectively and lead to effective cooperation on the ground, to the benefit of consumers and honest businesses.

¹⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/cons_org/associations/committ/index_en.htm

Redress

If consumers are to have sufficient confidence in shopping outside their own Member State and take advantage of the internal market, they need assurance that if things go wrong they have effective mechanisms to seek **redress**. Consumer disputes require tailored mechanisms that do not impose costs and delays disproportionate to the value at stake.

The Commission will reinforce the monitoring and encourage the use of the existing recommendations²⁰ which establish a number of minimum guarantees for **Alternative Disputes Resolution** (ADR) schemes.

The **Injunctions** Directive²¹ has established a common procedure to allow consumer bodies to stop unlawful practices that harm the collective interest of consumers anywhere in the EU. The Commission will report on the Injunctions Directive in 2007 and launch a public consultation concerning its impact. The Commission will complete a study of the situation. It will also consider action on **collective redress** mechanisms for consumers both for infringements of consumer protection rules and for breaches of EU anti-trust rules in line with its 2005 Green Paper on private damages actions.

5.4. Better informed and educated consumers

The **European Consumer Centres Network** (ECC-Net) aims to promote consumer confidence by advising citizens on their rights as consumers and providing easy access to redress in cross border cases. The Commission will continue to co-finance and manage this network with Member States and establish centres in each Member State.

The cycle of **information campaigns** in the new Member States, designed to raise awareness about consumer rights and the role of consumer NGO's, will be completed.

The Commission will increase the number of copies of the Europa School Diary and include other issues which are of interest to young people, in particular sustainable consumption. The Commission will encourage the development of new adult education modules and update existing ones²² so as to cover core consumer issues. The Commission will encourage the development of modular, high quality education courses in consumer issues, at post graduate level.

Empowered and informed consumers can more easily make changes in lifestyle and consumption patterns contributing to the improvement of their health, more sustainable lifestyles and a low carbon economy. Consumers are major contributors to environmental challenges such as climate change, air and water pollution, land use and waste. The protection of the environment and the fight against climate change calls for better information in areas, such as energy and transportation, where informed consumers could make a real difference.

²⁰ Commission Recommendation 98/257/EC of 30 March 1998 on the principles applicable to the bodies responsible for out-of-court settlement of consumer disputes (OJ L 115, 17.4.1998, p. 31); Commission Recommendation 2001/310/EC of 4 April 2001 on the principles for out-of-court bodies involved in the consensual resolution of consumer disputes (OJ L 109, 19.4.2001, p. 56).

²¹ Directive 98/27/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 May 1998 on injunctions for the protection of consumers' interests (OJ 166, 11.6.1998, p. 51).

²² www.dolceta.eu

5.5. Putting consumers at the heart of other EU policies and regulation

The Single Market review has called for further action on retail financial services. The Commission's recent sector inquiry²³ also found that retail banking markets remain fragmented and competition barriers persist. The Commission will adopt a Green Paper on retail financial services and a White paper on mortgage credit. The Commission will analyse obstacles that consumers encounter when opening, closing or switching bank accounts and will tackle competition problems in the retail banking sector.

The Commission's objective is to make sure that **services of general interest** (SGI) policy goes hand in hand with appropriate measures for consumers. It will also see to it that where appropriate, universal service at EU and Member State level is safeguarded. The Commission will address the issue of horizontal consumer rights applying in all SGIs in its forthcoming Communication on Services of General Interest. It will also continue to empower and protect consumers in sectoral SGI legislation.

The Commission will build on passenger rights developed in the aviation sector in other transport modes, in particular for passengers with reduced mobility. It will also adopt an energy customers' charter.

The Commission will develop better coordination of the concerns and priorities of the different relevant policies concerned with consumer non-food **safety** (e.g. consumer, health, enterprise and industry, environment, transport) and security (e.g. air transport).

With the ECCG, the Commission will continue to ensure consumer participation in all relevant policy groups and in principle, consumer attendance at all such groups will be reimbursed by each policy area. The Commission will also examine how to better involve consumer policy stakeholders more actively in consultations organised by other EU policies on proposals with a major effect on consumers²⁴. Each Commission department with a significant consumer interest will appoint a **consumer liaison officer**, as pioneered by the Department for Competition, in order to liaise with consumer stakeholders and ensure each policy area gathers the necessary evidence to monitor the impact of its policies on consumers.

5.6. Better protection of EU consumers in international markets

Regulators and enforcers throughout the world have a common interest in co-operation in detecting **unsafe products**, risks and carrying out risk assessments. In 2005, the Commission concluded co-operation agreements with the US Consumer Product Safety Commission and the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine of the People's Republic of China (AQSIQ) in the field of consumer product safety. The Commission will strengthen co-operation with US and Chinese authorities on the basis of the existing agreements and will seek to develop new agreements, where appropriate.

The growth in e-commerce means that rogue traders are free to operate internationally. The CPC regulation provides for **international agreements** on mutual assistance between the EU and third countries. The Commission will seek negotiating mandates from the Council for the

²³ http://ec.europa.eu/comm/competition/antitrust/others/sector_inquiries/financial_services

²⁴ This involvement of interested parties in the policy-shaping process is also one of the strands of the Green Paper on a European Transparency Initiative - COM(2006) 194.

adoption of such agreements with countries where there are major retail trade flows, and where there is interest in co-operation.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Consumer policy is uniquely well placed to help the EU rise to the twin challenges of growth and jobs and re-connecting with its citizens. The Commission's vision is to be able to demonstrate to all EU citizens by 2013 that they can shop from anywhere in the EU , from corner-shop to website, confident they are equally effectively protected; and to be able to demonstrate to all retailers that they can sell anywhere on the basis of a single, simple set of rules.

The Commissioner for Consumer Protection will on the occasion of European Consumer Day (15 March) every year deliver a speech outlining the progress that has been made. It will also keep the Council, Parliament and the Member States regularly informed. Before March 2011 the Commission will produce a mid-term report and before December 2015 an ex-post evaluation report.