



INFO-C

Information from the Consumer Policy Service of the European Commission - Quarterly n°9

COMING TO THE END OF AN EXCITING YEAR

This is the final issue of **INFO-C** 1993, a year full of important developments in Community consumer policy.

For the Treaty on European Union, the correct title of the Maastricht Treaty, was finally adopted and with it the new legal framework for consumer policy, Article 129A. The most urgent task for 1994 will be to translate into action the additional aspect introduced by this article: contributing to the attainment of a high level of consumer protection through specific action which supports and supplements Member State policies.

But in order to keep the CPS busy in the meantime the Commission adopted in July a new three-year Action Programme. Two central points are the improvement of both consumers' legal position and the flow of information regarding the Single Internal Market. So quite recently the Commission has adopted not only two Green Paper(1), one on the issues of guarantees and after-sales service and one on the specific theme of access to justice, but also a communication on the use of languages in labelling. All three themes are covered in this issue of **INFO-C**.

The result of the Council held under the Belgian presidency is also covered - the postponement of this from late October to late November explains why we have not kept to the planned publication schedule for **INFO-C** given in No 6.

The "positive feedback loop" with readers we hoped to establish in 1993 (see also No 6) has materialised to such an extent that we are now stepping up our publication rate to an issue every two months. This has only been possible through the support of our readers. The editorial staff would like to thank you for this and wish you all a merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

(1) In present Eurospeak, Green Papers are consultation documents outlining the situation and the options available without coming down in favour of any specific action at this stage.

INFO-C

Editors : Jens Ring
Diane Luquiser
Commission of the European
Communities
Consumer Policy Service
200, rue de la Loi -
B - 1049 Bruxelles
Tel. : +32/2/296.55.37
Fax : +32/2/296.32.79
Date : texts finalised the 30/11/93
ISSN No 1018 - 5755

OF SPECIAL INTEREST

Consumer Council	2
Consumers' confidence : results of the Eurobarometer	4
Euroguichets	8
Adoption of two Green Papers	10
Labelling and used languages	12
News from Member States	19
Publications and audiovisuals	33
Diary	37

CONSUMER COUNCIL : FIRST APPLICATION OF THE MAASTRICHT TREATY RULES

The Consumers Affairs Council was originally planned for October 19. It was, however, postponed to November 21 in order to permit more progress to be made on a number of issues.

This approach was successful in that the Council reached a common position on the question of "time-share". Before entering into the results of the Council in detail, two new elements resulting from the Maastricht Treaty must be introduced :

- from now on, the Council is entitled "Council of the European Union";
- all new proposals for Consumer policy will be subject to the procedure of "co-decision" before final adoption; this procedure increases the influence of the Parliament. The "Time-Share" proposal will be the first to be subjected to this procedure.

PROTECTION OF TIMESHARE PURCHASERS

The Council reached agreement in substance on a common position concerning the Directive on the protection of purchasers in contracts relating to the purchase of a right to utilize one or more immovable properties on a timeshare basis (1).

Such protection, by means of a Community instrument, is warranted on account of the cross-border nature of such transactions, of differences between the relevant national laws and of the problems faced by consumers in taking out such contracts.

The common position is designed to approximate the laws, regulations and administrative provisions of the Member States concerning the protection of purchasers in respect of certain aspects of timeshare contracts, viz.:

- information on the minimum constituent parts of the contract and the arrangements for forwarding such information;
- the procedures and arrangements for cancellation and withdrawal.

With regard to the provisions on information, the time-share contract and the document describing the property covered by the contract would have to be drafted, from among the official languages of the Community, in the language (or one of the languages) of the Member State in which the purchaser resides or in the language (or one of the languages) of the Member State of which he is a national, if he so wishes. However, the Member State in which the purchaser resides would be able to require the contract in all cases to be drafted at least in its own (or one of its own) official language(s), from among those of the Community. In addition the vendor would have to provide the purchaser with a certified translation of the contract in the official Community language (or one of the official Community languages) of the Member State in which the property is situated.

With regard to withdrawal conditions, the purchaser would be entitled to withdraw within 10 days without giving any reason. Any advance payment by the purchaser before the end of that cooling-off period would be prohibited.

The Directive lays down minimum requirements and so would not prevent Member States from adopting or retaining provisions that are more favourable in terms of pro-

(1) For the purposes of the Directive, a timeshare contract means any contract or group of contracts concluded for a minimum of three years by which, directly or indirectly, on payment of a certain global price, a real property right or any other right relating to the utilization of one or more immovable properties for a specified or specifiable period of the year, which may not be less than one week, is established or is the subject of a transfer or an undertaking to transfer.

protecting purchasers in this field, subject to their obligations under the Treaty.

Member States would have to comply with the Directive not later than three years after it is published, although they are committed to transposing it within as short a time as possible, in fact two years, in order to bring about swiftly a better standard of consumer protection in this field.

CONTRACTS NEGOTIATED AT A DISTANCE

The Council was briefed on progress with the proposal for a Directive to approximate Member States' legislation on contracts negotiated at a distance (distance-selling) and instructed the Permanent Representatives Committee to discuss it further.

TRANSPARENCY OF CROSS-BORDER PAYMENTS

The Council took note of the presentation by the Commission of the findings of a survey concerning transparency of cross-border payments and the present picture as regards costs entailed by such payments

The document points in particular to the high charges made for banking transactions, despite the undertaking given by the banks in March 1992 to bring such charges down.

The Council took note of progress with the other items on its agenda, viz.:

- second consumer action plan;
- consumer labelling of products;
- consumers' access to the courts;
- guarantees and after-sales service.

New titles for the Community institutions (1)

Following the implementation of the Treaty of Maastricht (Treaty on European Union), and as a result of the decision of the General Affairs Council on 8 November and of the Commission on 17 November, the current titles of the institutions of the European Union are as follows:

- "Council of the European Union"
- "European Commission"
- "European Parliament"
- "European Court of Justice".

However, for legal and formal communications, the name "Commission of the European Communities" will remain, as the Treaty on European Union does not amend Article 9 of the Merger Treaty establishing the Commission of the European Communities. The presidency of the Council of the European Union and/or the European Commission will represent the European Union according to their respective fields of competence.

(1) Source: Staff Courier of the European Commission, No 41, 2-8 December 1993

Eurobarometer 39.0 : Shopping in the Single European Market

The Consumer Policy Service included questions in the regular EC opinion survey Eurobarometer in the spring of 1993 designed to measure the impact of the Single European Market (SEM) on European consumers' attitudes and behaviour.

Some of the topics covered had also been included in Spring 1991, but there were also new questions relating to the following issues:

- Sources of information when considering a major purchase
- Institutions thought most capable of solving potential problems in buying from or selling to another EC Member State.
- Proximity of residence to another EC Member State.

Topics updated from their 1991 position were:

- The propensity of European consumers to buy in other Member States
- Satisfaction with such purchases
- Types of products/services purchased abroad
- Countries in which foreign purchases are made
- Perceived obstacles to buying or selling abroad within the EC.

I. Daily Life - Significance of Single European Market

The SEM "opened" in January 1993 in the sense that by this date the (vast majority of) obstacles to its full operation had been removed. Most respondents expect that it will have some effect on their daily life. However the freedom to live and work in other EC Member States is still uppermost (the most important aspect for 30%), whereas expectations as to a greater variety of goods and services on offer - a core issue for consumer protection - tops the list for only 8%, although 34% of respondents included this among the important issues (no significant change since 1991).

Roughly one in seven EC residents claim that the SEM has no effect whatsoever on their daily life - a view particularly widespread in Denmark, Britain and Ireland.

II. Purchase of Foreign Products/Services

A. Purchase in home country

According to this survey the level of purchasing of (EC) product/services from other EC Member States actually dropped between Spring 1991 and Spring 1993 following the birth of the Internal Market: when EC-residents were asked if they had bought any (EC) foreign product or service in their home country in the last six months, 54% replied "yes" in 1991 but only 46% in 1993; the steepest fall was in Germany (from 57% to 37% - the 1991 measurement was undertaken *after* unification).

To some extent, this could be a result of the recession, but it may also be related to other more subtle changes in consumer behaviour and preferences at a time of economic difficulty.

Furthermore, the SEM is a process, not an event: in its relatively limited period of operation, a major change in availability of goods/services cannot be achieved except where such purchases were considerably restricted within a Member State in the past. Another potential explanation is that people are less aware than previously of the country of origin of goods/services which they purchase.

Of the products actually purchased, food heads the list (1991: 34%, 1993: 30%). But even the products lowest on the order of priority [household appliances (11%) and cars/motor cycles (5%)] are well ahead of services of any kind. Services were purchased by only 1-3%, with medical services predominating.

A concrete manifestation of the SEM is that those who live close to another EC Member State (within 30 kilo-

metres of a border) are only marginally more likely to have purchased a product/service from another EC country than those who live farther away (53% versus 46% respectively). Border area residents are, however, considerably more likely to buy food, wine, clothing/footwear and even banking services from other EC countries than the remainder of the population.

B. Purchases while visiting other EC countries

Apart from shopping at home, people can also purchase products/services while visiting other EC countries. However, there has been no statistically significant change since 1991: less than one in ten EC residents had made such a purchase (worth more than ECU 100 in value) in the preceding six months; food, wine, clothing and footwear were again the most common items. Not surprisingly, those who live within 30 kilometres of a border with another EC Member State are more likely to have shopped abroad: some 13% of border area residents had done so, versus 6% of all others.

However, distance from (large) foreign markets is by no means the only explanation for this behaviour. Propensity to shop abroad in the EC ranges from 20% for residents of Luxembourg to 3% for residents of Portugal and Greece. Rather surprisingly, in the light of its island status, Britain scores 8%, not far from Denmark (10%).

Just 3% of EC residents ordered a product/service directly from another EC country. The figure was highest in the Benelux countries, just like shopping abroad.

C. Satisfaction with foreign purchases

Only one in four of the small number of EC residents who ordered product/services from other EC Member States reported having problems. More than nine in ten claimed to be very or quite satisfied with their direct order from another EC State.

The main difficulty/disappointment relates to delays in delivery, primarily attributable to the supplier rather than

to cross-border factors such as the post or customs/administration.

D. Sources of information

A new question asked in 1993 of all EC residents - irrespective of whether they are ordered from, purchased while visiting or knowingly purchased goods/services from another EC Member State in the past six months - was what sources of information they would use when considering major purchases (such as household electrical appliances, cars, furniture and hi-fi's articles which, it is recalled, people are far less likely to purchase abroad than, say, food).

The influence of the retailer/supplier is at least as important as word of mouth from friends/relatives/colleagues or neighbours. Both of these sources of information are rated higher than comparative tests in specialist magazines or consumer publications - mentioned only by four in ten EC residents as potential sources of reference information. Clearly, the spoken word predominates over the written one.

III. Consumer attitudes to buying from other EC Member States

As actual purchasing patterns indicate, consumer images of what product/services can be purchased with confidence in other EC Member States have changed little in the past two years. The items most commonly purchased abroad have the best reputation for living up to expectations. Conversely, services - and not least financial services like banking or insurance - still require considerable confidence building if EC residents are to shop abroad for them readily in the SEM environment. Only approximately one in five would buy these financial services with complete confidence in another EC State - yet this figure is of course a lot higher than the actual one. (*cfr.* above).

Germany and France are favoured by those who claim that they would be likely to buy with complete confidence in other EC Member States: out of a total of eleven product/service areas. Germany received significant positive mentions (over 10%) in eight and France in five cases.

Germany's reputation, however, seems to be driven by consumer durables (60% positive mentions), that is, it enjoys the best reputation among more rarely purchased product/service areas. Conversely, France scored highest where wine and food are concerned.

The main reasons for choosing to buy a product/service in another EC country seem to be expectations of lower prices and better quality. Better design and greater choice are important subsidiary influences.

IV. Obstacles to buying in another EC State

The respondents were asked to identify the main obstacle to buying from or selling to another European Community Member State. They were also asked for two other obstacles which they viewed as important.

The primary obstacle, identified by more than 50% in both 1991 and 1993, is a perceptual one: a belief that it may be too difficult to exchange the product/service if it is not up to expectations. As has been demonstrated above, expectations are, however, normally met.

Potential language difficulties also score high (+/-40% both years).

Greater emphasis seems to be laid in 1993 than in 1991 on difficulties in settling disputes and uncertainty about terms of sale, safety standards and quality standards (1991: 16-29%, 1993: 22-34%). Concerns about obtaining advice or difficulties in making payments are not often rated as the most significant obstacle - but can be seen to contribute to difficulties.

(*Cf.* also the article elsewhere in this edition of **Info-C** about the Commission Green Paper on Guarantees and After-sales Services.)

V. Institution capable of solving purchase problems

Asked to say which institution within the SEM was thought most capable of solving problems in buying from or selling to another EC Member State, almost half opted

for the EC institutions and one in three for national institutions of the relevant (two) countries. As many as one in four claimed that they did not know who was most capable - a result of lack of experience of buying/selling abroad or lack of understanding of the core competence of each institution?

Residents of Denmark remain by far the most convinced of the competence of their government to sort out these problems, with one in two opting for national institutions as the most capable. Conversely, the most pro-European are the Italians (54%). A large proportion of the Irish (40%) and the British (35%) felt unable to answer this question.

A copy of the graphical representation of the statistical data may be obtained from the CPS.

Contact:

Jens RING

CPS/5

Tel.: +32/2/295 69 47

Fax: +32/2/296 32 79

CONSUMER INFORMATION CAMPAIGN

Over the past ten months, the Consumer Policy Service has co-ordinated a Community-wide information campaign which aimed to make consumers more aware of the rights they enjoy as a result of a whole range of EC rules (see **INFO-C** No 7). By targeting a number of key media and interest groups in each Member State, easily readable basic information (in the form of press releases and explanatory notes) was distributed on the following selected themes :

Travel and Tourism

Unfair Contract Terms

Product Safety

Consumer Credit

Insurance

Food Labelling

Medicines

Banking

Cosmetics

Advertising

Each of the above themes was the subject of a briefing meeting and/or press mailing on a staggered basis from March to July. The campaign finished in September with

the organisation of press conferences in each Member State to explain the contents of the new Commission Work Programme which was adopted at the end of July (see **INFO-C** Special Edition). In general, the main presentation at these briefings was given by a member of the European Parliament on behalf of the Community, rather than just one institution. Representatives of the Commission also attended to help explain the policy and message underlying each of the themes.

The press reaction was very encouraging : over 1,000 articles or pieces in national and regional newspapers, radio and television. In the case of the latter, coverage was often boosted by the distribution via satellite of Video News Releases on each topic. These provided news broadcasters with pre-prepared footage for use in their reports, and initial estimates show that such pictures reached an audience of 180 million throughout the Community.

In addition, the campaign has provided the Consumer Policy Service with a range of information material which has been, and indeed will continue to be, distributed via existing and new networks. This material, which can also serve as a basis for the development of new forms of information material, includes comprehensive base material on the above subjects, a series of leaflets explaining the fundamental rights enjoyed by EU consumers, video newsreel footage, and a handbook of consumer information which can be made available on diskette. This material will be continually updated to take account of further developments at a European level which are relevant to consumers.

Contact :

CPS/5

Kenneth I. ROBERTS

Tel. : +32/2/295.56.57

Fax : +32/2/296.32.79



MILAN — March 25, 1993 DG X Office -Travel and Tourism

ANNUAL MEETING OF THE EUROPEAN AGENCIES FOR INFORMATION ON CONSUMER AFFAIRS

Representatives of all the agencies and antennae of these "Euroguichets" took part in this third annual meeting which was held in Brussels on 11 October 1993.

The principal aims of the meeting were to discuss the progress of the project during the past year, to exchange information and to see how contacts between the various agencies could be improved. The importance the Commission attaches to the cross-border region agencies was underlined by the attendance, towards the end of the morning, of Mme Scrivener, the Commissioner responsible for consumer policy, customs and taxation. Mme Scrivener stressed the vital role played by these agencies via feedback from the consumers on the problems they encountered in the single market. A DG X representative also attended to discuss the Commission's new information policy and the relations of the cross-border agencies with other information networks.

Progress to date

A number of new agencies had opened over the past year. More recently these included Flensburg, covering the Danish/German border, in August 1993. Kehl covering the Baden Württemberg/Alsace area had already started work in May but only opened officially in September 1993 and finally the office in Galicia (Spain) was opened on 7/8 October 1993. The Vitoria agency covering the Basque region, and the Netherlands side of the Aachen/Eupen/Sankt-Vith project still remained to be set up. The budgetary problems experienced by the Marseille agency had forced the office to close again but this had not hampered cooperation between French and Italian consumer organisations in that area.

Some agencies continued to place priority on advising the individual consumer whilst others preferred to improve consumer information by helping consumer organisations. Enquiries included car and property purchase,

long distance sales, VAT, consumer credit, capital transfer, insurance, civil liability, foodstuffs, price comparisons, etc. Several participants pointed out the often very complicated nature, in legal terms, of cases presented to them.

Clearly progress was being made with regard to cooperation between the agencies themselves. A brochure on purchase law had been prepared by the Gronau agency which compared German and Dutch law. This had then been taken up by Aachen and finally Kehl wished to add a part on French law in this field. Cooperation had also taken place in the area of price comparison surveys and press communiqués. All participants thought that more cooperation should be achieved over the coming months and several proposals were put forward.

CPS contact :

Carol HUMPHREY

Tel. : +32/2/295.25.28

Fax : +32/2/296.32.79

COOPERATION AGREEMENT

The ULC (the European consumer infocentre of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg) and the Belgian consumer organisation Test-Achats recently signed an international cooperation agreement. This is connected with the fact that these two neighbouring countries have always had close and friendly relations. Many Belgians pass through Luxembourg either for professional reasons or to save money, or again for sightseeing or shopping purposes.

Accordingly the two organisations already had relations, both as regards the provision of information and interventions. The cooperation agreement now makes these links official. From now on all members of Test-Achats or the ULC who can prove their affiliation will be free to enjoy the services provided by either organisation. In the event of problems the dossiers of Belgian citizens will be dealt with by the ULC as though they were its own members and vice-versa for Test-Achats.

Contact:

Test-Achats
S. MAUCQ
Rue de Hollande, 13
B - 1060 Bruxelles
Tel.: +32/2/536.64.11
Fax : +32/2/536.66.20

Source:

EUROKON
Bendelstraße 37
D - 52062 Aachen
Tel.: +49/241/40.45.26

THE EUROKON PROJECT GIVES MORE SAY TO EC CONSUMERS

The European Community's Economic and Social Committee, the consultative institution in the context of EC law-making, organised a conference on "Europe of the Citizen" on 27 and 28 September. Eva Johnen, head of the Eurokon project (Europäische Konsumentenberatung), was among those invited. Eurokon is a collaborative project involving the Verbraucher-Zentrale Nordrhein-Westfalen, the Verbraucherschutzzentrale Ostbelgien and the Netherlands Organisation Planpraktijk/consument en huishouding. The focus was on the questions, problems and demands raised by the invited consumers and firms in order - as ECS president Susanne Tiemann put it - to bridge the gap between European citizens and decision-makers and to put the citizen on centre stage in the formulation of European policy".

The Eurokon project invited Dieter Forth as an "exemplary European consumer", to talk about moving house from Aachen to Landgraaf in the Netherlands. Dieter Forth gave a vivid picture of the "removals adventure" in a Europe without borders, in a contribution which ranged from a Dutch-language house purchasing covenant to difficulties in connection with taxation, credit and insurance, and problems in reregistering a motor vehicle abroad.

Winding up, he called for greater EC commitment in advising consumers on transborder questions and problems, on the lines of the work done in Eurokon project. It is to be hoped that this appeal, as well as that of the other private citizens, will find an echo among European decision-makers.

CONSUMER INFORMATION ON ORGANIC FOODSTUFFS AS CLEAR AS MUD !

Consumers still cannot always tell the difference between "genuine" and "pseudo" organic products. Two years after the Council Regulation on organic foodstuffs was adopted, the consumer protection aspect of the whole operation is still riddled with holes. This, at any rate, is the result of an investigation conducted by German consumer associations into the labelling of organically grown foodstuffs, supplemented by another survey carried out in the border region straddling Belgium and the Netherlands by Eurokon, a consumers' organisation formed by groups from Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands.

The aim of the Council Regulation is to create the same conditions and minimum standards throughout the European Community for the production, inspection and labelling of organic products. At present, though, it covers only plant products, i.e. excluding products of animal origin. More particularly, the point is to help consumers to distinguish between "genuine" and "bogus" organic products with the help of the "Organic Farming - EEC Control System" labelling scheme.

With effect from 1 January 1993, all producers, processors and importers of organically grown products must be able to prove to private vetting agencies and state inspection authorities that they are complying in every respect with the terms of the Regulation. If they are unable to do so, the product is not allowed to bear the organic label.

To find out whether such products are already on sale, checks were carried out in 48 towns and cities in Germany on a total of 789 foodstuffs and on a further 84 products in neighbouring parts of Belgium and the Netherlands.

Only in 28 cases (3.5%) did the inspectors in Germany find in baby food, potato products, cereal products, pasta and fruit juices an indication that they had been made in compliance with the EC Regulation. The actual label was displayed on only 13 products (1.6%). In Eupen and Maastricht, a total of three products - all of them cereal-based - bore the label.

The inspectors found a particularly high number of "unclear" organic labels on fresh fruit and vegetables, a group of products for which there would seem to be as yet no really effective inspection system.

In Aachen, the inspectors found what they were looking for in a total of 31 shops, ranging from supermarkets to health food shops and market stalls. 61 products gave the impression of having been organically produced. On closer inspection, though, only a third of the foodstuffs proved to have been produced under approved organic conditions. And only three of the 61 products were labelled organic under the EC Regulation. The situation was much the same in Eupen and Maastricht, with 84 products giving the impression of being organic, whereas 12 out of 26 in Eupen (26%) came from approved organic farming organisations, compared with only 6 out of 38 (16%) in Maastricht, and a mere 3 out of the total of 84 were labelled in accordance with the EC Regulation.

So consumers are still in a quandry. Are the products which claim to be organic really covered by the EC Regulation? With organically grown products often being more expensive than the conventional item, purchasers have a right to an unambiguous and readily comprehensible labelling system.

The consumer organisations are pushing for improvements to be made to the labelling aspect of the Regulation. Use of the approved label should be mandatory for all products covered by the Regulation.

Source:

EUROKON

Bendelstraße 37

D-52062 Aachen

Tel.: +49/241/40.45.26

GUARANTEES AND AFTER-SALES SERVICES

The Green Paper calls for consultation

On 20 October 1993 the Commission of the European Communities adopted the Green Paper on guarantees for consumer goods and after-sales services.

This initiative was announced recently in the European Commission's second three-year action plan (see special edition of **INFO-C**) concerning consumer policy (1993-1995).

The Green Paper is a response to formal requests from the various Community institutions and to the aspirations of all the interested parties. It focuses on the questions raised by the sale of products, while ignoring existing problems concerning the provision of services. Moreover, in mooted possible solutions, the Green Paper limits the discussion to the sale of "movable consumer goods that are new and durable", these being the type of goods whose transfrontier purchase poses most problems for consumers.

As regards the notions of legal guarantee, commercial guarantee and after-sales service, a comparative analysis of the different national legislations shows that alongside common foundations these are also great divergencies.

As well, there is no **specific** legislation in this domain. Nonetheless, certain Community texts or policies play an influential role.

To conclude, the Green Paper is the point of departure for an in-depth public discussion of the subjects dealt with, the idea being to provide the Commission with the elements necessary for defining future measures in this domain. All interested parties are thus invited to provide the Commission with any data of an economic, social and/or legal order which they consider pertinent, notably as regards the functioning of the commercial guarantee, relations with producers and distributors, and consumer complaints. They may also propose to the Commission any action they consider appropriate with an eye to improving the functioning of guarantees and after-sales

services in the context of the Single Market and, more specifically, state their views on the solutions aired in the Green Paper. **The time-limit for consultation is 30 April 1994 and any person who presents a written submission by then may be invited to a hearing.**

CPS contact:

Mario-Paul Tenreiro

Tel.: +32/2/295.13.67

Fax: +32/2/296.32.79

ACCESS TO JUSTICE :

Part of the three-year plan

With a view to maintaining consumer confidence in the internal market and to intensifying transfrontier trade, the Commission adopted, on 16 November 1993, the Green Paper on access to justice.

If a purchase gives rise to a problem, a final type of frontier still exists which can complicate the search for a solution - namely the judicial frontiers.

In most Member States simplified procedures (Justice of the Peace, simplified seizure, etc.) have been introduced with a view to rendering justice "accessible" to all citizens, based on the notion of "small dispute".

Unfortunately, however, attempts to simplify procedures applicable to "small disputes" at national level cannot be effective beyond the judicial frontiers.

Besides court procedures, several out-of-court schemes for settling consumer disputes have been introduced recently, at the initiative of the economic sectors concerned (examples include banking and insurance) or the public authorities (examples: arbitration of consumer disputes in Spain and Portugal). These too are initiatives developed at national or local level which cannot provide a concrete solution to "transfrontier disputes".

The Green Paper adopted by the Commission is an attempt to survey court and out-of-court procedures appli-

cable to consumer disputes in the Member States and to examine the difficulties which private individuals may encounter in the case of a transfrontier dispute.

According to the Green Paper's definition, a "transfrontier dispute" exists when the complainant is domiciled in a country other than the one in which the defendant is legally established.

In principle, the "specific" or supplementary difficulties which arise may include the following:

- the court handling the case is not the court of the country in which the consumer is resident;
- the legal documents must be requested (letters rogatory) in a country other than that of the adjudicating court;
- the documents must be served in a country other than the one in which the complainant is domiciled;
- enforcement of the judgement must be required in a country other than that of the adjudicating court.

Other supplementary difficulties (or "barriers") concern, for example, translation of the documents, or the personal attendance of the parties, and legal aid.

An analysis of the initiatives which might be envisaged by the Community with a view to improving the existing situation is then proposed in the form of "ideas for discussion".

The Green Paper will be submitted for consultation to all interested parties, with a view to obtaining the greatest possible number of comments and suggestions by 31 May 1994.

In June 1994 a hearing may be organised to which parties who have submitted written comments will be invited.

CPS contact:

Marco GASPARINETTI

Tel.: +32/2/295.72.58

Fax : +32/2/296.32.79

WHAT LANGUAGE SHOULD BE USED TO INFORM CONSUMERS?

On 10 November 1993 the Commission adopted two communications which, although they have specific objectives, form part of an integrated approach:

- A communication of a general nature presented by Mrs Scrivener concerning the use of languages in informing consumers in the Community. It is a follow-up to the Council Resolution of 2 March 1993 on future action on the labelling of products in the interest of the consumer and is intended as a basis for discussion for the Consumer Affairs Council on 19 November 1993.
- An interpretative-type communication presented by Messrs Bangemann and Vanni d'Archirafi concerning the use of languages in the marketing of foodstuffs. It is a follow-up to the "Peeters" judgement of the Court of Justice of 18 June 1991 and, setting out the current state of Community law, is designed both to inform citizens as to their rights and administrations as to their obligations.

Information of consumers on the qualities and characteristics of products and services on sale is essential for the working of the Internal Market, because without information a genuine choice is not possible. Mrs Scrivener has stressed that "information must be readable and understandable".

Community law and the laws of the Member States contain many provisions on linguistic requirements as regards labelling and use and other kinds of messages addressed to the purchaser. These laws are very diverse and often incompatible. Hence it is necessary to clarify the rules of the game to avoid distortions to the Single Market.

From the two communications it emerges that the Member States may require the use of their official language or languages for mandatory particulars on labels of foodstuffs intended to be sold as is to the final consumer, provided there is no ban on the use of other languages or on recourse to other measures to inform the consumer. This does not rule out the use of terms of foreign origin which are easily understood - for example, if

such terms are in common use. In effect this requirement must be compatible with Articles 30 and 36 of the Treaty.

Notably, it is clear that the Member States must allow the simultaneous use of several languages on product labels. The general communication also emphasises multilingual labelling, which should be encouraged by the groups concerned but should not be mandatory, given the costs and technical difficulties this would involve.

Hence the Commission proposes encouraging multilingual information and improving concertation between producers, distributors and consumers in this domain.

CPS contact:

Marc JEUNIAUX

Tel.: +32/2/295.92.90

Fax: +32/2/296.32.79

UPDATE ON DISADVANTAGED CONSUMERS

As mentioned in the agendas of **INFO-C** Nos 6 and 7, the conference on "Consumers left behind in a Europe without frontiers" took place in Rotterdam (Netherlands) from 15 to 17 June 1993.

It was organised by the Netherlands consumers' association "Planpraktijk", in cooperation with the Consumer Policy Service of the Commission of the European Communities.

Speakers included representatives from various organisations such as the Hungarian Ministry of Health and Social Affairs and the BBC in the context of its programme to help disadvantaged persons, alongside consumer groups such as the Centre Régional Français de la Consommation (Lille) and the Catalan Consumers' Institute (Spain).

The goal of this conference was to clarify certain points concerning the risk for disadvantaged consumers of losing out on the large market.

These consumers are a mixed group. In the current recession an increasing number of people in ordinary circumstances are finding it harder to make ends meet.

The groups in question include:

- the mentally and physically handicapped;
- the long-term unemployed;
- persons with low educational achievements;
- persons in insanitary accommodation and the homeless;
- the elderly;
- convicts or persons recently released from prison, etc.

Problems concerning disadvantaged consumers were identified on various levels. Firstly, these problems had to be defined at social and individual levels. At the social level - despite the fact citizens have acquired rights and liberties - certain categories of people are still excluded. This applies to the poor, who are disadvantaged as regards free movement and freedom of establishment in the European Community, because a minimum income is required as a condition of residence.

Other problems may arise from overindebtedness of consumers (which sad to say is the priority concern of consumer organisations in the Member States) or inadequate public services.

At individual level, lack of education often prevents consumers from finding, understanding and using the available information.

Sickness, although it is a distinct chapter, is often linked to other problems because of the inaccessibility of services.

The next question was to determine who is responsible for improving the lot of these individuals.

It is clear that efforts must be made at all levels, i.e. both at Community and national level and regional and local level.

The political will already exists at the highest Community level.

This can be seen initially from the Treaty of Rome and now from the Maastricht Treaty and from the various Community programmes already under way.

It should also be noted that at the economic level measures should be taken to dissuade persons from enriching themselves at the expense of human development.

Several types of projects to combat the exclusion of certain consumers have now been developed. They concern information, education, the war on unemployment, measures to combat overindebtedness and projects to help the handicapped and immigrants.

Summing up, the Rotterdam conference highlighted the variety and multiplicity of the barriers encountered by disadvantaged consumers and the large variety of reasons for their exclusion.

Hence the actions must wherever possible be conducted in collaboration with these groups.

Above all the organisations must have the resources to act at different levels.

Hence it is necessary to work as partners.

The plan for a European centre for information and dissemination of experience and documentation both from the Community and outside should go some way to achieving this goal.

It could become the hub of a network of organisations working to help disadvantaged consumers.

Contact:

Planpraktijk Dynamic Assistance
 Jet CREEMERS
 Stationsweg, 147
 NL - 2515 BM Den Haag
 Tel.: +31/70/389.13.40
 Fax: +31/70/388.97.42

EHLASS 1993

On the 29 October 1993 the Council adopted the proposal for a Council Decision introducing a Community system of information on home and leisure accidents - **EHLASS** (European Home and Leisure Accident Surveillance System).

The objectives of the proposal was to organise and coordinate at community level the collection of data on home

and leisure accidents in the Member States with a view to promoting accident prevention, improving the safety of consumer products and informing and educating consumers so that they make better use of products.

The proposal suggested a period of five years for the system, but due to specific reasons the proposal was adopted for only one year. However, reflections on a possible new five year proposal are progressing.

CPS contact:

Lise BRUSENDORFF

Tel. : +32/2/295.55.66

Fax : +32/2/296.32.79

PILOT PROJECT IN THE "NEW GERMAN LÄNDER"

On September 1, 1993 a pilot project on debt counselling was launched by the consumer's organisation "Verbraucherzentrale (VZ) Sachsen-Anhalt" at their headquarters in Halle (former East Germany). This type of counselling activity is normally considered a standard part of VZ activity; but CPS support has been instrumental in getting, this activity taken up on a reasonable scale.

Overindebtedness is a particular problem in the new Länder:

- people have no experience of the variety of financial services and the possible consequence of commitments made in this sector;
- possible changes in a person's professional/economic situation were not normal (unemployment was unknown);
- because of the predictable inexperience of the population and the delay in setting up proper information systems and market surveillance, unscrupulous operators from West Germany moved into these new territories to take advantage of the situation.

The team set up by VZ for the counselling activity includes a lawyer and a social worker. The latter's task is to assist and survey the debtor, once a debt settlement plan has been established, in order to ensure the implementation of this plan and the personal commitment of the debtor to it.

The VZ in Halle has already built up good relationships with local (savings) banks, which are among the main creditors of consumers. One particularly useful solution is the assumption by one creditor of the totality of a debtor's debt. To encourage such assumption, which implies a gamble on the part of the creditor, VZ Halle plans to set up a voluntary guarantee fund to cover such risks. The lobbying of potential sponsors for such a fund has already begun.

There are no debt counselling schemes in the other new Länder (except for a small scale activity in Leipzig); but interest has already been expressed to draw on the experience of VZ Halle. As part of the pilot-project a colloquium of VZ's from the new Länder will be organised early 1994 to discuss this topic.

CPS contact:

Dieter HOFFMANN

CPS/6

Tel. : +32/2/295.77.11

Fax : +32/2/296.32.79

ACTS RELATING TO CONSUMER AFFAIRS

An "Inventory of Community acts relating to consumer affairs", published by the Consumer Policy Service and already mentioned in **INFO-C** No 7, now exists in German. It is regularly updated and available to all citizens.

Contact:

Joseph DOUDARD

Cellule documents - SPC

Tel.: +32/2/295.34.91

Fax: +32/2/296.32.79

COMPARATIVE TESTING PROJECTS FOR 1993/94.

The CPS supports the execution of comparative tests of consumer products for two reasons:

- development of the capacity to carry out such tests, know-how transfer, with the aim to ensure that tests are carried out rigorously and reliably to ensure independence and credibility, vis-à-vis not only consumers but also industry;

- introduction of the Single Internal Market-aspect in tests, i.e. EC-wide coverage of products and price/purchasing information as well as EC-wide publication of these results.

The test programs supported this year, to be carried out between now and the autumn of 1994, include the following:

- * **national test programs** by individual consumer organisations in Ireland (CAI), Spain (Ciudadano), and Portugal (INDC), covering several consumer products;
- * a program of **joint testing** of male preservatives, crash helmets, and credit cards carried out within the framework of the "**Group of Five**" - in fact six - (para)statal organisations: Stiftung Warentest of Germany, Institut National de la Consommation of France, Instituto Nacional del Consumo and Ciudadano of Spain, Adiconsum of Italy and Instituto Nacional de Defesa do Consumidor of Portugal.

These programs fall principally in the category "know-how transfer".

International Testing Ltd., the co-operation body of independent consumer organisations, will receive support for three projects of the second category:

- Comparative Car Buying Information for EC Consumers.

In 1992 the CPS supported the IT Camera and Camcorder Guide (see **INFO-C** No 5) which included product and price information from 11 EC countries, enabling consumers to compare price and brand information across borders and select products corresponding to their needs from whichever EC country they choose.

This project is the preliminary phase of a similar guide on cars, preliminary because considerable work must be done to harmonise the underlying research and testing carried out by participating consumer organisations on a national level. Emphasis will be on a comprehensive Europe-wide price survey, information on "buying abroad", comparative test information, as well as data on secondary safety and reliability.

- New Media for the Dissemination of Consumer Information.

IT will study and compare the experiments in the use of new communication media currently carried out by various consumer organisations and other alternative approaches. A second phase will consist in a series of demonstrations in key consumer areas (e.g. large shopping areas) of interactive terminals, followed by surveys of consumer reactions.

- Comparative Product Information Relevant to the Needs of Disabled People.

This is a continuation of the initiative reported upon in **INFO-C** No 6 to test standard consumer products from the point of view of disabled people.

The project consists in surveying current test work of special products as well as of standard products with or without disabled people in mind, with a view to inject where possible and relevant the special needs of disabled people into normal testing activities, including joint tests such as those conducted within the framework of IT.

CPS contact:

Jens RING

CPS/5

Tel: +32/2/295.69.47

Fax: +32/2/296.32.79

DRINKING WATER QUALITY

Drinking water quality is currently by a "hot" issue.

There is already a Community Directive dating from 1980 (80/778/CEE) relating to the quality of water intended for human consumption.

However, in some quarters it is felt that this directive should be reconsidered in the light of the experience gained with it and to take into account scientific and technical progress.

For this reason the Commission of the European Communities' DG XI "Environment, Nuclear Safety and Civil Protection" organised a conference on this topic on 23 and 24 September 1993, in the form of a consultation designed to gather information and suggestions from concerned parties.

This consultation was held at the widest possible level and consumers' interests were represented, mainly by the BEUC.

A lot of feedback was received both during the conference and subsequently by mail.

DG XI wishes to point out that interested parties still have a short time in which to submit any comments and suggestions they may wish to make.

Contact:

Frédéric MARIEN

DG XI

Tel.: +32/2/299.03.92

or

Margarita LANGER

DG IX

Tel. +32/2/296.86.72

Fax: +32/2/296.88.25

"PUT CONSUMERS FIRST"

Global Consumer Delegation tells GATT

It is no secret that the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations within **GATT**, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, is a disputed issue within the **EC**.

The views of consumers' organisations are, however, quite clear : **BEUC**, the European Consumers' Organisation, has joined forces with **IOCU**, the International Organisation of Consumers' Unions, in a delegation to Geneva to press for the completion of the Uruguay Round.

The delegation, which met Director General of **GATT**, Peter Sutherland, in Geneva, 26 October, included consumer representatives from India, the UK, Chile and Sweden.

"The end purpose of trade is to serve consumers, as expressed by **IOCU's** Director General, James Firebrace.

All consumers suffer as a result of protectionism. It means higher prices and lack of choice in both the developed and the developing world - with the poor hit the hardest, wherever they live."

The delegation has set out its concerns in a detailed paper, available from **BEUC's** offices on request. In particular it is calling on participants to the talks to :

- * improve their tariff offers, giving priority to reducing tariff peaks and tariff escalation, particularly on products of importance to developing countries;
- * accept the Blair House agreement, under which the US and the EC agreed (in November 1992) on a 21 per cent cut in the volume of subsidised agricultural exports. **IOCU** says this should be a first step in the reduction of Western agricultural protection, to be followed up in the next **GATT** round;
- * speed up plans to bring textiles and clothing exports from developing to developed countries out of the quotas set by the Multi-Fibre Arrangement and into multilateral **GATT** rules.

Also available from **BEUC** on request is a summary of conclusions and recommendations from "The World in the Round : How to reduce protectionism and protect the environment". Copies of the full paper are available from the Director General's office of **IOCU**.

Sources :

IOCU

Director General's office

9 White Lion Street

UK - LONDON N1 9PD

Tel. : +44/71/865.90.06

Fax : +44/71/865.90.07

BEUC

Avenue de Tervueren, 36 bte 4

B - 1040 Bruxelles

Tel. : +32/2/735.31.10

Fax : +32/2/735.74.55

FLAIR FLOW

Information on food research

Consumers increasingly demand healthy and natural foods that are more diverse, but contain less harmful residues. FLAIR is an EC programme which, through the combined efforts of scientists from research institutes and the food industry, is designed to meet this demand. The programme complements existing initiatives in Member States with increased links between different research groups and industries, and by concentrating on the interface between food processing, food distribution, and the consumer. This in turn helps to promote food industry efficiency and competitiveness, as well as the reinforcement of the scientific and technical infrastructures which serve the European food industry.

Based out of the Commission's directorate general for Science, Research, and Development, the programme funds research and development projects in the areas of food quality, food safety, and nutrition & wholesomeness. One such project, called **FLAIR FLOW EUROPE**, is designed to increase the flow of information concerning the programme to the food industry, consumer groups, and health professionals. The information is disseminated via one-page user friendly documents explaining project results; secondary routes include articles in journals and magazines, workshops, lectures, and the media in general. The entire programme operates through a network of national project leaders (EC and the four current EFTA applicants), who co-ordinate the various projects which receive funding.

For further information, contact:

Liam BRESLIN,
DG XII E-2
Tel. +32/2/295.04.77
Fax. +32/2/296.43.22

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION IMPROVES AIR SAFETY

I. Safety in air traffic management

On 19 July 1993 the Ministers of the Twelve Member States of the European Community for the first time ac-

knowledgeed that activities could be taken at European level in the domain of air traffic management and adopted a directive in this domain (1). International civil aviation and in particular the Community airline companies are suffering from structural problems linked to the way air traffic management equipment is installed in the Member States.

Because all Member States are keen to preserve their airspace sovereignty, they have preferred to invest in proprietary infrastructures. This approach was also justified for reasons of aerial defence. The end of the cold war, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union have rendered this principle obsolete.

Air traffic is expanding very rapidly; each Member State has installed radars and air traffic control centres for a certain aerial capacity. Today, congestion is so great that it is imperative to ensure the interlinking of the structures that were established individually at national level and so are as a rule by definition incompatible. Even today, air traffic controllers have to telephone to transfer responsibility for a plane from one State to another. One can imagine the potential conflicts this may pose during peak hours in mid-season. The number of manual operations is no longer compatible with the increasingly heavy burdens air traffic controllers have to bear.

The Community Directive on the definition and use of compatible technical specifications for the procurement of air-traffic-management equipment and systems adopted by the Ministers of Transport is designed to ensure integration of the Member States' air-traffic-management systems. Once this Directive is implemented automatic communication will be possible between the different air traffic control centres, as will the exchange of radar data. Thus if a radar in a Community Member State drops out, the neighbouring radar will be able to cover the sector in question without either pilot or controller being aware. Other measures are also envisaged by this Directive with a view to facilitating interoperability as already provided for in the Maastricht Treaty.

(1) OJ No L187, 29.7.1993

To avoid isolating the Community infrastructure from the rest of Europe as a result of these provisions, the Community mechanism adopted has been closely coordinated with the Eurocontrol Agency which is responsible for defining a pan-European solution to unify air traffic management centres.

Contact :

Luc TYTGAT

DG VII

Tel : +32/2/296.84.30

Fax : +32/2/296.90.67

II. Prevention of accidents

Luckily, aeroplanes crash very rarely. However, when they do it is important to determine the causes and circumstances as rapidly as possible so as to prevent a recurrence. This is why aviation accidents are subject to in-depth technical investigations whose exclusive objective is to prevent accidents.

With a view to improving air safety and to facilitating investigations into accidents, the Commission has approved, at the initiative of transport Commissioner Abul Matutes, a proposal for a Council Directive establishing the fundamental principles governing the investigation of civil aviation accidents and incidents (1).

The fundamental principles set out in this Directive are as follows:

- the obligation to investigate every civil aviation accident or serious incident with the sole objective of preventing a repetition;
- the clear distinction between the judicial enquiry (designed to determine liability) and the technical enquiry and reinforcement of the status of the latter;
- the permanence and independence of the investigation body;
- the obligation to publish an investigation report containing conclusions and recommendations; and
- measures to prevent the investigation being used for ends other than prevention of accidents.

This proposal, the first of those announced in the Commission Communication to the Council on Community initiatives concerning air transport accidents and incidents, should provide us with a better understanding of the mechanisms which lead to accidents and incidents and could hence constitute a basis for better accident prevention measures in the context of a common air safety policy.

(1) OJ No C257, 22.9.1993, p.8.

Contact:

Jean-Pol HENROTTE

DG VII

Tel.: +32/2/296.82.96

Fax.: +32/2/296.90.67

EUROPE

EUROGIRO

EUROGIRO is the name of a European-level post office association, established on 1 January 1993, whose aim is to facilitate computerised transfrontier payments for firms and private individuals.

In this connection the association has opted to change something which used to be considered immutable - the tardiness and expense of such transactions, a consequence both of the different currencies used and the need to combine different national computer systems.

How can this be done? By using existing national infrastructures and by networking them in a new hardware and software environment to create an integrated European postal giro transfer system.

This strategy allows the 14 European member organisations (La Poste-France, Giro Bank A.S-Danemark, Girobank Plc-United Kingdom, Postgiro-Norway, etc.) to follow their own policies developed in their national context. These are in accord with the habits and preferences of the citizens of these states. At the same time close collaboration is assured by the Denmark-based management.

Result: lower transaction costs, faster transfer (the sum paid to the beneficiary is credited to him in three working days). But above all, prices are transparent.

EUROGIRO may be used by anybody who has a post office giro account.

In brief, this system was created as a response to popular demand for speed and for transparency in costs and prices, which are often quite steep.

As a general rule such transfers cost less via the post office than via the banking system.

There have been numerous studies of transfrontier bank transfers, notably published by the BEUC at the behest of the European Commission.

These studies show that transfers from one Member State to another are often time-consuming, expensive and complicated. But one of the main problems has

been the lack of transparency as regards this type of payment.

Christiane Scrivener, Commissioner in charge of consumer affairs, had already urged banks to reduce their prices and to supply more information to consumers. Consumer information should have improved in the wake of the guidelines adopted by the banking community scheduled to enter into effect on 1 January 1993 and rendering information mandatory.

But it turns out that these guidelines have not been correctly followed.

In the meantime, the EUROGIRO system could be an appropriate way of meeting consumers' expectations regarding transfrontier payments.

Contact:

European Post/Giro
Directors Group
WTC-T2
21^e étage
167 Chaussée d'Anvers
B - 1000 Bruxelles
Tel. : +32/2/219.43.37
Fax : +32/2/219.39.44

THE EUROPEAN INTERREGIONAL INSTITUTE FOR CONSUMER AFFAIRS

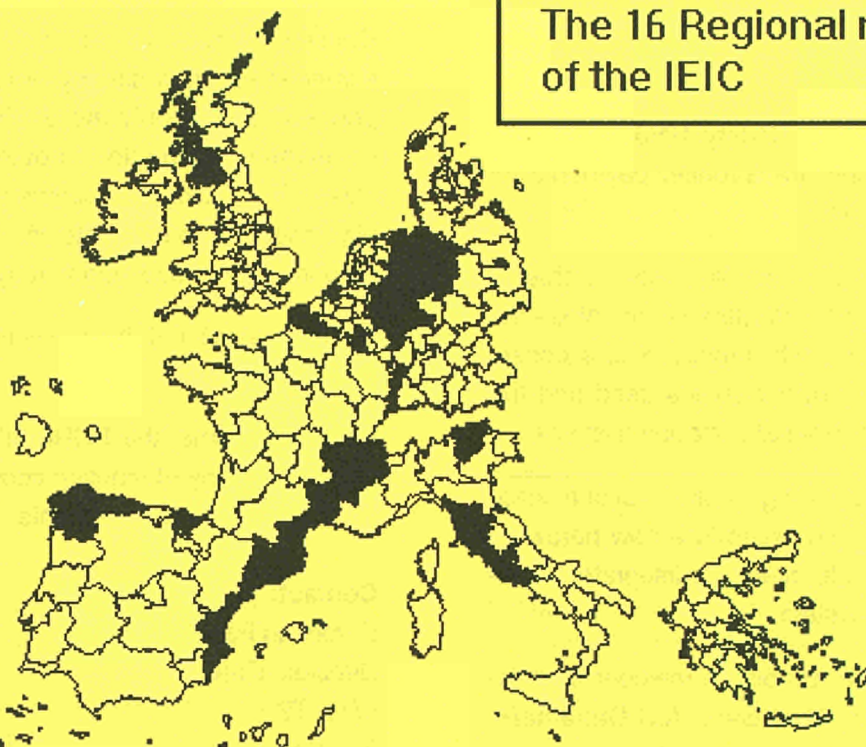
"An ideal forum for pooling information and experience in such fundamental consumer domains as training, study, surveys, databases, etc." This is how the European Interegional Institute for Consumer Affairs (EIICA) was portrayed at a European colloquium in 1989.

Three basic ideas lay behind the creation of the EIICA:

- "There can be no competitive single market if consumers cannot play their role as economic partners, and this means creating suitable tools and technical resources;
- Full and effective consumer information is the key to more transparent markets;



The 16 Regional members of the IEIC



IEIC map 1993

- Effective collection and dissemination of information presupposes scientific rigour and the use of advanced technology."

Set up in 1989, the EIICA is a non-profit making body whose purpose is to "undertake research work, studies and surveys designed to improve the information of European consumers, enhance their knowledge and make better use of resources, notably at the European inter-regional level".

The EIICA comprises technical bodies at regional (or national) level at the service of consumers and their associations, as well as scientific and research institutes which have decided to develop European interregional cooperation.

Currently sixteen organisations from seven Community countries are full members, though over 25 have already participated in the EIICA's work or in interregional cooperation measures.

The EIICA's activities are interregional and the institute supports all kinds of transfrontier initiatives

Since its creation the EIICA has completed a number of major studies, each of which has involved close cooperation between the members of the Institute. Most of the issues treated concern transfrontier consumption, such as comparative price studies, surveys on reasons for transfrontier shopping, and studies on various banking services.

Over the past two years the institute has been coordinating a pilot project on access to justice and the settlement of consumer disputes in various frontier zones within the European Community.

Each year the EIICA helps one of its members organise an international colloquium on a major consumer topic at Community level. Since 1989, the following subjects have been treated:

- the citizen as consumer in the single market;

- settlement of consumer disputes;
- information of consumers in Europe of the regions;
- region without frontiers as of 1 January 1983;
- the active consumer's role in environmental protection;
- Community instruments and their transposition at national and regional level.

The EIICA's goal is also to encourage cooperation between all European regions, and notably between the North and South, so as to pool experiences. In this connection two programmes for the exchange of experiences were carried out in 1991 and 1992. The programmes concerned:

- ways to inform consumers;
- quality certification of agri-foodstuffs.

These programmes were conducted in partnership with the regions of Asturias, Galicia (Spain), Nord-Pas de Calais (France) and Portugal (Norte, Algarve, Lisbon, Alentejo). The EIICA was coordinator and head of project. The programmes were co-funded by the participating regions and DG XVI (regional policy), via CEDRE (European Regional Development Centre).

In this context, it is vital for the EIICA to network the existing databases and make them accessible to all regional partners.

Finally, the EIICA is involved in concentration structures, notably in the Consumers' Consultative Council at the Commission of the European Communities

* Source: EIICA

For further information contact:

Mireille LEROY

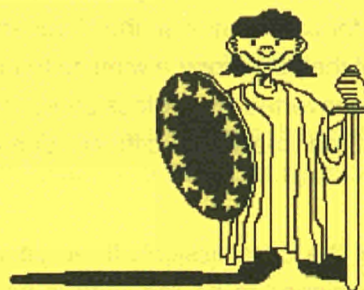
EIICA

47, rue Barthélémy Delespaul

F - 59000 LILLE

Tel: +33/20.60.69.10

Fax: +33/20.54.18.45



The European young Consumer Competition

The European Interregional Institute for Consumer Affairs (EIRCA) is launching the first European young consumer competition, with the support of the Commission of the European Communities' (Consumer Policy Service). The idea is to increase awareness among young consumers and teaching staff in EC countries about major consumer issues.

This competition, which will be relayed locally by member organisations of the EIRCA and various other partners, will involve the development of an information product realised and presented by young people. This product will be reusable by the Commission in the context of its communication measures.

This first exercise is addressed to groups of young Europeans aged between 11 and 14, and concerns the following themes:

- "How to choose a product". This theme will be tackled from a great variety of angles (price, quality, service, labelling, environment, product life).
- "Safety in the domain of sports and leisure activities".

Young people, organised in teams, will be called on to design and realise an information product related to one of the two topics. The objective is to involve them intensively in the work, so that the competition will have a real educational impact. Teaching aids will be sent to

teachers before the competition begins, so that they can provide guidelines and help integrate the competition into the school curriculum.

The best project from each country will be selected by a specialised jury for participation in the European finals in Brussels. One of the perks for the winning team will be to see their work converted by professionals into a short film suitable for broadcasting on different European television channels.

In the context of the Commission's three year plan, the competition is designed to be repeated in future years, with extension to older age brackets.

Contact:

Mireille LEROY
IEIC
47 bis, rue Barthélemy-Delespaul
F - 59000 Lille

INFORMATION ON DANGEROUS PRODUCTS COFACE RESEARCH PROJECT

So that consumers can safely use potentially dangerous substances and preparations, the labelling or packaging of these products contains information on the possible hazards. In this context COFACE (Committee of Family Organisations in the European Communities) is conducting a survey with financial support from the EC.

COFACE's aim is to learn more about the assessment, interpretation and use by consumers of information relating to the safety of dangerous products (several EC directives make it mandatory to provide this information).

The study is in the form of a questionnaire which has been distributed to a sample of family and women's organisations affiliated to COFACE across the European Community. It will provide information on various aspects:

- 1) Socio-economic milieu of the respondents;
- 2) Interpretation of symbols on the dangerous products;
- 3) Interpretation of written information concerning safety of dangerous products;

- 4) Ways of reading safety information;
- 5) Use of safety information in assessing the danger;
- 6) Use of labels in assessing the danger;
- 7) General assessment of safety information.

The results of this research will enable COFACE to describe the situation in various Member States of the Community. It will then be possible to see whether consumers should be given more labelling information and information on safety. Moreover, the results of this study will allow COFACE to communicate to the Consumer Policy Service of the Commission of the European Communities an assessment of European policy concerning information in this domain.

The first results of the survey are expected by year's end.

Source:

COFACE
Rue de Londres, 17
B - 1050 Bruxelles
Tel: +32/2/511.41.79
Fax: +32/2/514.47.73

The ESC Consumers Unit/EURO C has asked INFO-C to notify readers of its new address, valid from 4 November 1993:

Unité Consommateurs CES/EURO C
Boulevard Emile Jacqmain, 155
B - 1210 Bruxelles
Tel.: 224.04.11 (switchboard) & 224.05.40
Fax : 224.04.54 & 224.04.55 & 224.05.41

SPOTLIGHT ON PORTUGAL

Up to now **INFO-C** has not had the opportunity to publish much news about Portugal.

The purpose of this publication is notably to strengthen cooperation between the Consumer Policy Service and the Member States and between the Member States themselves both at national, regional and local level.

In this connection **INFO-C** would like to stress that it is very keen to receive information from organisations throughout the European Community and from countries which will be joining the Community in the near future.

Last September the editors were invited to Portugal by a number of hosts and had the opportunity to meet representatives of a variety of consumer organisations.

The first highlight was the opportunity to attend the World Railways Congress in Lisbon.

WORLD RAILWAYS CONGRESS

The International Association of the World Railways Congress organised - in cooperation with the International Railways Union - a World Railways Congress in Lisbon from 6 to 10 September 1993.

This year's theme was "Advanced Management Methods and Application of High Technology in a Competitive Market".

In addition to lectures, participants attended various workshops on the application of high technology in the domain of passenger services.

One of the speakers, Léo Pardon, general administrator of the SNCB (Belgian railways) presented a general paper on passenger information systems. He points out that (1):

"The railways have understood that it is vital to prioritise consumer services, notably as regards information.

This awareness coincides with a move towards increasingly sophisticated and more performative technologies in the field of services and sales.

We are now witnessing the proliferation of various systems for disseminating regular information (such as timetables, itineraries, etc.) and updates (concerning delays, incidents, etc.).

Once the consumer's interest is awakened, new information needs are born. They continue throughout the

journey. The passenger wants to receive information before and during his journey and again on arrival. Obviously, standard information has to be updated, i.e. corrected whenever the circumstances so dictate.

Internal service

Traditionally, passengers inform themselves by consulting train timetables, brochures, or by phoning the railway station.

In addition, in response to popular demand, the railways have developed a "trains" and "products" package of growing sophistication. Hence in Belgium, for example, the basic range of intercity and interregional trains is backed up by supplementary offers during peak hours and holiday periods.

As regards fares, the client can choose from a range of commercial packages depending on the type of journey he has in mind and his personal characteristics, such as age.

This system is more developed but also more complex, with the result that people now want more information of all kinds but also find it harder to read the train timetables.

To respond promptly to these difficulties and to provide the fullest and speediest possible information, various railways have developed electronic information systems, such as Aristote in Belgium.

Since 1 July 1991 Aridisc, a PC diskette, - the first instalment of the Aristote package - has been on sale in railway stations. Aridisc gives PC-users software in four languages (French, Dutch, German and English) containing standard railways information.

Aridisc comprises Aristote's three basic modules: the "timetable" module, the "fares" module and the "general information" module.

It costs FB 150 and may be exchanged during the year when the timetables are revised.

(1) Source:
SNCB-NMBS
Mr Léo Pardon
Administrateur-Directeur
Tel.: +32/2/525.21.11

A similar package is also available in Germany.

French consumers can access the same service via Minitel, which can also be used for reservations.

International service

In the international service, the sales and inquiries personnel also have other types of online systems.

To provide international information the personnel must have access to data on timetables, prices, commercial packages, characteristics of the train, the number of available seats, etc.

The Socrate (SNCF - France), KURS90 (DB - Germany) and Reselec (SNCB - Belgium) systems are typical examples.

The International Railways Union is currently studying different systems for communicating timetables.

Whatever solution is finally adopted, it will have to respond to recent market trends and also to comply with European legislation.

However, online information concerning international travel leaves much to be desired in various domains, notably as regards:

- the product offered (trains and conveniences);
- conditions of travel at the "market price";
- where the product can be obtained.

The railways are aware that it is necessary to supply consumers with the best possible information. They have an enormous task to complete. They also face an enormous challenge if they are to offer consumers what they are entitled to obtain - clear, precise and detailed information."

The possibilities of mixed transport, i.e. combined rail/road or rail/air trips have also been discussed.

Consumers expect a lot from this type of transport but railways still have a long way to go. However, this idea was discussed at the congress in the context of further improving the quality and quantity of the services offered.

Contact:

Union internationale des chemins de fer
Direction de la Communication
16, rue Jean-Rey
F - 75015 Paris
Tel.: +33/1/44.49.20.51
Fax: +33/1/44.49.20.59

CONSUMER PROTECTION IN PORTUGAL

During their visit to Portugal, the editors of **INFO-C** were invited by the Instituto do Consumidor (IC) to learn about the country's approach to consumer issues.

This visit to Lisbon - site of the IC - also gave the editors an opportunity to meet representatives of various associations.

Instituto do Consumidor

The IC is attached to the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources but is administratively independent.

Pursuant to a recent decree-law restructuring the IC, its objective is to promote a policy of safeguarding consumer rights. This involves helping the Ministry define and implement consumer protection policies, ensuring respect of requirements relating to the safety and quality of goods and services, providing assistance to consumer organisations, as well as flanking and multiplier activities concerning consumer protection at Community and international level and other tasks.

The IC is one of the three or four leading Portuguese consumer organisations, alongside DECO and UGC.

There is also a plethora of small single-issue or sectoral organisations (television viewers group, "tobacco and health" association, family confederation, etc.).

The "new pioneers" association, run on cooperative lines, has branches in various cities and provides services such as courses in nutrition education, etc.

One distinctive aspect of this country is that - in the context of family confederations or women's organisations - there are no departments specifically devoted to consumer protection.

Arbitration centre for car repairs

The Instituto do Consumidor has created a voluntary arbitration centre for disputes concerning motor car repairs, following a 1986 Act authorising the establishment of the centres.

Located in Lisbon, it may hear complaints from all over the country concerning vehicles purchased anywhere in Portugal.

The interesting point is that arbitration does not have to take place at a specific place because if an affiliate has permanent premises anywhere in the country it may be authorised to receive applications.

A coordination committee networks the affiliates.

The purpose of the centre is to encourage settlement of disputes in regard to services in this domain at national level. Complaints are handled through mediation, conciliation and arbitration.

The arbitration procedure involves three parties: the consumer, the supplier of services and an expert who must be acceptable to the two other parties. The centre's decision is immediately enforceable, has legal effect and may be confirmed by the Court of First Instance, where necessary.

The conciliation phase is free of charge.

If the matter goes to arbitration as such, each party must pay a sum equivalent to three or five percent of the value of the claim, the minimum charge being Escudos 5,000.

Moreover, because cars are considered to be the consumer product most closely associated with modern life, a national "directive" was issued in 1990. Given the size of the sector and the legitimate interests of consumers and suppliers of services in this area, measures were needed to prevent conflict.

Hence any order to perform repair work must contain certain information as described in this "directive" from the National Quality Council.

The mandatory information includes general data on the client and vehicle: - estimate of the cost of repair; explanation why overhauling is necessary; correct evaluation of the work to be performed, for example; content of the

invoice; payment procedures; payment conditions; guarantee; supplementary repairs, etc.

If despite this complaints persist, the consumer is referred to the arbitration committee for motor car repairs.

Contact:

Instituto do Consumidor
Praça Duque de Saldanha, 31
P - 1000 Lisboa
Tel.: 351/1/54.40.25
Fax : 351/1/52.24.10

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Portuguese consumers seeking redress in connection with small claims have access to institutionalised arbitration centres.

The Portuguese experiment in the arbitration of consumer conflicts is one of the actions undertaken by the Commission of the European Communities to improve conditions of consumer access to justice.

It is based on the National Voluntary Arbitration Act of 29 August 1986 (Act No 31/86).

The experimental phase was realised by launching the first centre at Lisbon under an agreement between the Municipalities of Lisbon, the Portuguese Association for the Protection of Consumers (DECA), the IC, and the Union of Traders' Associations of the Lisbon District (UACDL).

The objective of this centre - funded by the Consumer Policy Service, the Municipality of Lisbon and the IC - is to permit the prompt, effective and free settlement of small consumer disputes, through information, mediation, conciliation and arbitration.

The experiment ran from 20 November 1989 to 15 March 1991, when the arbitration centre was finalised, with the signature of a new agreement between the above-mentioned parties and the Ministry of Justice.

The arbitration centre consists of:

- an arbitration tribunal, consisting of one arbiter, who is a magistrate designated by the Superior Council of the Judiciary. Its jurisdiction extends to small consumer disputes for a value of up to Escudos 250,000 (+/-ECU 1,400). The tribunal's terri-

torial jurisdiction, which depends on the place where the contract was concluded or the place of performance of the service, is confined to Lisbon;

- a host service, consisting of lawyers who inform consumers, receive their complaints and draw up applications for mediation, conciliation or arbitration.

Most conflicts concern the provision of private-sector services, the sale of defective products, unfair contractual terms, misleading advertising, insurance and credit, timeshare arrangements and even the provision of services by the public authorities.

Up to now the Lisbon arbitration centre has been very successful, due doubtless to the simplified procedure, the speed of the procedure (average of 20 to 30 days between acceptance of complaints and their resolution) as well as its impartiality and efficiency, since the decisions made by the arbiter-judge have the same status as a court judgment.

Transfrontier consumer disputes

On 11 March 1992 the municipalities of Lisbon and Madrid signed an agreement with a view to cooperation and exchange of experience concerning arbitration in consumer conflicts. In accordance with this agreement, complaints submitted at Lisbon or Madrid concerning purchases made in either city will be heard by the competent body of the place where the contract was concluded.

To avoid paying travel costs, consumers may have themselves represented by a consumer association during arbitration.

Contact:

Centro de Arbitragem
de Conflitos de Consumo
Isabel MORAIS MENDES CABEÇADAS
Mercado Chão do Loureiro
Largo do Chão do Loureiro
P - Lisboa
Tel.: +351/888.36.23/888.35.35
Fax : +351/888.37.67

UNIÃO GERAL CONSUMIDORES

The General Consumers Union (UGC) is an organisation set up directly by the workers' trade union and is run by Elisa DAMIÃO, who is also a Member of Parliament.

The fact that the UGC is trade-union based gives it a far more social character and means that it is more in touch with the underprivileged.

Its main activity concerns prices. In Portugal, certain trades have formed an association and literally dictate the prices of their products. As a result, essential products such as medicines are often even more inaccessible to the "lower classes".

One of the UGC's main objectives in defending consumers is to combat such phenomena.

But their work also involves other activities, such as the organisation of a conference for the elderly, preparation of a video showing the living conditions of deprived children and intended for teachers or churches (which are closer to the underprivileged) or again publication of a magazine written in a popular style, in parallel with a small newsletter for the associated organisations. Recently the UGC organised, in collaboration with the Instituto do Consumidor and the Consumer Policy Service, a safety campaign for children.

The action was designed notably to sensitise those responsible for children from deprived environments (parents, teachers, etc.). Such children are particularly exposed to numerous risks. The campaign was accompanied by posters and brochures, an example of which is reproduced here.

Contact:

Elisa DAMIÃO
UGC
Rua Buenos Aires, 11
P - 1200 Lisboa
Tel.: +351/60.02.47
Fax : +351/397.46.12

EDIDECO

EDIDECO is a publishing house that works together with several other organisations in various Member States.

The origins go back to end 1990, when DECO, a Portuguese consumer protection association, decided to ally itself with a European organisation with which it already had intensive contacts.

In order to take on producers groups in the single European Market, these organisations have created a "consumer organisations multinational" spanning four Member States - Belgium, Spain, Italy and Portugal. Protection of consumers, in the traditional sense of the activity, is the purpose of the founder organisations.

This is the case with DECO where Portugal is concerned.

Reports on research activities and findings are published in the EDIDECO-owned reviews "Proteste" and "Dinheiro et Direitos".

EDIDECO is associated both with DECO and CONS-EUR ("Consommateurs Européen"), a body which coordinates research activities for the four above-mentioned countries.

EDIDECO's focus is on comparative tests of consumer goods and services. All the tests published by EDIDECO in the past two years were included in an annex to the March 1993 issue, so as to facilitate research for persons interested in any of the subjects covered.

In Portugal, comparative tests are carried out in accordance with a national standard and an established methodology. The project manager then establishes a "test programme" which takes into account the national and international standards for the type of product selected.

The laboratory commissioned may be Portuguese or foreign, depending on which best meets the criteria and requirements set out by EDIDECO.

To ensure that investigation costs pay off, EDIDECO always tries to arrange a joint "test programme" covering the greatest number of countries possible.

This collaboration is not limited to the countries of the EDIDECO group but also involves other European or-

ganisations for consumer protection in the context of international testing (see the article on this subject in this issue).

In most cases these activities are carried out with the support of the European Commission.

In recent years EDIDECO has signed protocols for the provision of services with the European Commission as regards research in such domains as:

- heat accumulators;
- prices in Portugal;
- parallel therapies;
- washing machines;
- cameras and optical equipment, etc.

Hence EDIDECO is a partner of the European Commission and has a wealth of practical experience.

Contact:

EDIDECO

Rua D. Filipa de Vilhema, 30 A

P - 1000 Lisboa

Tel.: +351/1/793.96.71

Fax : +351/1/793.36.79

BELGIUM

PUBLIC TRANSPORT IN BRUSSELS: MAGNETIC TICKETING

In the previous issue we reported on DANMØNT (Denmark), an "integrated circuit card" quite different from the familiar magnetic strip on bank cards, etc. Even this classical technology is still being developed.

On 31 October this year the STIB/MIVB (Brussels Inter-municipal Transport Company) introduced magnetic ticketing on its tram, bus and underground lines. Instead of multiple tickets there are now three cards containing a magnetic strip valid for one, five or ten journeys respectively.

The interesting point for consumers - apart from the fact that the new tickets permit free connections between all lines for one hour and are valid for return journeys - are

the perspectives this new technology opens. The new cancelling machines record, store and transmit information, allowing in particular fine-tuning of schedules. In future it will be possible to introduce new pricing formulas more adapted to changing trends, such as lower fares during off-peak hours or package fares covering both public transport and parking fees.

For further information contact:

STIB/MIVB

Avenue de la Toison d'Or 15

B-1060 Bruxelles

Tel.: +32/2/515.20.00

FRANCE

CROSS-CHANNEL CONSUMPTION

Given the ongoing expansion in cross-Channel traffic between Great Britain and France, the Comité de Liaison des Organisations de Consommateurs du Calvados (COLOC - France) has carried out various surveys in cooperation with the Centre Technique de la Consommation (CTRC) of Lower Normandy, now published in the form of a report.

Entitled "Consommation transfrontalière Basse Normandie/Angleterre: l'opinion des voyageurs trans-Manche", it concerns consumption between the two countries in the broader framework of the free movement of consumers in the European Community and the growth in trans-frontier Community trade.

The regions most affected by cross-Channel traffic are Lower Normandy in France and the County of Hampshire in Great Britain.

The report is based on surveys conducted at the Ouistreham Maritime Station (F) on the ferry linking Portsmouth (GB) with Ouistreham and Cherbourg. One main finding is that the great majority of tourists are British who travel to France. They mainly purchase alcohol (beer and wine). They often do the return trip on the same day, visiting the local hypermarkets in France, and their main motivation is price. In this particular case vast quantities are purchased because some tourists come with utility vehicles which they load to the limit.

Cheese is second on the list of food items.

Many British also have property in Lower Normandy - a total of 3,044 at 1 January 1992.

They also consume services, on much the same pattern as the French.

As to the French, they mainly buy non-food items when they visit Britain. Clothes head the list because they consider them to be cheaper, followed by compact discs and books. Tea is the main food item purchased.

COLOC and CTRC are quite aware of the trend in cross-Channel trade. In this context they hope to set up an information structure similar to that of the consumer information centres ("Euroguichets").

Contact:

COLOC

12, Rue Neuve Saint-Jean

F - 14000 Caen

Tel.: +33/31.50.38.50-31.85.36.12

Fax : +33/31.50.01.06

ITALY

PAYOFFS AND MEDICINES: A MIXTURE TO BE AVOIDED

The consumer organisation "Comitato Difesa Consumatori" (CDC) has brought an action for damages in the trial of former Health Minister De Lorenzo, the President of the Pharmaceutical Commission, Poggiolini, and other individuals.

For some time medicine prices had been skyrocketing, a flagrant affront to consumers. This "liberalisation" had been endorsed when Francesco De Lorenzo was in charge of health.

Since the scandal broke, the Italian media have publicised the results of judicial inquiries and of police raids at the homes of certain persons suspected of having accepted payoffs in the pharmaceutical sector.

At the trial, which will be held at Naples at some future date, the CDC will press for remedies for consumers who have been injured. Solutions advanced will include among others a reduction in the price of medicines and allocating damages recovered to comparative tests of pharmaceutical products.

Note: this is the first time that an Italian consumer organisation has brought an action for damages against a member of the government.

Contact:

Comitato Difesa Consumatori
Liliana CANTONE
Viale della Liberazione, 18
I - 20124 Milano
Tel.: +39/2/66.72.05.02
Fax: +39/2/670.63.80

INFORMATION "AGENCY"

The Milan-based consumer organisation "Movimento Consumatori" recently launched a new information service. This is an "agency" which provides weekly information by fax or modem (PC network). This information can be accessed by all local branches of the movement as well as by subscribers, mainly firms. The information comes from different sectors and local branches for dissemination at national level. This "agency" is the main instrument for spreading the association's ideas and views, and has become its mouthpiece.

Subscribers also receive nation-wide press releases, giving them an opportunity to respond swiftly if necessary.

Contact:

Movimento Consumatori
Michela BIANCHI
Via Adige, 11
I - 20135 Milano
Tel.: +39/2/545.65.51
Fax : +39/2/546.65.00

DEVELOPMENT OF VIDEO-TELEPHONE

Videotel in Italy is akin to Minitel in France, but is still in the experimental stage. Like its French counterpart, it consists of a terminal, i.e. a screen and keyboard. Cur-

rently, it is part of the "social commitment" project run by the SIP (Italian Telecommunications organisation) and entitled "Insieme - Informazioni in Videotel al Cittadino" (All together - Videotel Information for Citizens).

It is designed as a user-friendly telecommunications tool for informing citizens about all kinds of everyday problems - problems connected with consumer affairs, labour law, drug addiction, handicaps, dealings with public administration, environmental protection, etc.

But the user will be able to do more than just passively absorb information, since he will also be free to contact directly any of the organisations involved in the project, put questions and obtain a personal response from a qualified expert. For the moment, people who do not have their own Videotel - as is normally the case - will be able to interrogate it in centres with a social purpose placed at their disposal, such as ADICONSUM (the Italian Consumer Protection Organisation), the National Anti-AIDS Association, SIP, the citizen defense movement, etc.

Just recently terminals were installed in the "COOP" supermarket chain and the response was positive.

Interpretation project for the audibly handicapped

The SIP, in cooperation with the firm CSELT, is also piloting Videotel in the context of the European RACE programme (concerning advanced telecommunications technologies), as a communications tool for persons who have serious hearing and language problems.

Here Videotel returns the image of a person who responds using sign language, after going through a translation service.

This pilot project was set up in 1991 in collaboration with the province of Turin. The services provided include various forms of assistance, such as summoning a taxi, a doctor, an ambulance, etc.

The first step was to install the sites in four main centres - the National Organisation for Aid to Deaf-mutes, a hospital, an establishment for deaf people and a "sample family".

The second stage, now underway, involves installation of terminals in households and is designed to facilitate exchanges of information between the audibly handicapped.

If the experiment is conclusive, the quantity of services offered by Videotel could be diversified.

Contact:

SIP

Via E. Gianturco, 2

I - 00196 Roma

Tel.: +39/6/36.88.25.74

Fax: +39/6/36.88.22.07

DENMARK

ECO-CONSUMPTION

According to the National Consumer Agency of Denmark, there are a growing number of daily questions from Danish citizens and industries about how to protect the environment in the best possible way. Therefore the National Consumer Agency of Denmark has pursued several initiatives, which should improve information for consumers and manufactures on environmental questions.

Four concrete initiatives have already been examined:

- Testing of the environmental impact or the harmful effects of different products, e.g. compact detergents, gas boilers and energy saving bulbs.
- New leaflets have been published, including one for households and one for industry on environmental law and chemical law in Denmark.
- The monthly magazine of the organization has published articles on the results of tests carried out on the use of different household products. Such as freezers and woodburning stoves. An examination of the environmental impact of vacuum cleaners has also been published.
- The development of an EC environmental label for washing machines, in which the National Consumer Agency of Denmark has played an active role.

Other projects will arise in the future and the Consumer Ombudsman in Denmark is preparing guidelines for the use in marketing for environmental arguments.

For further information please contact:

Forbrugerstyrelsen

Amagerfælledvej 56

DK - 2300 København S

Tel.: +45/31.57.01.00

Fax: +45/32.96.02.32

GERMANY

APPLICATION OF THE SUBSIDIARITY PRINCIPLE IN THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

In its May edition (No 7), **Info-C** published a communication concerning a statement from the "Conseil national de la consommation" (France) on subsidiarity.

In Germany there has been a lively discussion on the subsidiarity principle during the past few months between the Federal government and the Länder as well as the Federal Economics Ministry and representative groups.

The AgV (Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Verbraucherverbände e.V.) - an umbrella organisation of 38 consumer groups - has recognised the need for such a principle, but has warned against using it to block EC legal instruments or proposals which could not or cannot be prevented using the normal law-making procedures. Notable examples include last year's product safety directive and the proposal for a directive on liability for services.

The AgV's view is that the Community legislator must take action whenever cross-border problems prevent consumers from making the most of the single market. Some months ago it issued a statement to this effect. Since the Federal Republic is one of the EC Member States which want to extend the subsidiarity principle as much as possible, the AgV has submitted a proposal for a recommendation to the Consumer Council attached to the Federal Economics Ministry, which was approved after an in-depth discussion and the introduction of certain amendments and supplements.

The Consumer Council includes representatives of German consumer groups along with trade unionists, legal experts and representatives of other associations such as the German Association of Tenants and the Evangelical Women's League.

Below we reproduce the key extracts from this recommendation:

"The Consumer Council emphasises that in a Community which will be expanding during the foreseeable future, political action and Community law-making is meaningful and desirable only provided the subsidiarity principle is applied...

Under the subsidiarity principle, important and essential proposals concerning consumer protection are to be discussed anew or withdrawn. The Consumer Council does not deny the need for substantive changes, for example in cases of overregulation. However, this should not mean calling into question the need for Community rules in these domains in general, since cross-border problems and the inadequacy of national provisions justify action at EC level.

Likewise, the Consumer Council does not deny that some envisaged consumer protection measures are overdrawn. Hence, existing and planned proposals for legal instruments must be closely scrutinised to determine their compatibility with the subsidiarity principle, since otherwise attempts to improve the level of consumer protection in the EC might experience a serious setback.

Hence the Consumer Council recommends to the Federal Economics Minister:

- the German approach to applying the subsidiarity principle should not allow a standstill or reversal of the level of consumer protection achieved in the Community;

- in examining the legal provisions, Article 129a (Consumer Protection) of the Treaty on European Union should be given due consideration;
- oppose any intervention regarding Community instruments already adopted and reopen discussions on proposals that have largely been agreed on only when there are serious reasons to doubt the need for a central rule;
- ensure the participation of German consumer groups and organisations in discussions at national level for the future as well."

Source:

AgV
Herr Dirk Klasen
Heilsbachstraße 20
D - 53123 Bonn
Tel.: +49/2/28/64.89-0
Fax: +49/2/28/64.42.58

EFTA COUNTRIES

SWEDEN

CONSUMER EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

A conference on this theme was held in Stockholm 12-14 September 1993 under the auspices of the Nordic Senior Officials' Committee on Consumers Affairs, a body under the Nordic Council of Ministers. 50 participants from 18 European countries participated and covered the themes curricula, didactic materials, teachers' training and consumer influence on education.

The report on the conference may be obtained from :

Konsumentverket
Hans JELEBY
Box 503
S - 16215 Vällingby
Tel. : +46/8/759 8300
Fax. : +46/8/38 7055

Info-C Publication Schedule

In **Info-C** No 6, the first issue of 1993 we informed our readers about our publication schedule, including deadlines for contributions. Now the time has come for the 1994 schedule.

In 1993 we succeeded in making **Info-C** a quarterly. We intend to be bold and ambitious next year and increase the rhythm of publication even further to bi-monthly. In addition, because of this increase in rhythm, we shall change the numbering. 1994 actually represents the fourth volume of **Info-C** (although volumes 1 and 2 consisted of only one number each). So our next issue will be "Vol.4 No 1 (1994)".

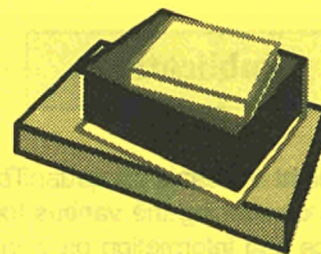
The six issues of volume four will appear in February, April, June, August, October and December 1994; the respective deadlines for contributions will be:

No 1 :	14/01
No 2 :	11/03
No 3 :	13/05
No 4 :	15/07
No 5 :	16/09
No 6 :	11/11

We are looking forward to your contributions and hope the positive relationship between **Info-C** and its readers will develop even further next year.

The editorial staff

PUBLICATIONS AND AUDIOVISUAL



- * A new brochure entitled "**Consumer rights in the single market**" has just been completed at the initiative of the Consumer Policy Service in cooperation with the DG "Audiovisual Media, Information, Communication and Culture" of the European Commission.

The aim of this brochure is to make the general public aware of the fundamental rights on which the European Commission has based its policy for the protection of consumers in the Member States. Hence, informed European citizens will be able to invoke these rights before the competent instances in their country.

The issues discussed are summarised under a few clear and succinct headings. Consumers are told about the structures at their disposal in the Member States, about the functioning of Community policy in this domain, and about the European Commission's future priorities.

The brochure, which is available in the nine Community languages, can be obtained from the Commission's representations and offices in the different Member States.

- * **Guia de comprador de habitação** (Guide for home buyers) is published by the Portuguese Institute of Consumers (IC).

This 281-page volume tells the consumer what he needs to know about housing and how to choose - for example, the rights and obligations of the consumer/dweller regarding his home, adapting the home to family life, or again the price/quality ratio in the housing market, etc.

The IC has also published two volumes entitled "**The Internal Market and Portuguese Consumers**".

The first volume is a forward impact study for 1993.

It contains several chapters devoted to various aspects of the internal market in the European Community in general and the situation of the Portuguese market in particular.

The second volume contains the proceedings of a conference held in Portugal on this issue with contributions from various individuals belonging to the IC and the world of politics and education.

For more information on these publications, contact:

Instituto do Consumidor
Praça Duque de Saldanha, 31
P - 1000 Lisboa
Tel.: +351/1/54.40.25
Fax : +351/1/52.24.10

- * Eco Label is the name of the Community ecological label designed to promote products which have a reduced environmental impact throughout their life cycle (see **INFO-C** No 7).

Manufacturers who affix this label to their products do so voluntarily and hence contribute to better informing consumers.

The Commission's Directorate-General "Environment, Nuclear Safety and Civil Protection" has published a small brochure containing key information on this subject in three Community languages - French, English and German.

The brochure also lists the names and addresses of the responsible organisations present in certain Member States and the contact points in the other Member States.

Information from:

Mark MOYS
DG XI
Tel.: +32/2/299.03.24
Fax: +32/2/299.03.12

- * The Consumer Organisations' Research and Information Centre (CRIOC) in Belgium has published six brochures on "Safe DIY". They were prepared as part of a campaign to prevent home accidents caused by DIY and gardening, with the support of the EC's Consumer Policy Service. The titles "Do it yourself", "Gardening", "Hand tools", "Electric tools", "Ladders and step-ladders" and "Dangerous products"

highlight the main hazards. The technical explanations concerning the various tools, as well as safety advice and information on work techniques, suitable clothing (gloves, aprons, etc) and correct behaviour are set out in plain words. As well as these brochures, available in French and Dutch, there are three illustrated posters with safety warnings which are ideal for classrooms or private DIY workshops.

Information:

CRIOC
18 rue des Chevaliers
B - 1050 Bruxelles
Tel.: 32/2/547.06.11

ation with the Instituto Nacional de Defesa do Consumidor (the National Institute for Consumer Protection, Portugal). The objective of the conference was "to assess the needs for information on the nature and causes of injuries, the experiences in accident data collection gained so far and the use made of information made available through these systems, for policy development by authorities, interest groups and the like".

The proceedings can be obtained from:

European Consumer Safety Association
c/o Consumer Safety Institute
Rijswijkstraat, 2
P.O. Box 75169
NL - 1070 AD Amsterdam
Tel.: +31/20/511.45.00
Fax: +31/20/511.45.10

-
- * The Deutscher Industrie- und Handelstag, DIHT, has published an 82-page information brochure on the EC-label entitled "**EG-Binnenmarkt, CE-Kennzeichnung**". This is a guide to the legal significance of EC labels in conjunction with basic guidelines for members of the DIHT, producers, importers and traders on how to use the EC label. The brochure assumes that the EC label is more of a conformity indicator for monitoring authorities than a quality seal and emphasises the importance for those affected by the directives to inform themselves about the relevant standards. All the directives are explained in the form of flow diagrams, together with information on the transition periods and the addresses of the inspection centres in Germany. The cost is DM 18 per copy.

Copies can be had from:

Deutscher Industrie- und Handelstag, DIHT
Abteilung Information
Postfach 1446
D-53004 Bonn
Telefax-Bestellservice: +49/228/104.663

-
- * "**Standards for access to the European Market - the Technical Programme 1993 - 1994**" is a publication of the Central Secretariat of CEN (the European Committee for Standardization). In this book "CEN has sought to gather all the essential information for those who have an interest in technical harmonization in Europe but who are not necessarily experts, to understand and evaluate CEN's work, its objectives and its present achievements in the context of the formation of the European internal market". This publication is available only in English.

To obtain a copy of the report, contact:

CEN
Secrétariat Central
rue de Stassart, 36
B - 1050 Bruxelles
Tel.: + 32/2/519.68.11
Fax: + 32/2/519.68.19

- * "**The role of accident data in designing, monitoring and evaluating measures aiming at improving consumer safety in Europe**" are the proceedings following a conference held in Lisbon in September 1992; the European Conference on the Role of Accident data. The conference was organized by ECOSA (European Consumer Safety Association) in collabor-

- * **Stiftung Warentest's Annual Report 1992** provides a general overview of the activities of this organization in the field of comparative testing of products and services. The report also covers the organisation's philosophy on testing; recent developments include greater attention to environmental and energy issues. Mention is also made of "test & rat", a two year old

magazine for consumers in the new federal Länder. STIFTUNG WARENTEST has especially put energy into the area of harmonising test methods used by consumer organisations in the EC and has also been cooperating with institutions in Central and Eastern European Countries. Excerpts in English are available.

For further information:
STIFTUNG WARENTEST
Lützow Platz 11-13
D - 10785 Berlin
Tel.: + 30/26.31.0
Fax: +30/261.1074

- * The Committee of Family Organisations in the European Communities (**COFACE**) has published a document containing the names and addresses of its member organisations as well as a list of periodicals disseminated by these organisations.

The periodicals are listed alphabetically by title, by the names of the organisations, and by the organisations' country of origin.

For information contact:
COFACE
Rue de Londres, 17
B- 1050 Bruxelles
Tel.: +32/2/511.41.79
Fax: +32/2/514.47.73

- * **EURO C**, the group which represents 22 national consumer protection organisations with roots in the trade union movement, has published the proceedings of a seminar relating to foodstuffs.

This "European Seminar on the quality and safety of foodstuffs in Europe" was held in Dresden (Germany) on 26 and 27 November 1992.

Various consumer bodies, including the Consumer Policy Service, were represented.

The objective was to pinpoint problems of foodstuffs quality in the context of the free movement of these products, with regard to institutional and regulatory aspects, technical and scientific questions, convergence, innovatory approaches and analyses, but also the macroeconomic dimension.

EURO C has also prepared a set of proposals concerning the promotion of a European policy for quality and safety of foodstuffs in Europe.

These documents are available in French, English and German.

They can be had from:
Unité Consommateurs CES
Rue Montagne aux Herbes Potagères, 37
B - 1000 Bruxelles
Tel.: +32/2/209.24.11
Fax : +32/2/218.35.66

- * EURO COOP has prepared a brochure on "**Consumer cooperatives and their activities at national and European level**".

This brochure is being distributed widely to members of EURO COOP and the Consumers' Consultative Council, the Community institutions and the press.

Contact:
EURO COOP
Rue Archimède, 17 - Bte 2
B - 1040 Bruxelles
Tel.: +32/2/230.32.44
Fax. +32/2/231.07.57

- * "**Energy in Europe - Annual Energy Review**". Edited by Directorate-General for Energy (DG XVII), the review is presented in four parts. The first part reports on the world energy situation on a region by region basis. Part two analyses in detail the European Community and its twelve Member States. The third part contains information on the rest of Europe and the former USSR. Finally, the Short-Term Energy Outlook for the Community is reviewed for 1993 and 1994.

For further information please contact:

Energy in Europe
DG XVII
Commission of the European Communities
200 rue de la Loi
B - 1049 Bruxelles
Fax: +32/2/235.01.50

-
- * **"OECD Economic Outlook No 53"**, published this summer, assesses current trends and the outlook for the next 18 months. This report shows that there are still many problems in several domains of the economy, mainly as regards unemployment in the countries of Central Europe. On the other hand average inflation in the OECD is at its lowest ebb for three decades. The report also emphasises the need to bolster consumer and business confidence for a sustained economic upswing. The OECD considers that governments could improve confidence through a certain number of measures, the most important being to finalise the Uruguay Round negotiations.

Information from:

OECD
2, rue André Pascal
F-75775 Paris Cedex 16
Tel.: +33/1/45.24.82.00

-
- * **"A common market for services"** is the first in a series of six publications on the internal market, from the Commission of the European Communities. The foreword emphasises the importance of a common market in services, while individual sections discuss different sectors of the services market and the strategies adopted - banks, insurance companies, securities, transport, new technologies and services, capital

movements and free movement of workers and members of the liberal professions. As to why there should be a common market for services in the first place, the brochure explains that both final consumers and firms in all the Member States will have a wider range of choices both at home and in other Member States. Price: ECU 19 (exclusive of VAT).

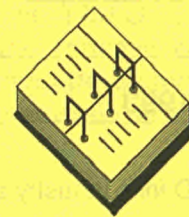
A 347-page volume on the **"Community social policy"** also belongs to this series. The reader learns about the measures adopted and proposals made as regards the fundamental social rights of workers, adopted at the Strasbourg summit in 1989 in the form of a "Community Charter of Fundamental Social Rights for Workers" ... This Charter lays down the major principles on which the European model of labour law and, more generally, the place of labour in society is based. All the sectors mentioned have their own introductions. Price: ECU 38 (exclusive of VAT).

"The elimination of frontier controls - Control of goods, Control of individuals, Value added tax, Excise duties". This booklet contains (i) a brief description of how the Community makes laws; (ii) a general introduction to the issues and problems involved in eliminating frontier controls; (iii) specific introductions to the approach being taken; (iv) a brief summary of each measure which has been adopted or proposed with a view to establishing an internal market without frontier controls. The price for the booklet is ECU 15.

The brochures can be ordered from:

Commission des Communautés Européennes
Eurobases
Rue de la Loi 200
B-1049 Bruxelles
Tel.: +32/2/235.00.01

Diary



Due to the fact that the "Consumers" Council did not take place until one month later than originally planned (see article on the subject), the publication date of **INFO-C** has also been delayed.

As a result, these dates have now passed.

The Editors have decided nevertheless not to omit these notices in case readers would still like to contact the event organisers to obtain any additional information.

We apologize for the delay.

6 and 7 December 1993

The "European Centre for Judges and Lawyers" - the Luxembourg branch of the European Institute of Public Administration - is organising its annual survey of "Current Trends in the Case Law of the Court of Justice and the Court of First Instance of the European Communities".

The purpose of this colloquium - featuring specialists in a variety of domains - is to present and comment landmark judgments of the Court of Justice and the Court of First Instance in 1992 and 1993.

There will be contributions on such topics as competition law, the free movement of services and the freedom of establishment, public contracts, the environment and free movement of persons.

Participation fee: ECU 390.

Information from:

IEAP - Antenne Luxembourg
Mireille LACOUR
Circuit de la Foire internationale, 2
L - 1347 Luxembourg
Tel.: +352/42.62.30 or 42.62.31
Fax : +352/42.62.37

6 and 7 December 1993

The "Eighth Seminar on Consumer Law" will be devoted to **Relations between Patients and Doctors** Tomorrow and will take place at the Intercontinental Hotel in Paris.

These two discussion days will take the form of round tables at which the following questions will be debated: what use health cards?, predictive medicine - what are the risks?, medical accidents - reparation without punishment?, how can compensation be financed? Various personalities from the medical and legal world and representatives of consumer groups and the insurance sector will attend.

Information from:

Institut National de la Consommation
80, rue Lecourbe
Tel.: +33/1/45.66.20.20
Fax : +33/1/45.66.21.50

7 and 8 December 1993

The Second International Conference on raising the standard of Public Services, organised on behalf of the Citizen's Charter Unit (a British committee) will be held in London with the title "Service for the Citizen". The emphasis will be on practical aspects in the form of case studies and opportunities for discussion and debate. The scope of this year's conference has been enlarged to include practical examples and case studies from Australia and North America. Demonstration modules will illustrate how public services provide information to consumers with the aid of advanced technology.

Information from:

Touchstone Exhibitions & Conferences Ltd.
4 Red Lion Street
Richmond
UK - Surrey TW9 1RW
Tel.: +44/81/332.00.44
Fax : +44/81/332.08.74

9 december 1993

"The Food and Drinks Industry and its Consumers" is the theme of a forum organised by the Confederation of the Food and Drink Industries of the EEC.

Participants will include members of the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee, high-ranking civil servants from the Community Institutions, representatives of the national administrations of the 12 Member States, heads of national food and drink federations and European organisations of industrial branches, numerous business leaders and journalists representing the major media.

In view of the growing demand for consumer information on foodstuffs, the European foodstuffs industry has decided to devote specific attention to labelling, which is the main source of such information.

Venue: Brussels

Information:

CIIA

Rue de la Loi, 74

B - 1040 Bruxelles

Tel.: +32/2/230.81.45

Fax : +32/2/230.85.69

Seuls les lecteurs n'ayant pas encore exprimé leur désir d'abonnement (gratuit) à INFO-C, sont invités à compléter le (les) coupon(s)-réponse(s) ci-dessous. Toutefois, si vous avez déjà renvoyé votre demande d'abonnement, nous vous saurions gré de vérifier vos coordonnées sur l'étiquette d'envoi et de nous communiquer toutes erreurs ou changements d'adresse pour la bonne expédition postale de votre bulletin.

Commission des Communautés Européennes
Mr J. Ring
Service Politique des Consommateurs
Rue de la Loi, 200
B - 1049 Bruxelles



NOM :

PROFESSION :

ORGANISME :

ADRESSE :

Désire recevoir INFO-C.

En FR - EN - DE (1)

(1) Biffer les mention inutiles

Der folgende Antwortkupon ist für jene Leser gedacht, die Info-C noch nicht regelmässig im (Gratis-) Abonnement beziehen. Sie können ihn aber auch für die Mitteilung von Adressenänderungen bzw. zur Berichtigung der Angaben auf dem Adressenaufkleber benutzen.

Kommission der Europäischen Gemeinschaften
Herr J. Ring
Dienst Verbraucherpolitik
Rue de la Loi, 200
B - 1049 Bruxelles



NAME :

BERUF :

ORGANISATION :

ADRESSE :

ICH WÜRD GERN INFO-C EMPFANGEN

IN DEUTSCH - IN ENGLISCH - IN FRANZÖSISCH (1)

(1) Bitte präzisieren.

Only those readers who have not yet asked for their (free) subscription to INFO-C, are invited to fill in the reply-coupon(s) below. However, if you have already sent in a request, we should be grateful if you would check your name and address on the label of this bulletin and inform us of any errors or of any changes in your address in order that your copy arrives without delay.

Commission of the European Communities

Mr J. Ring

Consumer Policy Service

Rue de la Loi, 200

B - 1049 Bruxelles



NAME :

PROFESSION :

ORGANIZATION :

ADDRESS :

Wishes to receive INFO-C.

In French - in English - in German (1)

(1) Please underline your preference(s)

NAME :

PROFESSION :

ORGANIZATION :

ADRESS :

Wishes to receive INFO-C.

In French - in English - in German (1)

(1) Please underline your preference(s)

NAME :

PROFESSION :

ORGANIZATION :

ADRESS :

Wishes to receive INFO-C.

In French - in English - in German (1)

(1) Please underline your preference(s)