

**COMMISSION  
OF THE  
EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES**

Office of the President

PRESIDENT JENKINS'  
ADDRESS TO THE ASSOCIATION OF CONSUMERS , BRUSSELS

FRIDAY, 23 SEPTEMBER 1977 AT 1030 AM

I am delighted to be speaking here today on the 20th anniversary of the Association of Consumers in Belgium, not only because I attach great importance to the role which the Commission, with the help of such organisations as this, must seek to play in the lives of the citizens of Europe, but also because I understand that at least part of the original inspiration for the Association's highly successful magazine "Test Achats" came from the British Consumer Association, with which my wife was associated for many years. I have therefore been privileged to follow very closely the development of the consumer movement over the last decades. Tremendous strides forward have indeed been made during that time. For in 1957 when your organisation was founded, and the Treaty of Rome was signed, there were virtually no consumer organisations in Europe, and the Treaty referred to the Consumer only three times. Now in 1977 the position is very different. There are Consumer Associations in every country in Europe - some of them very powerful. Your magazine, Test Achats alone, has some 240,000 subscribers. As far as the European Community is concerned, we now have a programme of action for consumer affairs which is taking concrete form in various ways, including the adoption by the Council of Ministers of a series of directives which improve the standards of consumer protection in the Member States. There is also a Commissioner, Mr Burke, who /is specifically responsible

is specifically responsible for Consumer Affairs, a Director-General responsible for the Environment and Consumer Protection Service and a Consumer Protection Directorate which we are in the process of expanding. Because of the growing importance of informing the consumer, we also have a special division within the Directorate-General for information, which deals specifically with consumer interests. Then we have the Consumer's Consultative Committee, set up in 1973, to advise the Commission on the formulation and implementation of policies and directives.

What progress have we therefore made since April 1975 with our programme for consumer protection and information? I think we can be proud of a record which in only 2½ years includes directives on food labelling, toy safety, car safety, doorstep selling, unit pricing, product liability and correspondence courses. And by the end of the year there will be two further directives on misleading advertising and consumer credit. Of course however fast we run, you in the consumer movement will be encouraging us to run even faster. I know that there is still a great deal of work to be done in consumer education and information but we are making progress in both. In the former, studies are being carried out in the member countries by consumer organisations financed by the Commission, and in the information field, the Commission maintains permanent contact with television, radio and press by means of holding regular meetings on consumer affairs. There is also the whole field of legal redress to be properly covered, but I do believe that we have now created a solid basis on which to do this.

We recognise too in the Commission that the consumer's interest has to be considered far beyond the directives and policies put forward under the specific heading of "Consumer Policy". The consumer has to be taken into account in all parts of Community policies - industry, agriculture, competition, anti-trust law, transport, environment and so on. It is obvious that unless we can demonstrate that our proposals have some meaning for the man in the street, and for his quality of life, we cannot expect to build a broad base of support among all the people of Europe - a base which will be all the more necessary when there are direct elections to the European Parliament.

/Let me give

Let me give two examples where we really have tried to take proper account of the consumer. The first has direct relevance to the theme of your conference today, since it certainly affects employment. I mean the policy which we are following in the international negotiations on textiles, the so-called Multifibres Agreement. Here we have had to weigh up the problems which our own textile industries in the Community are facing, from low-priced imports of clothing, with the need to combat inflation and our obligations to third countries. It has not been an easy course to steer, and in a period of high unemployment we cannot simply ignore the social consequences of cheap imports. But we have avoided making a move towards protectionism which, if it became general, could have unhappy consequences for world trade and as a result for consumers.

The other example I will mention is agricultural policy, in which consumer organisations have been taking an increasing interest. I have no hesitation in saying that our farm price proposals this year took the consumer's interest fully into account: our proposals for a 3 per cent increase in the common prices, at a time when price inflation generally in the Community is in double figures, were I believe courageous.

Finally Mr President, on behalf of the Commission I would like to express our congratulations for your first twenty years, and our best wishes to your Association for the future. My colleague Richard Burke joins me in that message. I have admired personally the high quality of your work - including your publications, such as Test Achats - and I am particularly interested to see the progress which you have made in the field of consumer rights and services. Good luck to you for the future.