



Health & Consumer Voice

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President Barroso supports Mrs Kuneva's plea for empowered consumers



José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission

On the occasion of European Consumer Day, the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, and Consumer Commissioner, Meglena Kuneva, co-authored an article on the EU's efforts to empower consumers in Europe, which is a key step towards growth, jobs and prosperity for all.

John F. Kennedy once said “Consumers, by definition, include us all yet they are the only important group whose views are often not heard.” The European Commission is working hard to change that. Consumers deserve transparent and competitive prices, clear information and robust protection against faulty and unsafe goods. And Europe can help deliver these things.

We must empower consumers so that they can use more effectively their strongest weapon: the power of comparison and choice. That's why the Commission has set up a new system—the European Consumer Market Watch—to investigate whether various sectors of the economy are delivering the information, choice and value for money consumers deserve.

The new system is designed to identify if and why markets may be failing

consumers. Such failure could be due to a lack of competition, distortion of consumer choice, lack of transparent and complete information, poor regulation, or a combination of some or all of these.

Price differences not only occur between member states, but also within member states. Sometimes they reflect differences in cost, e.g. for transport and distribution. Sometimes they reflect differences in consumer preferences. But—and this is the point where we need to look deeper—sometimes they reflect unjustified obstacles within the single market, for example as a result of red tape. This is where we need to act because EU citizens should not be hit in the pocket by such obstacles.

Another interesting finding is that in 2006, some 27% of EU consumers made on-line purchases but only 6% bought from outside their home country. This indicates a lack of confidence, as people do not know their rights in other countries or trust they will be able to enforce them. This can be detrimental to both consumers and businesses and needs to be addressed.

The Market Watch initiative is about opening eyes so that consumers can become a stronger force in the economy. That will be good for consumers. It will be good for those businesses that are offering the best products and services at the best prices. It will be good for Europe's ability to compete in a global age.

For the full article, please view:
http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/president/pdf/article_080315_en.pdf



In brief



New health Programme 2008-2013: the 2008 workplan and calls for proposals

The first work plan for the implementation of the second programme of Community action in the field of health (2008-2013) was published on 29 February. The work plan sets out for 2008 the priority areas and criteria for funding actions under the Programme for a total of € 46.6 million. At the same time the Commission announced the calls for proposals for projects, operating grants and conferences as well as invitations for joint actions in the field of public health, for which an Information Day was held in Luxemburg on 12th and 17th of March.

A call for expression of interest was published on 9 February to establish a list of experts for support activities in connection with the second health programme. These activities involve reviewing project proposals submitted under annual calls for proposals, monitoring and evaluating funded projects, and other tasks related to the implementation of the Programme.

For further information, please visit:
http://ec.europa.eu/phea/index_en.html

European Consumer Day 2008 - A Year of Change

This year's European Consumer Day (15 March) was celebrated with a series of events across Europe. On 10 March, the Consumer Commissioner, Meglena Kuneva, presented the first ever EU Consumer Champion award to a Finnish consumer campaign at a ceremony in Brussels. On 14 March, she delivered a keynote speech at a conference of the European Economic and Social Committee, setting out the changes that are shaping Europe, where business and consumers together should be driving the economy.



Meglena Kuneva, Consumer Commissioner

The Commissioner's priorities are threefold: to ensure consumers are informed, that they enjoy the same rights wherever they are in Europe and that there is no compromise on safety. Well informed proactive consumers, are critical determinants of healthy markets driving growth and prosperity.

The top prize for the EU Consumer Champion award went to Finland for a dynamic web-game designed to teach young consumers about their rights and responsibilities as online shoppers. Ireland, UK, Hungary, Estonia and Norway also received special category awards for campaigns which promoted consumer rights in an innovative and effective way.

The UK campaign won 'most original' prize with its 'Consumer Challenge Quiz', to help young people with learning disabilities to become better informed.

Ireland received the 'best financial campaign' for the high profile promotion of a personal finance website.

The 'Best children's prize' went to Hungary, for a national drawing competition for primary schools. In addition special merit prizes went to Norway for its 'iTunes' campaign and to Estonia for the 'Make Responsible Credit Decisions' campaign.

The winning campaigns were those that best reflected the message that consumers should 'know their rights and use their rights' in their daily transactions.

For further information, please view:
http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/index_en.htm

Open Alcohol Forum – Conference Announcement

On 17 April, in the framework of the European Alcohol and Health forum, the Commission will organise an 'Open Forum' in Brussels. The European Alcohol and Health Forum was established by the Commission as one of the cornerstones of the EU communication strategies to sup-

port Member States in reducing alcohol-related harm.

The 'Open Forum' will provide a platform for general exchange of information and discussion with a broad range of interested parties. All organisations and individuals with a particular interest in the reduction

of alcohol-related harm may participate in the Forum.

For further information, please view:
http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/alcohol/Forum/alcohol_forum_en.htm

Previous registration is required by email at the following address:

SANCO-C4-Health-DETERMINANTS@ec.europa.eu

New Health Commissioner: Mrs Androulla Vassiliou

Following the departure of Mr Markos Kyprianou at the end of February, the President of the European Commission, Mr José Manuel Barroso, accepted the nomination by the Republic of Cyprus of Mrs Androulla Vassiliou as the new Commissioner for Health.



Androulla Vassiliou, Commissioner for Health

Mrs Vassiliou began her career as a lawyer and was elected as Member of the House of Representatives of Cyprus for two terms (1996-2001 and 2001-2006). She served on the European Affairs Committee and on the Joint Parliamentary Committee for Cyprus. Mrs Vassiliou was also an Alternative Representative of the Cyprus Parliament

to the Convention of the Future of Europe (2001-2003). In addition she was Vice-President of the European Liberal Democrats and Reform Party (ELDR, 2001-2006) and as such chairperson of the European Liberal Women's Network.

In 2002, she was appointed Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of the Cyprus Oncology Centre, a non profit making institution offering a wide range of treatment to cancer patients, from which post she resigned upon her nomination as EU Commissioner.

Following the procedures for nomination of a new Commissioner, Mrs Androulla Vassiliou was heard by the European Parliament on 1 April.

For further information, please visit:
http://ec.europa.eu/health/dyna/press_rel/ph_press_en.cfm

EU Bans on sale of non-child resistant and novelty cigarette lighters

On 11 March, the Commission Decision banning the sale of non-child resistant and novelty lighters to consumers entered into force. The Decision was adopted following a positive opinion of Member States represented within the General Product Safety Directive (GPSD) Committee. This measure enhances consumer safety, requiring that cigarette lighters which are dangerous for children can no longer be sold to consumers in the EU.



The placement on the market and importing of such lighters was already forbidden since 11 March 2007, giving industry a year to comply with the rules. The Decision requires the Governments of the Member States to ensure that common cigarette lighters placed on the EU market are child-resistant thanks to a simple and very cheap system that makes them much harder to light. Furthermore, it forbids the placing on the market of lighters which resemble objects that are attractive to children (also known as 'novelty lighters'), for example because they resemble little toys.

coming into force of this measure which will foster consumers', and in particular children's, safety in Europe. Cigarette lighters are consumer products which pose a serious risk when misused by children. In particular for disposable lighters as children may play with them and accidentally cause fires, serious injuries and deaths.

For further information, please visit:
http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/index_en.htm

Commissioner for Consumer Protection, Meglena Kuneva, welcomed the

'Better Training for Safer Food' gets underway for 2008

EU-based activities within the 'Better Training for Safer Food' initiative for 2008 will begin with a workshop in Stratford-upon-Avon in the UK between 21 and 25 April. Fifteen training programmes will run in 2008, on various subjects, both in the EU and third countries, training 4,000 participants over 120 workshops. Further EU-based programmes cover plant health, food hygiene, BSE and similar diseases, animal by-products, animal welfare, zoonoses and plant protection products.

Third country activities for 2008 began in February with a training session in Bangkok on the Trade Control and Expert System (TRACES) risk management system. This improves procedures for imports of animals via the electronic exchange of import documents and other information.

TRACES training, is part of a programme also including the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF). Other third-country programmes cover food testing, EU food standards and Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza control.

For further information, please visit:
http://ec.europa.eu/food/training_strategy/index_en.htm

Commission Proposal for clearer and more modern rules for feed and pet food labelling



On 4 March, the Commission adopted a proposal for a Regulation aimed at simplifying the existing procedures for labelling and marketing of feed and pet food, contributing to making the system more efficient and maintaining the high level of protection for animal health and welfare as well as public health. Modernised rules will also benefit the EU livestock sector, helping to promote its competitiveness.

The proposal aims to reduce the bureaucracy for feed operators, removing the very detailed and inflexible labelling requirements which have become unnecessary since the implementation of the integrated food safety approach - 'farm to fork'.

General provisions are set out for the labelling of all feed, such as the need to indicate the type of feed, the name and address of the operator, list of additives and the net weight. In addition, in the case of 'dietetic' feed, all claims must be properly substantiated.

With regard to pet food, the requirements do not include the same level of detail as needed by farmers on the composition of feed. Labels in this case must carry a telephone number that customers can call if they wish to receive further information on the contents.

The freedom of the feed industry to innovate will be boosted by these changes, affecting a market of roughly € 50 billion in the EU. The 62 million pet owning households in the EU, will be in a better position to evaluate the content of the food they buy for their pets.

For further information, please view:
http://ec.europa.eu/food/food/animalnutrition/labelling/index_en.htm

Harmonizing procedures for published information in the veterinary and zootechnical fields

The Commission adopted a proposal for a Council Directive that harmonizes and simplifies the current procedures laid down in 21 Council acts for listing, updating and publishing information in the veterinary and zootechnical fields. The simplified approach will reduce the workload and administrative burdens for the competent authorities in the Member States, the farming industry, trade operators and the Commission itself.

The lists include items such as approved animal health establishments (assembly

centres, dealers, semen collection centres etc), breeding organisations in Member States and third countries, and certain laboratories.

The aim of the Commission's proposal is to establish a rational method for listing these establishments to facilitate veterinary checks, improve administrative management of the lists in Member States and third countries and provide information to the public.

The proposal is an example of the Commission's 'Better Regulation' Policy.

For further information, please visit:
http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/index_en.htm

In brief



Revision of risk assessment methods for nanomaterials in cosmetics

On 3 March, the Scientific Committee on Consumer Products (SCCP) concluded that, in order to assess the potential risk of insoluble and/or biopersistent nanomaterials used in cosmetics, new risk-assessment methods are needed or existing ones have to be improved.

The Committee considers that the current risk assessment methodologies are adequate for soluble nanoparticles but not for insoluble and/or biopersistent ones. For those contained in cosmetics, it believes that the assessment should be carried out on a case-by-case basis taking into account the specific properties regarding particle size, number and surface characteristics.

The SCCP notes that it is primarily the insoluble particles that raise health concerns, related to the possible uptake through the skin.

For further information, please visit:
http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_risk/committees/04_sccp/04_sccp_en.htm



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