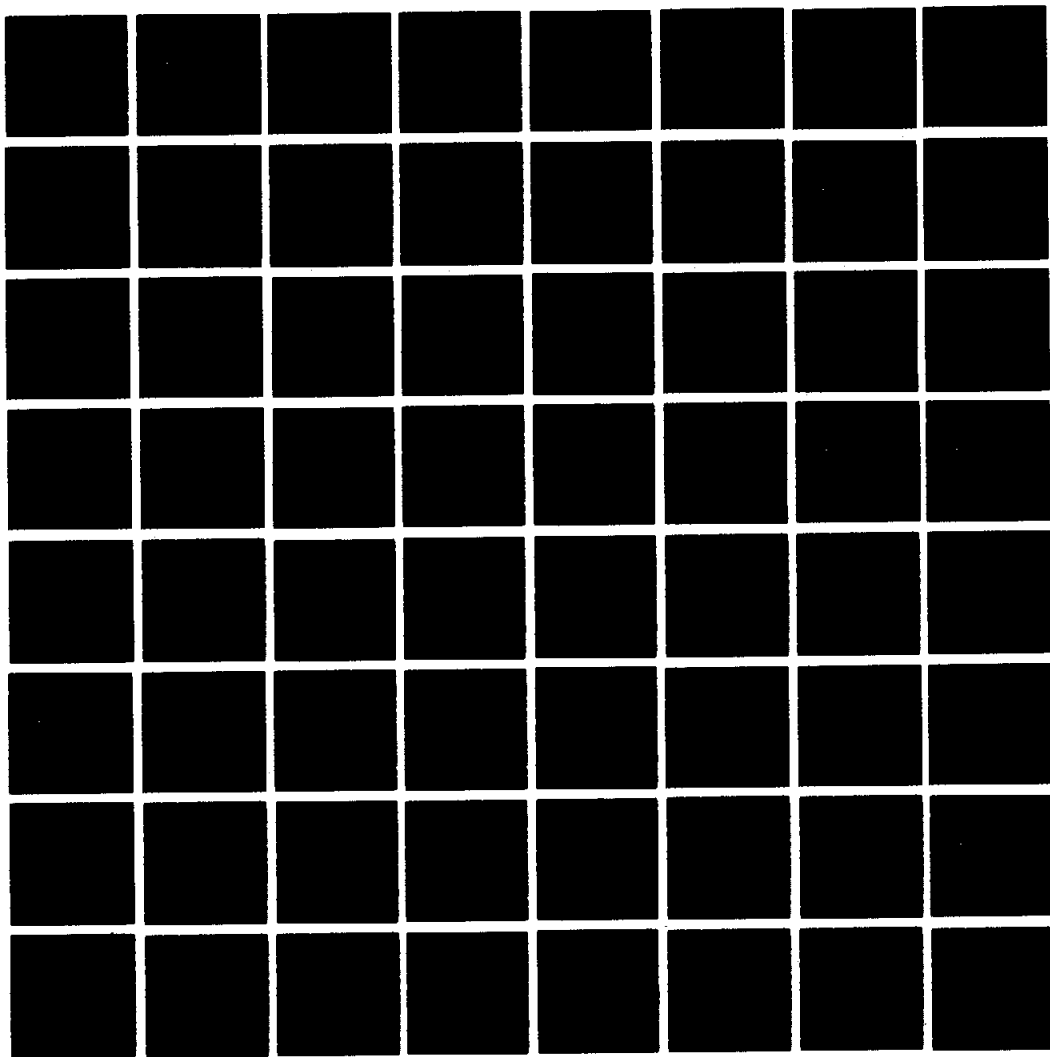


The Consumer in the European Community



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Cartoons by Terry Willers

The tables in the text are extracts from 'The European Consumer — his preoccupations, his aspirations, his information', the results of a survey carried out in the Member States of the Community in 1976.

The consumer in the European Community

Introduction

The bricklayer on the building site, the clerk adding up figures at his office desk, the housewife shopping in the supermarket may sometimes wonder what the European Community has to do with them. Newspaper headlines can often give the impression that it is concerned mainly with big business, farmers and fishermen. But the Community affects each of its 258 million citizens in their everyday lives, and is doing so more and more. Within the Community, the bricklayer, the clerk and the housewife share a common identity with the businessman, the farmer and the fisherman. They are all consumers enjoying the growing benefits of an expanding common market embracing nine countries.¹

It is fair to say that when the Community was formed the emphasis was placed largely on the achievement of economic progress. The Treaty of Rome which established the Community in 1958 made very little mention of consumer interests. Its aim of bringing about a closer union between the people of Europe and the improvement of their living and working conditions was to be achieved largely through economic integration and consequential economic prosperity. The benefits this new, vastly enlarged market would bring to the consumer were implicit rather than explicit. Nevertheless, the Community has been of substantial benefit to consumers. The creation of a common market has provided a wider choice of goods. The existence of a larger market has enabled manufacturers to make economies of scale. The increased competition between them has also helped to keep price increases to a minimum. In addition, the operation of the Community's fair trading laws protects the consumer against such things as monopolies and price fixing.

Today, in a time of world economic recession, the Community is learning to cope with adversity rather than prosperity. Its biggest single challenge as a defender of consumer interests is to fight inflation and it is battling against rising prices on the broad economic front. However, the consumer needs other forms of protection in an increasingly complex commercial world. Where the consumer was once a partner in a balanced and often personal relationship with the corner shopkeeper and his small-scale suppliers, he is now a member of a society characterized by mass production and to a large extent dominated by large retailers. The consumer as an individual has virtually no economic power with which to match the vast resources and know-how of the producers.

Industry has developed and concentrated itself into giant units using intensive advertising and sales promotion techniques exhorting the consumer to buy. Modern sales methods can even 'create' a market for a product where none previously existed. The market is con-

¹ France, Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom.

stantly bombarded with new products made from new materials using new techniques, and the consumer has tended to become just a unit in a mass market. Faced with a rapidly changing and ever more complicated selection of goods, armed often with insufficient information, the consumer cannot hope to use his resources to his own best advantage.

Because of this very obvious economic imbalance, consumers have formed their own associations to defend their interests, and national governments have tried to legislate to protect them. However, as world trade expands, there is a limit to the extent to which national governments can protect their consumers. The Community, as we shall see, can complement their efforts and also provide additional protection at an international level.

Not only does the consumer need protection; his interests need to be promoted. He needs to be given a voice, and his interests must be given consideration in the decision-making process equivalent to those of the producers and distributors. To meet these needs, the European Commission has set up its own Consumer Protection Service and has had a programme of consumer protection and information since 1975. It has also created new channels of communication through which the consumer's voice can be heard at European level. As a result of these initiatives, it is now forging ahead with legislation to protect the consumer, whether he be out shopping, dealing with doorstep salesmen at home, borrowing money, undertaking courses of study by correspondence or in one of the many other situations where he is dealing with economic interests more powerful than himself.

The Commission is trying to protect the consumer in his day-to-day dealings, but it is also seeking actively to promote his interests by ensuring that consumers are consulted on all European legislation liable to affect them. Consumers can thus become a group to be reckoned with in Europe.

I. The growth of consumerism

In historical terms, the consumer movement is young, and it was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s that it began to gather any kind of momentum in Europe. Now, however, consumer awareness is on the upturn. In a survey of European consumers carried out by the Commission in 1975,¹ five out of ten people questioned about the relative importance of the problems to be dealt with by the Community thought that the protection of consumers was 'very important'.

The consumer movement came to Europe from the United States where it began in 1928 with the founding of an organization known as the Consumer Union. The Union was set up by an economist and an engineer who worked in the American Bureau of Standards and who decided that the American public ought to have access to the results of the kind of

¹ The European consumer, published by the Commission of the European Communities, Brussels, 1976.

comparative tests made by the US Government prior to purchasing decisions. The Union therefore carried out its own comparative tests, the results of which were published for its members' use in 'Consumer Report'.

In 1947, Europe acquired its first private consumer organization with the founding of the Danish Consumer Council (Forbrugerradet) and in the late 1950s similar organizations began to appear in the other countries of Western Europe. But it was not until the late 1960s that the strongest of these began to have any noticeable influence on business and government. This development coincided with growing concern on the part of European governments for consumer affairs. To try to help consumers, they encouraged new legislative proposals, set up government agencies for consumer affairs or else delegated responsibility to the various ministries.

Developments from country to country obviously differed, with the result that today, consumer organization and awareness vary greatly from one Member State of the Community to another. It is not possible to examine the situation in each Member State here in detail, but broadly speaking, organizations of consumers in the Nine fall into three main groups.

Firstly, there are the financially independent organizations which finance themselves through membership fees and sales of tests results. In some, membership is open to individuals while in others it is composed of family, trade union or Christian movements. Secondly, there are organizations which are part-financed by government, to a tune of only 20% in Italy but by as much as 80% in Denmark. Finally, in a category all on its own, comes the German 'Stiftung Warentest' set up at the initiative of the Federal Government in 1964 to inform the consumer on the quality of goods and services offered on the market.

But membership of consumer organizations is small and usually limited to the middle class and well-educated. The European Commission's 1975 survey of consumers found that only 2% of respondents belonged to a consumer organization. Moreover, less than four persons out of ten in Luxembourg and the United Kingdom and less than one in ten in Italy were able to mention the name of a consumer organization.

Nevertheless, consumer organizations have a responsibility which goes far beyond their limited membership. It is the consumer at the bottom of the social scale who is the most vulnerable; he has less money and is less able to manage what he has. He buys in small quantities and the fact that he is badly informed and poorly educated makes him a prime target for mass advertising campaigns. Consumer associations therefore fight not only for their own members, but also for the least well-off consumers.

Just as national consumer organizations have achieved varying levels of effectiveness, so have governments responded to their lobbying in different ways. Broadly speaking, countries can be divided into those where governments have set up a single body to deal with consumer affairs (the 'Secretariat d'État à la Consommation français auprès du Ministère de l'Économie et des Finances' in France and the 'Department of Prices and Consumer Protection' in the United Kingdom) and those others (Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands) where they are dealt with by one or several government ministries (usually the Ministry of Public Health, of Economic Affairs, Agriculture, etc.).

In the legislative field, Member States' achievements on matters of interest to consumers again vary. As far as consumers' physical well-being is concerned, this is the field in which they probably receive the most protection over Europe as a whole, but actual levels of protection differ from one Member State to another. All Member States, however, have some kind of legislation to protect their citizens from dangerous products either by informative labelling, by rules about the composition of products, by obligatory safety norms or, most often, by a combination of the three. In recent years, all have taken action too to protect consumers' economic interests, although the actual measures taken and their content vary widely. Two subjects engaging the attention of most of the Member States have been consumer credit and misleading advertising, and a number of them already have legislation on these topics on their books.

Systems of legal redress in the Member States are a factor of legal and administrative systems and contain striking differences. Generally speaking, however, all Member States have attempted to improve systems of consumer redress in recent years. For example, Denmark established a consumer Ombudsman and a consumer Complaints Board in 1975, and the United Kingdom established a special arbitration procedure for small claims (under UKL 100).

Levels of consumer information also differ. All Member States' governments have channels through which to consult consumers on matters of interest to them, but little has yet been done in the way of formal consumer education.

II. Why a Community consumer policy?

If the governments of the Member States are legislating in favour of the consumer, then why a European programme of consumer protection as well? We need only consider the nature of the so-called 'consumer society' in which we live to find the answer.

The 'consumer society' grew out of the increasing availability of a widening variety of goods as a result of an expansion in world trade. As communications improved and States agreed to make more and more reciprocal trade concessions the choice to the consumer became wider and prices keener. This was particularly true of goods traded within the European Community where, as a result of the removal of customs duties and other barriers, trade increased rapidly. For example, trade between the original Six in 1958 was worth less than 7000 million units of account.¹ By 1972, just prior to the enlargement to Nine, it was worth around 61 000 million u.a. Trade between the Nine has increased from 90 000 million u.a. in 1973 to 130 000 million u.a. in 1976.

The creation of this vast common market embracing nine countries and 258 million citizens has meant not only a greater variety of goods from which consumers can choose. The

¹ 1 unit of account = approximately BFR/LFR 50, DM 3.66, FF 5.5, LIT 625, DKR 7.5, HFL 3.62, UKL/IRL 0.4.

increased volume of goods on offer has increased competition and thus kept prices competitive. In addition, because manufacturers are able to gear themselves for a larger consumer market they can make economies of scale, e.g. by planning longer production runs of a particular item, thereby minimizing the cost of retooling. As well as abolishing barriers to trade within its own borders, the Community has extensive trading relations throughout the globe which are of benefit to consumers, particularly by making available to them secure supplies of goods at stable prices.

As world trade expands, and as the range of foreign goods on offer in our shops increases, a growing number of consumer protection measures falls outside the scope of action of national governments. The Community, on the other hand, can and does implement laws which have effect not only in the Member States but, in some cases, beyond its own borders.

In addition to Community measures designed specifically as part of the consumer protection and information programme, the implementation of other Community legislation which is valid for all nine Member States is of benefit to consumers. This is particularly true of fair trading laws which protect consumers from the abuse by large firms of a monopolistic or dominant position in a particular market, or from the formation by a group of firms of a cartel to fix prices. Community legislation to ensure fair competition can also be applied to firms outside the Community which export to it, and this is a good illustration of how the Community can offer protection to the consumer not simply against shoddy goods or unfair trading practices originating within its own borders but against those originating in third countries as well.

It is not only against inferior goods and sharp practices that consumers need protection, however. If, for example, a British housewife wants to buy an Italian washing machine, how can she be sure that its wiring meets the required standards? How does the Belgian gardener know whether the German lawnmower he buys will conform to his country's noise emission levels? If his Irish counterpart buys a French weedkiller can he be sure that the instructions for safe use on the label are adequate?

National governments can legislate to protect their own consumers on all these points. But the likelihood would be that each country would produce different legislation which in turn would create a situation where a product would be acceptable in some Member States and not in others. Such technical barriers to trade would hinder the operation of the common market and would be to the consumer's disadvantage. The Community is steadily working to remove such obstacles and common standards have been introduced for a vast array of goods. In every case the aim is to reach the highest common denominator possible. There is no question of harmonization for harmonization's sake.

The creation of the common market has, by increasing consumer choice and keeping price rises to a minimum by means of increased competition between manufacturers and distributors, been of both direct and indirect benefit to consumers. The Community is now trying to go further by restoring the balance between the consumer on the one hand and the manufacturer and the distributor on the other so that the consumer can regain his rightful place as a full partner in the economic process.

In other words, the Community, while continuing to introduce legislation designed to protect consumers' interests, is pursuing a policy of actively promoting their interests. This requires the consumer dimension to be taken into consideration when all Community legislation is being formulated.

III. The Community response

1. The early days

Consumer interests have not always received the amount of attention that they receive today. Very little mention is made in the Treaty of Rome of consumers as such and none at all directly to the protection or promotion of their interests. The two occasions on which consumers are specifically mentioned are in the sections of the Treaty dealing with agriculture and competition: Article 39 states that agricultural products should 'reach consumers at reasonable prices' and Articles 85 and 86 also refer to consumers. In particular Article 86 bans the use of unfair trading practices liable to limit 'production, markets or technical development to the prejudice of consumers'. Nor was it until the early 1970s that the European Commission had an effective administrative unit responsible for consumer affairs, let alone a consumer policy.



None the less, the years prior to that saw developments of enormous benefit to the consumer and because of the specific Treaty references mentioned above, many of these were in the fields of agriculture and competition.

As already mentioned, the Commission's competition department has been monitoring industry and commerce for many years to ensure that firms are unable to create monopoly situations for themselves, to carve up markets or to fix prices to the detriment of the consumer. For example, in 1975 the Commission fined United Brands, the American company which markets bananas under the Chiquita label, 1 million units of account for abuse of its dominant position over a large part of the Community's market for bananas. Among other things, the Commission found that United Brands was charging unequal prices to different sub-distributors. The Community ruling was this year upheld by the Community's Court of Justice although the fine was reduced to 850 000 u.a.

For its part, the common agricultural policy (CAP) has played an important role for the consumer over the years by helping to ensure that Europeans received stable supplies of food while helping to bridge the gap between farming and non-farming incomes. In recent years, the CAP has to a large extent cushioned the European shopper against the effects of sudden or large fluctuations in food prices on world markets.

In a different sphere, the administration of the customs union saw to it that by 1968, customs duties between the six original Member States were abolished while at the same time, the Community's policy on the approximation of laws resulted in the breaking down of a large number of technical trade barriers (or non-tariff barriers), those hidden obstacles to the free circulation of goods within the customs union. Technical trade barriers have long been an obstacle to the establishment of free trade and thus to the widening of consumer choice, but are by no means as easy to dismantle as tariff barriers. Nevertheless, a great deal of work has been done on the establishment of common standards allowing the free circulation of goods while at the same time incorporating strict health and safety criteria.

Consumer interests in the Community have been represented since the early days — and still are — in the Economic and Social Committee and the European Parliament, both of which have a consultative role to play in the process of adopting European legislation. European Parliament members have in the past shown a high degree of concern with the position of the European consumer and the same is true of the Community's Economic and Social Committee which contains, as well as representatives of the two sides of European industry, a general interest group including a number of consumers. More specifically, however, a Contact Committee for consumer questions was set up in 1962 with the help of the Commission which was made up of delegates from five European organizations representing the consumer viewpoint. It was consulted by the Commission on different problems in the field of agricultural policy. Its role is now filled by a Consumers Consultative Committee which will be dealt with in the next section.

2. A fresh impetus

Following a long period of sustained economic growth which had not, however, resulted automatically in progress on other fronts, such as the social field, the Nine Heads of State or Government meeting at the Paris Summit in October, 1972, decided that the Communi-

ty's development needed to be broadened beyond the narrow confines of economic achievement. The Nine's leaders stressed the social and human objectives of economic development, stating that 'economic expansion is not an end in itself'. They added that 'its first aim should be to enable disparities in living conditions to be reduced... it should result in an improvement in the quality of life as well as in standards of living'.

In concrete terms they agreed to expand the European Social Fund, to introduce a Regional Fund, and to ask the Commission to draw up programmes for the protection of the environment and of consumers. The latter was to be drawn up by January 1974.

A further factor which gave added weight to this new upsurge of interest in consumer affairs was that the United Kingdom and Denmark, two of the Community's new Member States, had particularly strong national consumer movements. The European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee, too, were both urging the Commission to give a new emphasis to consumer affairs in the Community. The combined effects of all these factors were that early in 1973, the Commission took three important steps.

The first of these was the setting up on 1 January 1973 of the Commission's Environment and Consumer Protection Service with a division responsible for consumer protection and information. This division replaced the former administrative unit for consumer affairs which had been within the Commission's competition department. Its task is to look after the interests of consumers in the Nine and it falls directly under the responsibility of a Commissioner.

The second major step taken by the Commission was to set up a Consumers' Consultative Committee (CCC) to give to the Commission the consumer view on work undertaken at Community level. The Committee is composed of twenty-five members: fifteen representing those organizations regarded by the Commission as representative of consumers, four experts appointed by those organizations and six independent experts appointed by the Commission. The organizations regarded as representative of consumers at the European level are the European Bureau of Consumers' Associations (BEUC) which represents the Member States' consumer organizations in Brussels, the Committee of Family Organizations in the European Community (COFACE) and the European Community of Consumer Cooperatives (Eurocoop), both of which have extended their interests into the consumer field in recent years, and the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) which represents the Community's free trade unions in Brussels. The CCC's secretariat is provided by the Environment and Consumer Protection Service.

The Committee's brief is threefold. Its main task is to make the voice of European consumers heard on all Community affairs affecting them. It gives opinions, either at the Commission's request or on its own initiative, on texts being drawn up by the Commission, on decisions to be taken or on subjects which it considers to be of particular interest to consumers at a given moment. Secondly, the CCC provides a meeting place for organizations representing consumers at Community level. These organizations, with their different preoccupations and interests, are encouraged to work together within the Committee and its bodies. Thirdly, by asserting the presence of consumer organizations in the European Commission, the Committee encourages an exchange of views with other institutions and professional bodies organized at Community level.

The third step taken by the European Commission after the Paris Summit of 1972 was to invite the newly-created Environment and Consumer Protection Service to draw up a preliminary programme for a Community consumer protection and information policy.

IV. The consumer protection and information programme

The Community's preliminary programme for a consumer protection and information policy was adopted by the Commission on 5 December 1973, and approved by the Council on 14 April 1975, after receiving favourable opinions from the Economic and Social Committee and the European Parliament in 1974.

The programme is a charter of consumer rights as well as a plan of action for a policy which constitutes a general framework for the provision of better consumer protection under the different Community policies, as well as the approximation of laws, all of which affect the consumer's position. It defines the consumer as not merely a purchaser of goods, but as someone whose interests can be affected by a broad range of developments in society and whose interests must be considered in the harmonization of all Community policy.

At national level, it is hoped that the programme will induce Member States to give official recognition to the basic consumer rights and thereby provide increased protection. It is a Community response to the 'abuses and frustrations arising at times from the increased abundance and complexity of goods and services afforded the consumer by an ever-widening market'.¹



¹ Preliminary programme of the EEC for a consumer protection and information policy, OJ C 92 of 25.4.1975.

The programme sets out five basic consumer rights. These are as follows:

- (a) the right to protection of health and safety;
- (b) the right to protection of economic interests;
- (c) the right of redress;
- (d) the right to information and education;
- (e) the right of representation.

Having defined these rights, the programme defines the ways and means by which the Community should seek to protect them.

1. Protection of health and safety

Goods and services offered to consumers should under normal or foreseeable conditions of use present no risk to health or safety. Where a product, because of its utility, cannot be withdrawn from the market despite the existence of a risk, consumers should be warned of the risk involved. Substances added to foodstuffs, for instance, should be defined and their use regulated. Foodstuffs should not be adulterated or contaminated during transport or marketing and household appliances should be covered by a certificate showing that they comply with safety standards.

To achieve these objectives, the Commission undertakes in its consumer protection programme to monitor markets and current research for information on substances or products which might endanger health or safety and to push ahead with Community programmes to approximate laws in agricultural, foodstuffs and industrial sectors.¹

2. Protection of the economic interests of consumers

As far as the European consumer's economic interests are concerned, the Commission believes that consumer should be protected against abuse by sellers in instances such as the drafting of contracts, the dissemination of advertising materials and point-of-sale information and the definition of conditions of credit. The consumer must likewise be protected against damage to his economic interests caused by defective products or unsatisfactory services and is entitled to reliable after-sales service. This type of protection should be ensured by the harmonization of laws and regulations at Community level or by the adoption of direct measures at that level.

The Commission therefore undertakes in the programme to submit to the Council proposals on the harmonization of general conditions for consumer credit in the Community, an area in which studies have shown that the consumer needs help. Similarly, the Commission also undertakes to draw up measures against false or misleading advertising, as well as to protect consumers from unfair commercial practices to be found in the terms of contracts, in methods of doorstep selling, in premium offers, in the provision of unsolicited goods and services and in information given on labels, packaging etc. In all of these fields, the Commission states its intention to submit appropriate proposals to the Council.

¹ General programme for the elimination of technical barriers to trade in industrial products and foodstuffs, Council Resolution of 28 May 1969 (OJ C 76 of 17.6.1969), supplemented by Council Resolution of 21 May 1973 (OJ C 38 of 5.6.1973).

The Commission undertakes to harmonize the law on product liability in the Community, so that consumers are afforded better protection against manufacturers selling faulty or defective products.

The Commission also states its intention to look into the possibility of Community action to improve the range and quality of services provided for consumers and to promote the more general economic interests of consumers by considering such problems as how the consumer can obtain better value for money when buying goods and services, how waste can be prevented with regard to packaging, product durability and the recycling of materials, and how to protect the individual against forms of advertising which encroach on his freedom.

3. Advice, help and redress

The consumer should receive advice and help in respect of complaints, injury or damage caused by defective goods or services, as well as swift redress for any such injury or



Peep Wilkers

damage. In order to reinforce and possibly improve the machinery already existing in the Member States for these purposes, the Commission undertakes in the preliminary programme to look into and publish its findings on the advantages and disadvantages of the various systems of advice and redress in the Nine and where necessary, to make proposals for improving existing systems.

4. Consumer information

As far as consumer information is concerned, the Commission considers it important that sufficient information should be available to the consumer on the nature, quality, quantity, price and use of the goods and services on offer, in order to enable him to make an informed choice. He should also be fully aware of his rights in the event of any claim for damage or injury resulting from the use of a defective product.

Priority actions to be taken in this field include the laying down of rules for the labelling of products whose specifications are harmonized at Community level. There should also be Community principles for stating prices including prices per unit of weight or volume. The Commission wants to encourage cooperation between national bodies carrying out comparative product tests and to continue with the taking of regular consumer surveys to provide the kind of information on consumer attitudes which is necessary for the establishment of an integrated policy on consumer information and education. The programme also includes an undertaking that the Commission will provide information, to be relayed to consumers through radio, television, films and the written press, on measures taken on their behalf at national and Community level.

5. Consumer education

In the field of consumer education, the programme states that children, young people and adults should be educated to be discriminating consumers, conscious of their rights and responsibilities. In particular, they should be educated in the basic principles of modern economics.

The Commission therefore undertakes to pursue its studies on methods and materials to be used in educating consumers and it suggests the setting up of special centres in the Member States for the training of teachers in this relatively new field.

6. Consumer consultation and representation

When decisions which concern them are prepared, consumers should be consulted and allowed to express their views, in particular through organizations concerned with consumer protection and information.

The Commission has therefore carried out a comparative study of the various methods of consumer consultation used in the Nine and will encourage consumer organizations to make their views known and to coordinate their efforts. It will also encourage exchanges of information between the Member States on consumer consultation.

7. The programme's implementation

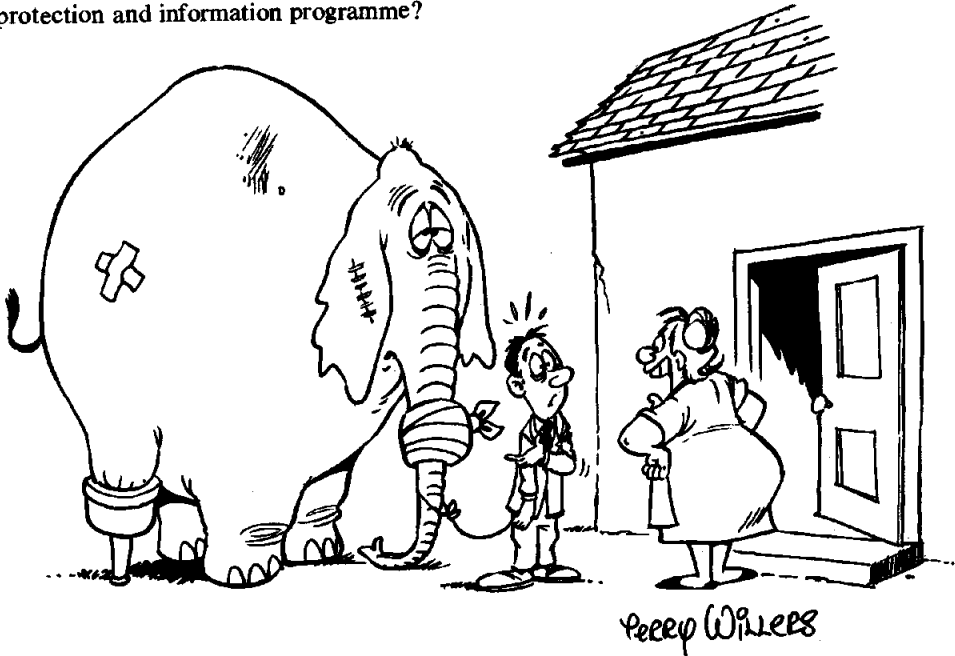
In a final section of the programme which covers the implementation of the work outlined above, the Commission states that it will take account of the work already in hand on consumer affairs throughout the world and that it will collaborate with other international bodies at work in this field, especially the Council of Europe and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) whose work on consumer matters is particularly relevant to the Community's own programme.

The Commission intends to complete the work scheduled in its preliminary programme for a consumer protection and information policy within a four-year period.

V. The record so far

Since 1973, when the Environment and Consumer Protection Service was set up, the rhythm of the Commission's work to better the consumer's position in a market society has accelerated. The Consumer Protection and Information Division's first task was to draw up the preliminary programme outlined above and, once the programme was adopted by the Member States, to implement it, a task with which it is now forging ahead. Some measures of consumer protection have come out of other Commission services, however, in which case the proposals are monitored by the Consumer Protection and Information Division.

What progress has been made so far in implementing the objectives of the consumer protection and information programme?



1. Protection of health and safety

Various measures are possible to protect consumer health and safety. Perhaps the most effective are the formulation of requirements for the composition of products, the introduction of approval procedures to be gone through before certain products may be put on the market, the prohibition of sales or the obligation to provide adequate information for the consumer. If taken independently and disparately by national governments, however, measures such as these could constitute technical barriers to trade and it is therefore essential that, in the interests of free trade and thus of the consumer, they should be taken at Community level.

a. Protection of consumer health

It is often said that we are what we eat. Food is, of course, an important ingredient in health, but in these days of prepackaged food and intensive farming, the consumer often has little idea of just what he is eating in the way of preservatives and other additives. A considerable body of work has already been achieved at Community level to try to regulate this situation. Not all of it can be mentioned here, but some of the most important measures are described below.

The Commission is aided on the technical side of its work on consumer health by two important committees: the Scientific Committee for Food and the Scientific Committee on Animal Nutrition, both of which are composed of highly qualified persons eminent in their scientific fields. The Committee on Animal Nutrition is consulted by the Commission not only on animal health, but also on the wholesomeness of foodstuffs of animal origin. The Scientific Committee for Food is consulted on all matters connected with the protection of human health in the field of food consumption, and in particular on the composition of foodstuffs, the use of additives and other processing agents and the presence of contaminants. It has issued reports on a number of subjects which have served as bases for draft Community legislation.

The Commission also has an Advisory Committee on Foodstuffs, upon which consumers are represented (see below) and which has issued opinions on several proposals made in the field of consumer health.

So far the Council has adopted legislation controlling the use in foodstuffs of four types of additives, namely, anti-oxidants, colorants, emulsifiers and preservatives. These directives are updated at regular intervals on the basis of the advice of the Scientific Committee for Food and additives which do not figure on the lists published with the directives are automatically banned. There is also legislation regulating the presence of erucic acids in oils and fats destined for human consumption because tests showed that erucic acids could possibly have harmful effects on health.

If it is important to control food additives, it is equally important to control the containers in which foodstuffs are packaged or cooked: migration of toxic substances from container materials into foodstuffs can pose health problems and it is important, therefore, to ensure that certain standards are respected. The Council has therefore adopted a directive on materials and articles containing vinyl chloride monomer and intended to come into contact with foodstuffs. The directive lays down maximum permitted VCM levels. Further work is under way in this area.

Also in the field of foodstuffs, the Council has adopted directives on honey, fruit juices, tinned milk and chocolate, laying down rules governing their composition, their names, the special features of the manufacturing processes involved and their labelling. It is also examining draft directives on jams, jellies, marmalades and chestnut purées and on mayonnaise and sauces derived from mayonnaise. Generally speaking, each of these lays down the composition and special manufacturing features of the product concerned, as well as rules governing their labelling and packaging.

A health hazard which has received much attention recently is that created by the presence of pesticide residues in the food we eat. The Community plans to legislate in this field and in fact the Council is currently examining a first regulation on maximum permitted levels of pesticide residues in and on fruit and vegetables. Meanwhile the Commission is preparing directives for maximum levels of pesticide residues in and on cereals intended for human consumption and in and on foodstuffs of animal origin.

The Council is also examining a Commission proposal on the approximation of laws of the Member States on the labelling, presentation and advertising of foodstuffs in general. The need for an improvement in labelling is widely recognized and in fact some Member States have already introduced certain requirements of their own. The Commission's proposal, however, should bring about a broad improvement of consumer protection throughout the Community. The proposal lists information which must as a rule be given clearly and legibly on the label of any food product, including product ingredients and the date up to which the food can be consumed without danger to health. The label must also show how the product should be kept and used.

Another set of products now governed by Community-wide standards is cosmetics. The Council has adopted a directive setting out the substances and colorants which can or cannot be used in the manufacture of cosmetics.¹ The Nine have agreed to work towards the adoption of 'positive lists' of substances permitted in cosmetics, as opposed to the current system of 'negative lists' of substances found to be harmful and thus excluded from use. Positive lists will mean the blanket prohibition in cosmetics of all substances and chemicals not proven to be non-toxic.

Many of the above proposals and directives tie in with the Community programme for the elimination of technical trade barriers in the industrial products sector. By setting Community-wide standards for products such as cosmetics and foodstuffs, the Community not only extends consumer protection throughout the Nine but also, as mentioned before, prevents the build-up of technical obstacles to trade.

The Community has also adopted measures to protect consumer health within the context of its agricultural policy. There are, for example, Community rules on trade in poultry² and in fresh meat³ which are designed to ensure that the meat reaching the consumer is of the highest standard possible as far as health protection is concerned.

¹ Council Directive 76/768/EEC.

² Council Directive 71/118/EEC.

³ Council Directive 64/433/EEC, amended by 66/601/EEC, 69/349/EEC and 70/486/EEC.

b. Protection of consumer safety

The manufacturer of a product should be responsible for ensuring that his products are safe and if not, that the consumer is fully informed of the risks involved in their use. Often, however, the consumer is insufficiently protected in this field. It is hoped, by setting safety standards at Community level, to improve the present situation.

Work achieved by the Community on consumer safety is wide-ranging. Twenty directives on motor vehicles, for example, have been adopted by the Council, and fifteen more are in the pipeline. These cover subjects such as anchorages for safety belts, brakes, noise levels and exhaust fumes. Other proposals sent to the Council cover the safety of lifts and the classification, packaging, and labelling of dangerous substances.¹ The aim of the latter is to strengthen controls to protect man and his environment against potential hazards from new substances placed on the market. It provides for a compulsory notification procedure for manufacturers when goods are first marketed.

The Council has adopted a directive relating to restrictions on the marketing and use of certain dangerous substances.² The directive restricts the use of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB) and polychlorinated terphenyls (PCT) and prohibits the use of vinyl chloride monomer as an aerosol propellant.

A draft of very special interest to consumers, since it concerns safety in the home, is one on toys. Standards for toy safety vary widely from one country to another and the consumer has no way of telling which toy is made to a lower standard than another. The Commission is therefore in the process of drawing up a directive concerned with the physical, mechanical and electrical safety of toys, as well as their flammability and toxicity.

Work underway in the Commission on a draft proposal to regulate the safety of household cleaning products necessarily covers a wide range of products. This is a field where little work has so far been done, but which can hold particular hazards for children. A study on the subject is being carried out on behalf of the Commission by Eurocoop, the organization of European cooperative groups.

Another survey will be carried out during the course of 1978 on the causes of accidents in the home and it is intended that it should be used as the basis for further measures in this field.

2. Protection of the economic interests of consumers

It is not just the physical well-being of the consumer that needs protection however. He also needs to be protected in his dealings with people offering him goods and services. All too often, the consumer discovers that he has been misled by dishonest advertising, persuaded to buy against his better judgment by high-power selling or that he has been sold a defective product, only to find that the cards are stacked in favour of the producer. European legislation can remedy this and, by ensuring that Community producers or those offering services all have the same liability and costs to bear, can further help the consumer by preventing distortions of competition.

¹ Council Directive 67/548/EEC.

² Council Directive 76/769/EEC.



The Commission has drawn up a number of important legislative proposals in this area. Among these is a draft on the approximation of the Member States' widely divergent laws on the liability of producers for defects in their products.¹ In an age of mass production, mistakes can occur in the manufacturing process which result in the marketing of a defective product, and the results of these defects can vary in gravity. A number of the Member States already have legal protection for the user of a defective product — some have a very high level of protection based on liability for defects without evidence of fault, others have no protection at all.

To regularize this situation, therefore, the Commission has proposed legislation which would establish the principle of liability irrespective of fault, as opposed to the traditional principle of proving the fault. The Commission's proposal would mean that the producer would be liable for all damages caused by a defect in an article sold by him, whether or not he knew or could have known that the defect existed. However, there would be limits to the manufacturer's liability of 25 million European units of account² for personal injury, 15 000

¹ COM(76)372.

² 1 EUA (February 1978) = BFR/LFR 40-1924, DM 2-59338, HFL 2-77819, UKL 0-629926, DKR 7-01307, FF 5-82906, LIT 1064-46.

EUA for damage to personal goods and 50 000 EUA for damage to real property. Furthermore, the producer would no longer be liable after an expiry period of ten years. The Commission hopes that, when adopted, the product liability directive will strike a new balance between producers and consumers.

The Commission is also working on new draft proposals to regulate consumer credit by ensuring that the terms on which credit is given are fully understood by the debtor and that the conditions attached to the credit are fair.

Credit charges are often massive and the borrower is trapped into a volume of repayments the size of which is unknown to him at the beginning, but which can become a near-impossible burden. The result of this is that, very often, the highest charges are paid by the poorest groups in the population.

Among the draft's main features will be the requirement that all credit agreements, with the exception of bank overdrafts, must be made in writing, and that effective annual interest charges and all other charges applying to loans should be prominently displayed. In the case of agreements to purchase on credit concluded other than at a place of business of the supplier or his agent, a 'cooling off period' will apply so that a consumer will have the right to change his mind about a purchase within seven days of signing.

Another area in which the Commission considers that the individual consumer needs greater protection is that of 'doorstep selling'. Several States already have legislation to protect the consumer against the risk of contracts made outside commercial establishments. Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, for example, all allow various 'cooling-off periods' during which the consumer may cancel a contract and Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands all require some kind of prior authorization to sell goods outside a commercial establishment. In Ireland and Italy, however, there is at present no specific legislation for such contracts.

In an attempt to regulate this disparate situation, the Commission has submitted a draft directive to the Council on the curbing of abuses arising from sales made away from business premises. Proposals include the obligatory writing down of contracts and the introduction of a 'cooling-off period' for the consumer (similar to that to be introduced under the consumer credit measures). The proposed directive will provide a minimum degree of protection for consumers and special articles will enable Member States to adopt additional provisions if they wish to extend protection for example with regard to the length of the 'cooling-off', the outright prohibition of the sales of certain goods or services away from business premises, a system of prior authorization and measures to prevent the false dating of contracts.

In a similar field, there are also plans afoot for Community measures to protect students who undertake correspondence courses at home. A draft directive now with the Council seeks to ban misleading advertisements, door-to-door recruitment, poorly qualified instructors and contracts which override the interests of the students. Under the terms of the proposal, all contracts relating to home-study courses must be made in writing. They must contain certain particulars informing the participant of their main terms and should allow the student a seven-day period from the date of receipt of the first teaching materials during which he may terminate the contract.

Five Member States have already passed laws aiming to prevent abuses by those running home-study courses. In France, all correspondence courses are monitored and private

organizations wishing to offer home study courses must satisfy the authorities that their teaching standards are adequate. Germany has a similar system. The Commission's proposal thus aims to raise standards in all Community countries to a level which already exists in some.

The Community is also taking steps to combat misleading and unfair advertising. All consumers are familiar with the type of advertising that proclaims, for example, 'Our toothpaste is better'. But better than what?

The Commission has sent the Council a draft directive to protect consumers against unfair advertising.¹ It lays down minimum criteria for determining whether advertising is misleading or unfair and permits comparative advertising under certain conditions (the comparison made between two products should relate to material points and not insignificant characteristics, and claims should be verifiable). It provides recourse to legal remedies for consumers affected by misleading or false advertising and lays down that where an advertiser makes a factual claim the burden of proof that the claim is correct lies with the advertiser in the event of a dispute.

Further plans on the part of the Commission to increase protection of consumers' economic interests include action to be taken on the results of a study on after-sales service in the European Community. The study was carried out by BEUC on behalf of the European Commission. The Commission is also preparing proposals on unfair terms in contracts and the informative labelling of textiles.

3. Advice, help and redress

It is all very well adopting legislation on product liability and the like if the consumer has no effective means at his disposal through which to press claims against manufacturers who sell him a washing machine that will not work, against workmen who do not do a proper job, or shopkeepers who give him short measure. The Commission therefore undertook in its consumer protection programme to look into systems of legal redress in the Nine.

With this undertaking in mind, the Commission organized a symposium on the subject of consumer redress in collaboration with the Faculté de Droit et des Sciences Économiques in the French university town of Montpellier. The purpose of the symposium was to examine the legal means by which consumers in each of the Member States could lodge complaints, obtain legal defence, or simply receive advice. It was also to examine the corresponding systems and laws of certain non-Member States.

Those present at the symposium acknowledged unanimously that the traditional process of law — whether in civil, criminal or administrative courts — is fraught with disadvantages for the consumer. The main obstacle in his path is the high cost of legal proceedings which discourages the consumer from resorting to law to settle minor disputes. On top of this are the psychological obstacles created by complicated legal procedures and terminology which is incomprehensible to the layman.

¹ COM(77)724.

To overcome these obstacles, several of the Member States, as well as other countries like the United States and Sweden have tried to find new ways of helping consumers to protect themselves more easily. These were discussed and compared extensively at the symposium and a number of proposals were formulated. The proposals emphasize the need to step up consumer information and education and to create arbitration bodies as well as consultative bodies empowered to help consumers and traders or suppliers of services to reach an amicable settlement of their differences. They recommend the simplification of legal procedures for small claims and the assumption of responsibility for consumer protection either by consumers' associations or by the public authorities or by an ombudsman.

The Commission intends to send the Council a communication on legal redress for consumers, of which the above proposals will form the basis.

4. Consumer information

National legislation in the Nine on the amount of information to which the consumer has a right varies enormously. In several countries, the law does not oblige a supplier of goods and services to give any basic minimum of information to the consumer on what he is getting for his money and it has therefore fallen to the courts to create some kind of protective framework for the consumer. And yet if the consumer is to be able to make a rational choice between the vast variety of goods and services on offer to him and thus to play his full role as an economic partner, then he must be in possession of all the facts.

The Commission has therefore sent the Council a draft directive on the marking and display of the prices of foodstuffs. Food manufacturers often baffle consumers by packaging their goods in boxes or bottles containing quantities such as 55 grams or 370 cl which often makes the task of the shopper trying to make price comparisons between different brands well-nigh impossible.

The Commission wants to put an end to this situation and has therefore proposed that all foodstuffs for sale to the consumer should have their selling prices and unit prices clearly marked and displayed. The same requirements should apply to advertisements, offers for sale and catalogues stating prices. To avoid the difficulties involved in manufacturers printing unit prices on packaging, however, the directive provides for flexible forms of price-marking such as signs, posters and wall display.

Between 1969 and 1975, several Member States adopted laws and regulations on unit pricing by weight or volume and two Member States have taken steps to make unit pricing compulsory. Others, however, do not have any specific legislation on the matter. The legislation proposed by the Commission should make unit pricing general in all Community countries.

In addition, the Council has already adopted a directive on the making up by weight or volume of certain pre-packed products¹ and another on the making up by volume of certain pre-packed liquids.²

¹ Council Directive 76/211/EEC of 20.1.1976.

² Council Directive 75/106/EEC of 19.12.1974.

The Commission is preparing a proposal on the unit pricing of household products as a supplement in the non-food sector to the proposals already before the Ministers, and this will be by a further proposal on the marking and display of prices of certain categories of service. The measure will apply to hotel and catering services, shops and household repairs and will make it obligatory to mention points such as whether or not taxes and service charges are included in prices.

A symposium on consumer information was held in Brussels from 23 to 25 November 1977, under the auspices of the Commission and the University of Louvain. Over three hundred participants from the nine Member States and from several non-Community countries took part.

The aim of this symposium—which was attended by Mr Burke, Member of the Commission—was to provide a forum in which representatives from the consumer and business world and representatives of the public authorities, press and research institutes could discuss the various questions arising out of consumer information and suggest ways and means of improving the content, form and means of consumer information.

The Head of the Commission's Environment and Consumer Protection Service underlined the need for an improvement in the quality of information supplied to consumers: the fundamental issue at stake was to obtain a better understanding of consumers' needs, to satisfy these needs and to teach consumers to obtain information.

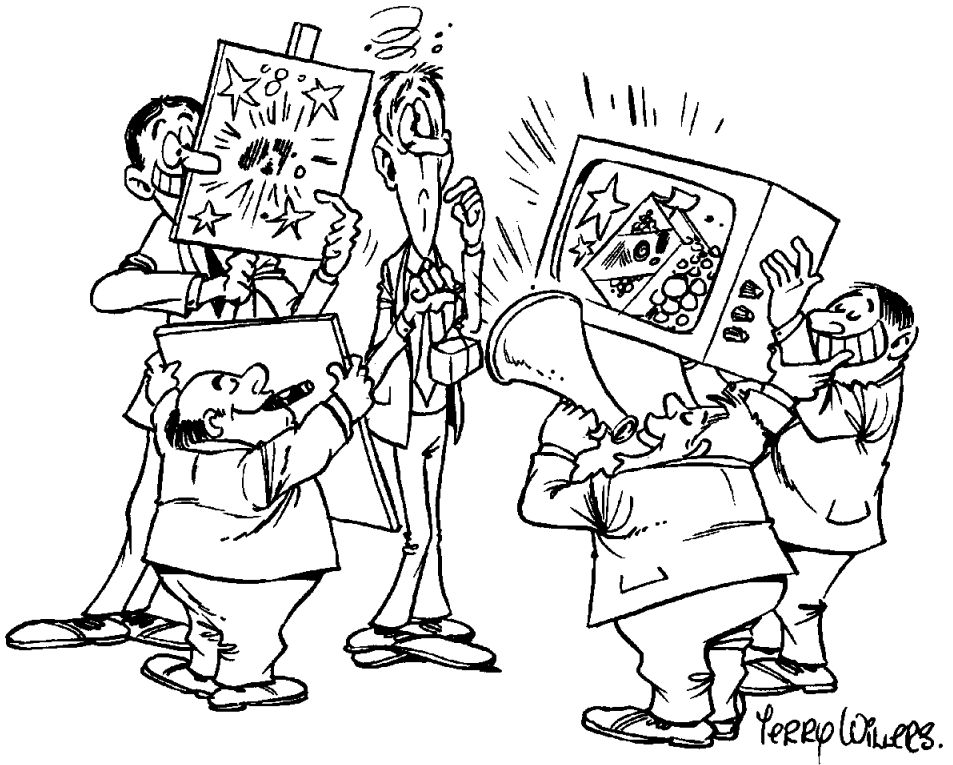
The suggestions made at the symposium centred mainly on the following aspects:

- (i) making labelling's role strictly informative;
- (ii) increasing the access of consumer organizations to the media;
- (iii) restricting the subjective aspect of advertising and increasing its informative duties;
- (iv) relaxing the ban on comparative advertising;
- (v) developing consumer advice and information centres;
- (vi) expanding the informative role of public authorities and services.

5. Consumer education

If consumers are to make proper use, however, of the information available to them, they need special education. Politicians have been known to say that if consumers would only behave in a more rational way, compare prices, qualities and services before buying, they could help to keep prices down and thus aid politicians in their battle against inflation. But consumers need to be helped to understand the influence they can exert in their role as well-informed consumers. The best way to do this is to ensure that they are educated in consumer affairs in the schools.

To enable it to determine the most effective means of encouraging consumer education, the Commission has gathered information on initiatives taken in certain Member States. This was done partly at first hand and partly with the help of BEUC and Eurocoop who have completed studies on consumer education in schools and consumer education for adults respectively.



In December 1977, a symposium on consumer education in schools was held in London, and future Community action in this field will take into account the results of this meeting. The symposium called upon the Member States to create the necessary opportunities for consumer training throughout the whole of school education, to include the subject in teacher training courses and to take action to develop suitable teaching materials. The meeting also called upon the Commission to set up a European centre for the dissemination of material on consumer education.

As far as more general information for consumers is concerned, the Commission's Directorate-General for Information is responsible for the dissemination of information to consumers on national and Community measures taken in their interests. It holds regular meetings with journalists and radio and television producers of consumer programmes in order to keep them informed of developments and has dealt at considerable length with consumer questions in its weekly bulletin 'Euroforum'.

In 1977, the Commission published its first report on consumer protection and information policy and will in future publish similar reports on an annual basis. The Environment and Consumer Protection Service has also prepared a number of publications intended to keep consumer organizations abreast of developments at Community level, including 'The consumer organizations and the public authorities (1977)', as well as a bibliography on publications dealing with the promotion of consumer interests.

6. Consultation and representation

The Commission takes the view that the consumer must be considered as a social partner in his own right. This means that consumers should be represented when decisions affecting their interests are taken both in government and administrative bodies and in trade bodies. They would thus receive equal status with producers' and trade union groups.

The setting up of the Commission's Environment and Consumer Protection Service was an important step forward in the promotion of consumer interests at Community level. Besides itself initiating legislation on consumer affairs, the Service monitors work being done in other Commission services which is liable to affect consumer interests.

In another move to enable consumers to steer Community policy along more consumer-orientated lines, the Commission set up the Consumers' Consultative Committee, which has been an active instrument of consumer policy since it was created by a Commission Decision of 25 September 1973.¹

The Committee is consulted by the Commission as soon as work begins on the drafting of Community provisions; this means that it can make any observations at an early stage and forward to the Commission detailed opinions on measures being prepared.

The Commission approached the Committee for any opinion it specifically requires, but the Committee may also give an opinion on matters which it has discussed on its own initiative; consequently, it can carry out fairly detailed investigations. In this way, it can pass resolutions on topical subjects such as nuclear energy and safety, the potato market etc. These resolutions are forwarded to the Commissioner responsible and are usually the subject of a press release.

As a result of this process of consultation, the Consumer Consultative Committee has given opinions on a wide range of subjects. Subjects upon which it has issued opinions include consumer credit, misleading advertising and doorstep selling, as well as insurance contracts, a subject on which the Commission is preparing proposals.

The Committee has on several occasions given statements of its position on the common agricultural policy and has also issued opinions on Commission proposals for agricultural prices. Its representatives are consulted on a regular and continuing basis by the Commissioner responsible for agriculture to discuss developments in the CAP.

As well as issuing opinions in its own right, the Consumers' Consultative Committee also sends representatives to a number of other committees set up by the Commission, namely the Advisory Committee on Foodstuffs, the Advisory Committee on Customs Matters, the Advisory Committee on Veterinary Matters and more than twenty Advisory Committees for individual agricultural products. The task of all these committees is to advise the Commission in the drafting of legislation in specific fields and it is therefore important that, since they are all fields that concern consumers, they too should be included in the deliberations.

¹ Council Decision 73/306/EEC, OJ L 283 of 10.10.1973.

The Advisory Committee on Foodstuffs is of very special interest to consumers and is consulted by the Commission on all matters relating to the harmonization of legislation on foodstuffs. Amongst other things, it has issued opinions on the labelling, presentation and advertising of foodstuffs, on a Commission proposal for the approximation of Member States' laws on bakers' wares, rusks, cakes and biscuits, and on colorants.

In the process of its task of representing consumer views to the European Commission, the Consumers' Consultative Committee has promoted exchanges of views between the many institutions and trade groups organized on a European basis and has also begun a dialogue with the Community agricultural organizations (COPA-COGECA), which are as concerned as consumers about how the common agricultural policy should develop.

To coordinate all these activities, to produce joint opinions and to appoint representatives to other committees, the organizations present on the CCC, whether they represent the family, the trade unions, the cooperatives or those organizations more strictly devoted to defending consumer interests, have had to cooperate and to consult with each other. The Commission hopes that by encouraging this cooperation, it can help to strengthen the consumer lobby at European level.

The Commission states in its preliminary programme for a consumer policy that it will encourage organizations representing consumers to study matters of particular importance to consumers. To this end, it has financed a large number of studies every year, carried out by BEUC, COFACE, Eurocoop and ETUC. Recently completed studies have been on topics such as consumer needs regarding transport, consumer education, informative labelling and care labelling of textiles.

Finally, in a broader field, the Commission states its intention in its preliminary programme on consumer protection to take full account of studies and other work already carried out by international bodies and to collaborate with them to varying degrees. Since the adoption of the programme, it has had particularly fruitful collaboration with the Council of Europe's Committee on Legal Cooperation on such subjects as product liability, unfair terms of contract, economic and other obstacles to civil proceedings and after-sales service. It has also participated in the work of the OECD's Committee on Consumer Policy and has been regularly represented on working parties dealing with such topics as labelling, consumer credit and undesirable marketing practices.

VI. The next steps

The Commission is clearly well on the way to achieving a great many of the objectives laid out in its preliminary programme for a consumer protection and information policy—but not all of them. The rest it hopes to have achieved by the end of the programme's allotted four-year period, at which time a further action programme will be drawn up to carry on where the present one leaves off.

The Commission is continuing its policy of breaking down technical barriers to trade by aligning Member States' product legislation, and this means that gradually, as more barriers go, consumers will see in their shops an increasing range of goods from other Member

States, available at competitive prices and meeting strict Community-wide norms designed to protect and inform the consumer. It is eventually hoped to introduce a sort of Community guarantee for goods that would be respected in every Member State.

The Community's plans for fiscal harmonization will ensure that manufacturers pay equal rates of value added tax to their respective governments and that therefore, with more equal production costs, they will be able to sell competitively on European markets.

Meanwhile, the Competition Department continues to police mergers and commercial practices and consumers are lent an increasingly sympathetic ear by those responsible for administering the common agricultural policy—and thus for food prices in the Nine.

Perhaps the most important factor for the future of European consumerism is that with the setting up of the Environment and Consumer Protection Service and the Consumers' Consultative Committee, consumers have now established a footing in Europe's decision-making process and can thus join with the Commission in ensuring that their interests are actively promoted.

The Commission is determined that the emphasis in consumer policy should be placed more and more on the promotion of consumer interests rather than merely on protection. So far, this commitment has taken the form of a more explicit input of consumer interests into general policy formulation in the Commission than was the practice in the early years of the Community.

However, the active promotion of consumer interests need not be to the detriment of producers. With this in mind, the Commission is encouraging cooperation between producers and consumers. Basically, producers exist to serve the needs of consumers but they are often faced with choices regarding the type and marketing of goods they produce which a continuing dialogue with consumers would help them to resolve. The more each know about the other's problems the greater are the possibilities of achieving results satisfactory to both.

The Commission's aim is to establish a better balance of power in the market place so that the consumer can regain his rightful pre-eminence in the economic system. In doing so, it is not the Commission's intention to undermine the producer, whose interests are and have been for a long time well-represented at Community level. The Commission is simply trying to give the consumer voice a weight in keeping with the importance of consumer interests and to provide an adequate counterbalance to the strength and influence of the producers. This can be achieved not at the cost of conflict but by the promotion of constant consultation between both sides which will lead to the establishment of a mature partnership.

Membership of one or more consumer associations
Breakdown by level of education and by family income
 (Community as a whole)

(in %)

	Overall	Level of education			Income			
		Low	Average	High	Low	Lower middle	Upper middle	High
Pay a subscription:								
— to one association	29	30	30	26	23	33	33	31
— to more than one association	21	14	26	31	10	15	24	35
Do not belong to any	47	53	41	40	64	49	41	33
Don't know/no reply	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	1
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

What consumers feel the Community offers

(in %)

	Wider range of products for consumers	Exports of industrial goods	Exports of agricultural products	Restraint of price increases
Sample as a whole	67	58	47	38
Of each 100 persons in favour of the Community (63%)	76	70	55	47
Of each 100 persons stating no decision (21%)	61	49	38	30
Of each 100 persons against the Community (9%)	44	26	29	16

Question:

'Have you heard of organizations (independent of manufacturers and traders) which specialize in consumer information and protection?'

'Can you name one such organization (in your own country)?'

Answer:*(in %)*

	Have heard:			Have not heard (b)	Don't know Didn't reply (c)	Total (a)+ (b)+ (c)
	Total (a)	Can name one	Can't name one			
Luxembourg	56	37	19	35	9	100
United Kingdom	48	36	12	46	6	100
FR of Germany	55	25	30	30	15	100
Denmark	52	24	28	40	8	100
France	44	24	20	53	3	100
Belgium	32	22	10	59	9	100
Ireland	31	19	12	58	11	100
Netherlands	58	16	42	30	12	100
Italy	24	8	16	67	9	100
Community	44	23	21	48	8	100

Question:

'Do you think bodies which carry out comparative tests on products and publish the results are trustworthy?'

Answer:*(in %)*

	Yes	No	Don't know or haven't heard of the tests
FR of Germany	59	5	36
Netherlands	57	4	39
Denmark	56	2	42
France	47	2	51
United Kingdom	43	4	53
Luxembourg	45	3	52
Belgium	41	3	56
Italy	30	8	62
Ireland	22	2	76
Community	45	5	50

Importance attached to consumer protection

(October/November 1975)

	Very important	Important	Fairly important	Not at all important	Don't know/ no reply	Total
Ireland	57	31	7	2	3	100
Luxembourg	30	49	6	3	12	100
Italy	51	30	10	6	3	100
FR of Germany	41	32	17	4	6	100
Belgium	46	27	10	4	13	100
Netherlands	39	27	12	7	15	100
United Kingdom	47	35	8	5	5	100
France	50	28	13	5	4	100
Denmark	43	31	7	6	13	100
Community	46	31	12	5	6	100

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