

308/73

# European Communities

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EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

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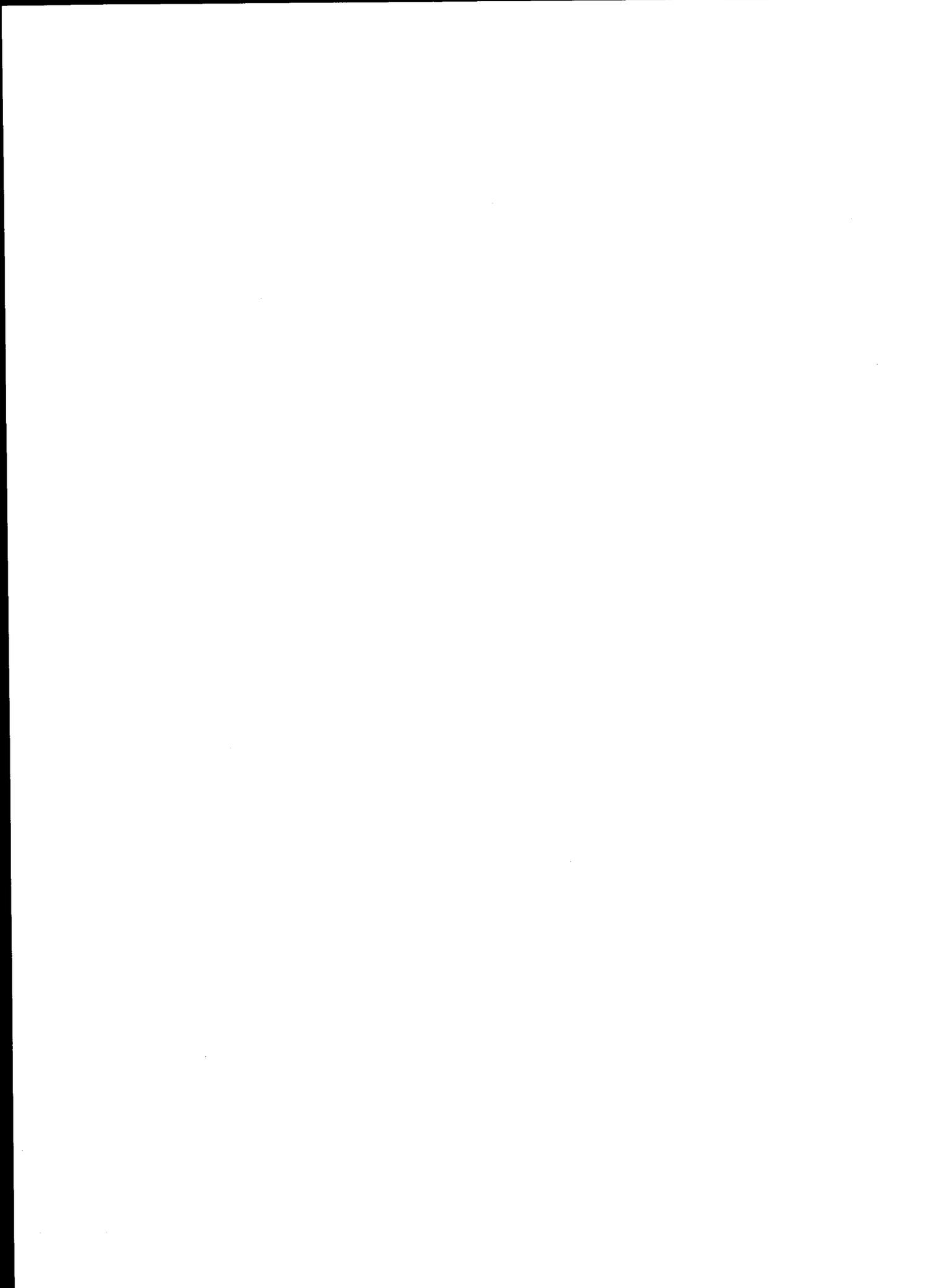
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### Report

drawn up on behalf of the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs

on the proposal from the Commission of the European Communities to the Council (Doc. 308/73) for a preliminary Programme of the European Economic Community on Consumer Information and Protection

Rapporteur: Mr Giovanni BERSANI



By letter of 21 December 1973 the President of the Council of the European Communities requested the European Parliament to deliver an opinion on the proposal from the Commission of the European Communities to the Council for a preliminary Community programme for consumer information and protection (Doc. 308/73).

By letter of 7 January 1974 the President of the European Parliament referred this proposal to the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs as the committee responsible and to the Committee on Public Health and the Environment for its opinion.

The Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs appointed Mr Bersani rapporteur on 29 January 1974.

It considered this proposal at its meetings of 21/22 February 1974, 28/29 March 1974, 18/19 April 1974 and 23 April 1974.

At its meeting of 23 April 1974 the committee unanimously adopted the motion for a resolution.

The following were present: Mr Lange, chairman; Mr Notenboom, vice-chairman; Sir Brandon Rhys Williams, vice-chairman; Mr Bersani, rapporteur; Mr Artzinger, Mr Burgbacher, Mr Van der Hek, Mr Brøndlund Nielsen, Mr Normanton, Mrs Orth (deputizing for Mr Kater) and Mr Scholten.

The opinion of the Committee on Public Health and the Environment is attached.

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Opinion of the Committee on Public Health and the Environment

A

The Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs hereby submits to the European Parliament the following motion for a resolution, together with explanatory statement:

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

embodying the opinion of the European Parliament on the proposal from the Commission of the European Communities to the Council for a preliminary Community programme for consumer information and protection.

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the proposal from the Commission of the European Communities to the Council (COM(73) 2108 final)
  - having been consulted by the Council (Doc. 308/73),
  - having regard to the report of the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs and the opinion of the Committee on Public Health and the Environment (Doc. 64/74 ),
1. Welcomes the proposal for a preliminary programme of the Community on consumer information and protection which, if fully implemented, would considerably strengthen the position of the consumer;
  2. Considers it highly desirable for consumer organizations to be strengthened sufficiently to enable them to influence the formulation of policy with the necessary expertise;
  3. Feels that financial support from public sources could be very useful in this connection, provided it did not in any way curtail the autonomy of consumer organizations;

4. Feels that specific consumer organizations are not represented strongly enough on the Consumers' Consultative Committee;

5. Requests the Commission to alter the presentation of its programme by combining chapters III and V and appending an annex indicating what the Community has achieved so far in the field of consumer protection;

6. Requests the Commission to modify or supplement its priorities on the following points:

- health and safety: Community legislation in this area must be extended considerably in the next three years;
- unfair and deceptive commercial practices: under this heading mention should also be made of the conditions to be met by guarantees on consumer goods;
- misleading advertizing: the requirement for advertizing to indicate the principal objective details of the product should be formulated more positively;
- hire purchase and consumer credit: a draft directive should be submitted laying down the conditions which the corresponding contracts must satisfy (inter alia, amount to be paid back, duration of loan, annual interest, down-payment, penalties in the event of arrears);
- complaints, advice and redress: there is a need for a Community-wide service which operates promptly and is available free of charge to everyone;
- consumer information and education: there is clearly a need for a basic directive on informative labelling; in addition, regulations are required concerning the addition of directions for use or instructions for care and use (for textiles) in the language of the country or destination, and provisions prohibiting misleading packaging;
- consumer information and education generally: efforts must be made to ensure that at least as much time (at comparable viewing hours) is devoted to consumer information as to television advertising; this consumer information must be objective and unprejudicial to conditions of competition;

- comparative testing of products: although the Commission itself need not be active in this field, it should do everything in its power to encourage such testing;

- harmonization of legislation: harmonization of the legislations of Member States in any of the above-mentioned areas should be based on the ~~strictest~~ <sup>most advanced</sup> legislation;

7. Requests the Commission to incorporate the above amendments in its proposal pursuant to Article 149, second paragraph, of the Treaty;

8. Instructs its President to forward this resolution and the report of its committee to the Council and Commission of the European Communities, and to the Governments and Parliaments of the Member States.

B.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

I. THE CONSUMER IN A MODERN ECONOMY

The 250 million inhabitants of the Community have in common the fact that they are all consumers. It is therefore extremely important that the Community should not become a disappointment to consumers.

The sense of discrimination required of consumers in a market economy presupposes a knowledge and insight which the consumer cannot obtain in a modern economy without help. Although consumers in the Community are better informed today than in the past and are inclined to be more critical of the products offered it is becoming increasingly difficult to make a responsible choice because of the complex nature of many products, the wide range on offer and persuasive advertising. For these reasons the Community needs a consumer policy.

The basic rights of the consumer are generally given as those outlined by President Kennedy in the early '60's. The Commission, too, refers to these rights, formulated a little differently, on page 2 of its programme. The objectives of a consumer policy are derived directly from them.

In its programme, the Commission has concentrated mainly on those aspects which the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs feels should be considered. The Commission rightly emphasizes the need for better legal protection of the consumer. This must in fact be the key-stone of any Community programme to help consumers. Legal protection does not mean that the government will mollycoddle the consumer. On the contrary, the intention is to provide the consumer with the legal instruments with which to defend his interests himself.

Another element of consumer policy - consumer information - is just as important, but in this field, the task of the Community institutions will be mainly limited to publicizing and explaining Community decisions directly affecting consumers. Obviously the Commission can also do something to promote the organization of comparative testing of products at Community level but this is already done reasonably well at international level and moreover consumer organizations may be rather sensitive to interference of any kind by government bodies in their activities in this field.

The Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs discussed in detail the production of the consumer as a user of public goods.

## II. CONSUMER INFLUENCE

Some decentralization of consumer information is desirable, but this presupposes each Member State having a properly constituted consumer organization. At the moment this is not the case. The Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs would like the Commission to provide it with information on the size and importance of consumer organizations in each of the Member States (resources, activities, number of members or subscribers per 100,000 inhabitants, etc.).

A modern consumer organization is responsible not only for providing information on products, but also for seeing to it that the government, in formulating its policy, takes into account the interests of the consumer<sup>1</sup>. For their part, consumer organizations must realize that their advice will only be considered if they display the necessary expertise in all the different policy sectors; as yet this is far from being the case.

Everyone is a consumer, but nearly everyone is also involved in some form of production of goods or services. The latter aspect is more important to most citizens, as can be seen for instance from the fact that citizens are generally more interested in increasing their incomes than in bringing about a reduction in prices. It is also reflected in the rather weak organization of consumers as opposed to that of producers and employees.

It is in the interest not only of national governments and parliaments, but also of Community institutions, to strengthen consumer organizations, not least with a view to fighting inflation. This must be done by involving the organizations which represent consumers at an early stage in the formulation of policy; in addition, financial support must be given to encourage the formation of strong consumer organizations. This support must, however, be provided in such a way that the autonomy of these organizations is in no way curtailed. This is all the more important as the government itself also figures as a producer on a number of markets and has other interests to consider besides those of the consumer. The Commission overlooks this point in its programme.

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<sup>1</sup> This will be facilitated by having a minister in the national government responsible specifically for consumer problems, as is the case in Great Britain and Canada.

### III. CONSUMER INFLUENCE IN THE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT PHASE

It is widely held that half the products which are to be sold in 20 years' time must be discovered or developed now. The consumer has no control over the wide range of products which are currently being developed in laboratories or similar establishments and some of which will appear on the market once the development process is terminated. It is precisely in the research and development phase that the course is set and the composition of the range of products and services largely determined for the coming years. If consumers have to wait until the product is already on the market, their opportunities for influencing the range of goods and services on offer will be reduced considerably.

It is not easy to consult the consumer already at the research and development stage and to involve him in the decision-making process. Yet something can be done to lend a little more weight to consumer interests when assessing the advantages and disadvantages of developing a new product. Consumer organizations should, for instance, be involved in the drawing up of long-term economic programmes and budgets for scientific research. The Commission could perhaps investigate this aspect, which is not referred to in the programme.

Some influence is in fact already exerted on the decisions taken at the research and development stage. Consumer organizations have discovered that manufacturers are tending more and more when developing new products to take into account the requirements imposed by these organization on goods and services. Consumer organizations are tending to set standards, a welcome development which obviously also imposes a corresponding responsibility on the organizations concerned.

### IV. INSTITUTIONAL REPRESENTATION

Only passing reference is made to the Consumers' Consultative Committee in the programme. The composition of this committee, which it was decided to set up in September 1973, presented the Commission with a number of problems. This is not surprising in view of the number of organizations aspiring to represent consumers.

The Committee has 25 members: 15 representatives of European consumer organizations (consumer groups, family associations, consumer cooperations, three trade union organizations) and 10 experts.

Although such organizations undoubtedly have their merits, it would be preferable if groups concerned more directly and specifically with consumer interests were represented more strongly on the Committee

The Commission does not indicate the criteria by which the 10 remaining experts sitting on the Committee were chosen. Neither the programme nor the general report mention the actual tasks of this Committee. Can the Committee volunteer advice of its own accord? And can it do so not only on traditional consumer problems but also on policy questions which affect the consumer indirectly? The Commission provides the secretariat of the Committee, which was allegedly involved in the formulation of the programme.

#### V. PRESENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME

A shortcoming of the Commission document is that it is practically incomprehensible to the average consumer because of complicated formulations and repetitions. The Commission's policy memorandum would have been a far more readable document if chapter III 'Objectives and Outlines of a community consumer policy', three-quarters of which is repeated in chapter V 'Priorities', had been combined with this last chapter. The introduction could be shortened considerably and an annex should be appended indicating just what the Community has achieved so far and how consumer interests are served in the Member States.

#### VI. Consequences of the Common Market for the consumer

The Common Market undoubtedly brought with it many advantages for consumers. The abolition of customs' duties, intensified competition, specialization and rationalization of production and distribution, have increased the range of goods available, moderated price increases to some extent and accelerated economic growth. However, the effect of the EEC as such cannot be isolated from other factors and quantified.

Some time ago<sup>1</sup>, the Commission announced that the proportion of intra-community imports in the consumption of family households in Community countries was 14% on average, and for industrial consumer goods, 20%. It was emphasised that the increase in intra-community trade involved only a limited number of products. It would be interesting to hear from the Commission just how the situation has evolved since then in this respect and how price developments for those products in respect of which a rapid increase in intra-community trade has been noted compare with price developments for goods which are still almost exclusively supplied by national producers.

Retail prices of identical or comparable consumer goods in the Community still vary considerably. There can be no objection to this if these differences are the result of natural conditions of competition (wage levels, production structure, access to raw and basic materials, trade structure, transport costs). However, the Commission should adopt a firm stand if these differences are explained by agreements and other practices as defined in Articles 85 and 86 of the EEC Treaty, or if they are the result of administrative and technical barriers to trade. The Community, too, obviously has a duty in this respect if the differences result from widely divergent tax charges. The range of action for the Commission in this sphere is thus a good deal wider than implied in the Seventh General Report<sup>2</sup>.

At the Parliament's request<sup>3</sup>, the Commission made a study in 1969 of the causes of price differences in the Community. Strangely enough, the Commission did not consider it necessary to inform Parliament of the result of this study. The Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs would now like to know the results of the comparative surveys of price and purchasing power parities conducted by the Statistical Office.

#### VII. OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HEALTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The annexed opinion of the Committee on Public Health and the Environment contains a number of observations also made in this report. The practical suggestions advocate above all faster harmonization and improvement of foodstuffs legislation and the laying down of Community regulations for the care and use of textiles. The Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs gladly endorses these suggestions.

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<sup>1</sup> Meeting of the Economic Affairs Committee of 6 December 1968.

<sup>2</sup> 'Regulations only govern price differences by reference to agreements and concerted practices which give rise to them. Hence the Treaty does not apply to price differences which are not concerted. Consequently consumer associations should promote a greater knowledge of market conditions - the best way to overcome price differences.' (Para.180).

<sup>3</sup> OJ No. C 17 of 12 February 1969.

However, for the reasons given in section I, paragraph five, of this report, the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs cannot agree to the proposal that the Commission itself should play an active role in the field of comparative testing of goods. On the other hand, the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs does agree with the committee asked for its opinion that the funds which the Commission proposes to devote to the implementation of its programme are rather modest and justify a certain scepticism.

#### VIII: Priorities

The programme which the Commission intend to implement in the next three years (Chapter 5 of the Programme) is ambitious but realistic. Apart from a number of points to which we shall refer later, it does indicate the most important items which can and must be dealt with in that period. If this programme is fully implemented, the consumers' position will be much stronger.

The Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs wishes to propose the following alterations:

1. Under the heading 'Unfair and deceptive commercial practices' (page 18) mention is made of '... eliminating ... unfair contracts'. The Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs believes that minimum conditions should also be stipulated for guarantees on durable consumer goods. The committee proposes that this point should be explicitly mentioned.
2. Misleading advertising: in this section of the programme (page 19) the formulation of the objectives is too negative. Advertising must not only not be misleading, but should also give the principal objective details on the product concerned.
3. Hire purchase and consumer credit (page 19): there is a real need for Community control here, since, on the one hand, such credit is becoming more readily available, while, on the other, the conditions under which it is granted are often one-sided and unclear. The Commission programme, however, remains somewhat vague when it states on page 20, that the Commission intends, within three years, to 'prepare a first draft directive or other appropriate measures for submission to the Council.' 'Submission of a draft directive...' would have been clearer.

4. Complaints, advice and redress (page 20): this item (Point 3 under Priorities) is also very important. The text, however, reveals that the Commission has not yet made much progress in preparing Community legislation in this field. Only now does it contemplate 'analysing the studies already made in this field', which is probably why this entire point is formulated somewhat vaguely. What is important, however, is to lay down, as the Commission itself puts it, a Community-wide complaints and advice service which operates quickly and is readily accessible to everyone. The system of the consumer ombudsman, which has been very successful in Sweden, could be used as a model. It appears, however, that the Commission is, for the moment, thinking only in terms of studying existing legal practice. The Commission is requested to be more specific about its ideas.

5. Consumer information and education (page 21): the second paragraph on 'labelling' obviously refers to the basic directive for which there is, indeed, a serious need<sup>1</sup>.

Provisions are also required which, where necessary, will make it compulsory to add directions for use or instructions for care and use (for textiles) in the language of the country where the product is to be sold, and will prohibit misleading packaging. Manufacturers may for example leave the packaging and price of products unchanged, while reducing the contents, say, by one quarter.

6. Under the heading 'Consumer information and education generally', the Commission announces that it intends 'to use fully the resources of mass media communication through whatever channels may be provided...' (page 22). This firm tone is a little out of place among the otherwise very cautiously formulated proposals of the Commission, particularly as there is no clear indication of exactly how the Commission intends to proceed.

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<sup>1</sup> The 'method' is only loosely formulated in this paragraph: in the second sentence of the first indent, the Commission announces that 'interested parties ... will be consulted on the need for a draft directive.' Three sentences later, however, the Commission declares that it will, in any case, submit a proposal to the Council. There is then obviously little point in first consulting interested parties on the desirability of a directive.

Of course, it is appropriate for television to devote far more attention to consumer information and for the relevant programmes to be ~~transmitted~~ at peak viewing hours (which, at the moment, is unfortunately rarely the case.) A reasonable aim would be to ensure that at least as much time (at comparable viewing hours) is spent on objective consumer information<sup>1</sup> as on television advertising. However, the Community can do little more in this direction than make suggestions.

7. Some years ago, the Commission attempted, in cooperation with the consumers contact committee, to launch a European consumer magazine. However, only a few editions of this magazine were published. Can the Commission state why these activities were discontinued? The Commission now proposes (Para. 85, last indent) to publish an annual report on consumer matters. Might it not be more useful to revive the monthly European consumer publication?
8. Para. 85 (page 22) of the Programme refers to the comparative testing of products. Comparative testing of products is already well under way in a number of Member States; there is also a good deal of cooperation and exchange of information between consumer organizations in different Member States, but much remains to be done here. Far greater efforts must still be made to counter the advertising of producers who often try to create separate markets and market 'niches' for products which do not differ appreciably but which, it is claimed, represent something new and better. All too often, the manufacturers and the trade are still the only source of information on the products they offer.
9. Almost every page of the preliminary Programme shows that the Commission is still only in the early stages of its work on the formulation of a consumer policy. In many cases, the Commission clearly lacks the necessary information on what has already been done in the Member States. This is surprising, since the Commission has had a consumer service for

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Belgium has already made considerable progress in this field. Consumer information through the medium of television should be provided in such a way that large production and commercial undertakings do not benefit from it.

more than six years now. Admittedly this department was set up on a modest scale, but it seems reasonable to assume that the three officials involved - a year ago the department changed heads and was extended to six officials - must have achieved something in all those years. The Commission is requested to provide further information on this point.

OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON  
PUBLIC HEALTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Draftsman: Mrs E. Orth

On 21 January 1974 the Committee on Public Health and the Environment appointed Mrs Orth draftsman of an opinion.

It discussed the draft opinion at its meeting of 19 April 1974 and adopted it unanimously with one abstention.

The following were present: Mr Scott-Hopkins, vice-chairman and acting chairman; Mrs Orth, draftsman; Mr Adams, Mr Brégégère, Mr Creed, Mr Dalsager (deputizing for Mr Albertsen), Mr Delmotte (deputizing for Mr Lagorce), Mr Eisma, Lord Lothian, Mr Noé, Mr Petersen, Mr Rosati, Lord St. Oswald, Mr Schwabe (deputizing for Mr Willi Müller) and Mr Springorum.

1. On 18 December 1973 the Council acknowledged receipt of the Commission's communication on a preliminary Community action programme for consumer information and protection. The Committee of Permanent Representatives was instructed to discuss the programme. The Council was in principle required to reach a decision on the programme 'as soon as possible, but in any case before the summer recess'.<sup>1</sup>

2. The Commission's consumer protection programme is broken down into 4 main sections totalling 92 paragraphs. The programme concludes with a draft Council resolution

- approving the objectives and principles of the Community programme,
- approving the projects described in the programme and the priorities set for their implementation,
- noting the Commission's intention of implementing the programme either on its own responsibility or by submitting suitable proposals to the Council,
- requiring the Council to decide on these proposals within nine months of their communication by the Commission.

3. By referring to the resolutions adopted at the Paris Summit Conference of October 1972 the Commission attempts to create an image for itself in a field to which it has not in the past paid much attention. This lack of interest has given the Commission and thus the European Communities the reputation of attaching most importance to concentrations of producers. The consequence has been in many cases resignation and ill-feeling among those not interested in the strengthening of the manufacturer's position, i.e. above all the consumer.

4. In view of the frequency with which these and similar proposals have already been submitted by the various institutions in the Community of the Nine, an examination of the individual questions broached and the proposed elimination of certain grievances gives rise to justified doubt as to whether the Commission has sufficient ideas of its own to produce a really integrated and balanced concept. In the committee's view, the programme contains various measures which in themselves are to be welcomed but which are not coordinated.

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<sup>1</sup>See 'Agence Europe', 8.1.74

5. The change to mass-production methods is accompanied by a change in the consumer's position, making him the target of efforts to sell him goods that have already been manufactured. It is obvious that weight must be added to the consumer's side of the scales. There is a particular need for a substantial increase in

- the protection and assistance given to consumers,
- the information given to consumers on all questions of interest to them,
- effective consumer representation.

6. The Commission considers the following to be the bases of a Community consumer policy:

A. Protection in terms of health and safety

This includes quality and safety tests and checks as well as standardization requirements.

B. Trading practices concerning goods and services

The following are to be investigated or harmonized:

- (a) Practices falling under the law of unfair competition,
- (b) Trading practices which lend themselves to deception and abuse,
- (c) Warranty problems arising out of economic losses,
- (d) Deceptive package sizes,
- (e) Liability of authorities and private industry for goods and services; customer service etc. to be governed by standards against which quality can be checked.

C. Price stabilization

By regulating price and trading structures and providing adequate information. The Common Agricultural Policy is to be reappraised in the same way.

D. More effective competition policy

by the strict application of Articles 85 and 86 of the EEC Treaty.

E. Consumer assistance

is to be improved by increasing the means of redress and in the long term by providing better information through the creation of computer links between the Member States and centralized sources of information.

F. Consumer information

with the aid of labels and inscriptions and by reviewing advertising methods, carrying out comparative testing of products and research into consumer behaviour and attitudes, informing the consumer of his legal rights, employing the mass media and setting norms for the qualifications of the liberal professions which provide public services.

G. Consumer representation

The Consumers' Consultative Committee is to make consultation, representation and participation possible.

7. The tasks of the Consumer's Consultative Committee can be summarized as follows:

It was set up to give consumer interests a political dimension as a counterweight to the considerable emphasis placed on economic interests. Bodies active in the past in the field of consumer protection, and in particular the former Contact Committee for Consumers in the Community, were not able to fulfil their task. The Consumers' Consultative Committee is required to deliver an opinion on the Commission's draft consumer protection programme and to express its views on any other measures proposed by the Commission. It can also submit suggestions to the Commission so that each knows the other's opinion and any differences can be resolved.

The committee held its constituent meeting in Brussels on 19 November 1973. It is composed of fifteen experts appointed by the consumer associations and ten named by the Commission, making a total of twenty-five members.

The Commission also set up a committee of national experts, which met at the beginning of November for the first time and held its second meeting on 20 November 1973. It largely focuses its attention on three wide-ranging subjects: consumer protection, consumer information and adequate consumer representation.

8. Section IV of the proposal deals with the implementation of the action programme, objectives and methods being allocated in Section V to each of the abovementioned areas of a Community consumer policy. The proposed implementing measures are welcomed by the Committee on Public Health and the Environment. However, the Commission should be aware of

the difficulty it will encounter in getting the programme approved by the Council of Ministers. It may be sure of the European Parliament's full support in this respect.

9. In Section VI of its programme the Commission rightly points to the need for close cooperation with other institutions. It feels that collaboration between the institutions of the Community and other international organizations at European or world level should make it possible to avoid duplication. In addition, the Commission will benefit in this way from work already done by other organizations in this field. Efforts by the Commission in this are also supported by the committee.

10. After examining this preliminary Community programme for consumer protection, the committee feels bound, however, to make a number of criticisms. Although the Commission feels that the objectives and priorities of the first phase of the programme, which is to be implemented in the next three years, have been set in such a way that they can actually be achieved and serve as a firm basis for the remaining phases, the committee is very sceptical as to the likelihood of this in fact being the case. When it is remembered what difficulties the Commission has hitherto encountered in finding a common denominator for standards on individual products, particularly in the sphere of foodstuffs law, the present programme, the first phase of which is to be implemented in three years, can only be described as extremely ambitious.

11. In the committee's opinion, the Commission and Council should initially concentrate their efforts on coordinating and harmonizing existing laws and regulations in the Member States where they concern consumer protection in the broadest sense of the term. In this harmonization the Commission and Council should not, however, content themselves with an agreement on the lowest common denominator, as has unfortunately been the case in the past. It will in fact be of decisive importance for the Council to be guided by the most progressive sections of Member States' legislation and to adapt Community provisions so that the consumer is afforded optimum protection. The Commission must bear this goal in mind at all times and shape its proposals accordingly from the outset.

12. In addition, the committee considers it a matter of urgency for rapid progress to be made in reforming foodstuffs law and establishing a ruling on the marking of textile goods (particularly with regard to their care) at Community level. Here again harmonization must be effected at a level that meets the consumer's most stringent requirements. The committee is convinced that the consumer's interests must be given priority over all other factors. It will therefore support without reservation any action taken by the Commission in this direction

13. The same will apply to the Commission's efforts to create a Community ruling on informative advertising and to abolish confusing or even deceptive advertising. The consumer has a right to be provided in a clear form with all the information on a product that might interest him.

Finally, the committee attached great importance to the comparative testing of products, which can constitute an effective contribution to market transparency. It therefore calls on the Commission to take the initiative by establishing such tests or at least to provide effective support.

14. In conclusion, the committee wishes to point out to the Council and Commission that they would be well advised not to restrict themselves to declarations of intent in connection with consumer protection measures, but at last to follow up these well-meaning declarations, some of which have been repeated many times over the years, with deeds.

The committee will pay close attention to the Community's future activities in the sphere of consumer protection and reserves the right to report on the subject in due course.

#### Conclusions

15. The Committee on Public Health and the Environment
1. Welcomes the preliminary programme for consumer information and protection as a first step towards a coordinated and transparent consumer policy at Community level;
  2. Notes with regret that measures taken by the Commission in the past to achieve harmonization in the sphere of consumer protection, and in particular in the field of foodstuffs law, have met with considerable difficulty and therefore feels that the present, extremely ambitious programme can be implemented within the planned time-limit only if the Council and Commission place their activities in this field on a completely new basis;
  3. Calls on the Commission and Council to concentrate their efforts initially on harmonizing Member States' existing laws and regulations on consumer protection and to be guided in this by the most progressive legislation in each case.

4. Regards it in addition as a matter of urgency for rapid progress to be made at Community level towards reforming foodstuffs law, ruling on the marking of textile goods (particularly with regard to their care), making informative advertising compulsory and introducing comparative product testing;
5. Insists on the Commission and Council taking account in future measures to harmonize consumer policy of the fact that the interests of the consumer and therefore of the general public must be given preference over all other interests of certain groups in our social order;
6. Requests the Commission and Council not to content themselves with well-meaning declarations of intent on the need for effective consumer protection, but to take the action described in these declarations;
7. Reserves the right to keep a close watch on the Community's future activities in the field of consumer protection and to report to the European Parliament accordingly.

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