



# Health & Consumer Voice

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## G7: Health security worldwide

On 5 December Health Commissioner Androulla Vassiliou hosted the 9th Ministerial Meeting of the Global Health Security Initiative (GHSI), gathering health ministers from G7 countries (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, UK, US), Mexico and the World Health Organisation.

The GHSI is an international partnership among like-minded countries to strengthen health preparedness and response globally to health security threats of biological, chemical, radio-nuclear terrorism (CBRN) and pandemic influenza. This year's GHSI ministerial meeting focused on three key areas: research and development of drugs and vaccines against health threats, border measures such as border closures and virus sample sharing for influenza pandemic preparedness, and thirdly, on crisis communication mechanisms among GHSI members.

The GHSI was first established in 2001 as a response to September 11th terrorist events and the subsequent release of anthrax letters in the US. Global health security covers a wide range of issues such as generic preparedness and response to encounter public health crises, pandemic influenza as well as threats caused by chemical, radio-nuclear and bio-terrorism agents (by accidental or deliberate release).

Health security is an increasingly important issue on both the European security and health agendas. To develop European policies on health security, the Health Security Committee was set up in 2001 and its mandate



was renewed by the Council in 2007. It has a multi-annual work plan and links closely with Member State authorities in improving preparedness and developing concrete actions to address health security threats.

The European Commission and the EU Member States have an extensive programme of work in the area of health security, steered by the Health Security Committee, which is a forum for the senior officials from the Member States and the European Commission to examine health security related matters and develop stronger collaboration at the European level. The Commission acts as a liaison between the GHSI and the Health Security Committee to ensure that coherence of the work carried out in these bodies.

Each year in the preparation for the ministerial level debates, the GHSI collaboration brings together experts and senior officials from the G7 countries and Mexico and officials from the European Commission.

A "communiqué" setting out the achievements of the GHSI to date and defining future areas of joint work to promote collective health security was agreed at the end of the meeting.

For the conclusions of the ministerial meeting, please view:

[http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph\\_threats/com/preparedness/docs/GHSI2008\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_threats/com/preparedness/docs/GHSI2008_en.pdf)



## In brief



### 2008, a good year for Global tobacco control

The Commission confirms that tobacco control measures are gaining ground in 2008. The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) is rapidly gaining importance as a global law and policy making body on the best ways curb tobacco use. In 2008 the total number of Parties that ratified the FCTC reached 161. The EU Member States together with the European Commission are active partners in this process.

In February 2008 negotiations started on the protocol to combat illicit tobacco trade. The negotiating body is chaired by Ian Walton from the anti-fraud department (OLAF) of the European Commission.

The third Conference of the FCTC Parties was held in Durban, South Africa in November 2008. The EU spoke with a strong single voice and guidelines were adopted on several important issues, such as tobacco packaging and labelling and all forms of tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship.

The EU Tobacco Advertising Directive that came into effect in July 2005 banned tobacco sponsorship of cross-border events such as Formula One. Thereafter some EU Member States still kept exemptions for big sports events. However, they rapidly changed their laws after rigorous enforcement action by the Commission.

Formula One tobacco sponsorship in the whole EU came to an end by 2006 but was still visible in certain Formula One races outside the EU and was brought back to Europe via television and other mass media. Both Health Commissioners, Markos Kyprianou and Androuilla Vassiliou, saw this as an issue of political importance and took steps to address this issue.

In 2008, the television spectators witnessed the first tobacco free Formula One season around the world. Tobacco logos were not shown on cars, team suits or around the track.

In 2009, the EU will continue to be a major player in global tobacco control.

For further information, please see:

[http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph\\_determinants/life\\_style/Tobacco/ban\\_tobacco\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/Tobacco/ban_tobacco_en.htm)

## Online tickets under pressure

On the eve of a meeting of 27 national enforcement agencies and stakeholder groups in Brussels, Vice President Tajani, EU Transport Commissioner and EU Consumer Commissioner Meglena Kuneva have stepped up pressure on airline companies selling tickets on the web to meet their legal obligation to fully comply with all the requirements of EU law. In a joint letter to the airline representatives, the two Commissioners have set out a 30 point checklist of consumer rights which all web pages selling air tickets must respect. Following industry feedback, the checklist will be consolidated.

More than 700 million air tickets are sold every year in the European Union. These sales are highly digitalised but it is clear that the rights of consumers buying such tickets online are still not secure since the Commission continues to receive many complaints about air ticket selling websites. The preliminary work within the European Enforcement network has been intensified following the Airline Sweep investigation in September 2007 when 1 in 3 websites surveyed (137 out of 386 originally checked by the 13 reporting countries) had to be followed up with enforcement action, and the progress report on enforcement in May 2008, when 50% of sites had been corrected.



The Commission has been monitoring developments in the airline sector since then and will produce a "wrap up" final report in May 2009 as well as an assessment of the need for any further action at that time including infringements procedures if necessary.

The work with industry is taking place in parallel with additional efforts by the Commission to increase enforcement controls at national level. Commissioner Kuneva addressed Ministers at the Competition Council on 1st December 2008 calling on them to concentrate all the necessary additional efforts and resources on the airline investigation to enable a final wrap up in May 2009.

Two major pieces of EU legislation improving air passengers' rights have come into force recently: the Directive on Unfair Commercial Practices and the Air Services Regulation. These two measures create a clear legal framework for business operators selling air tickets.

For further information please see:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/08/1857&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN>

## EU Open Health Forum in Brussels

The European Open Health Forum conference: "Developing and Implementing Health in the European Union" (10-11 December 2008) has been opened by Commissioner Vassiliou on 10 December 2008.

This conference aimed to contribute and increase the profile of health in the EU policies through discussion between EU policy makers and stakeholders on pressing public

health issues and their impacts on the Community. The EU Open Health Forum is a mechanism for the European Commission to get feedback from stakeholders on the implementation of the EU Health Policy and to identify the need for new policy initiatives at EU level.

For further information please view:

[http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph\\_overview/health\\_forum/open\\_2008/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_overview/health_forum/open_2008/index_en.htm)

## Saving lives: improving organ donation across Europe

On 8 December, the Commission adopted important safety and quality measures for organ donation and a 10 point action plan to work with Member States on strengthening organ donation and transplantation systems in Europe.

For many patients, organ transplantation represents the only life saving treatment available. There are currently 56,000 patients waiting for a suitable organ donor in the EU. It is estimated that every day 12 people die while waiting for transplantation. The Directive and Action Plan address three key challenges: improving the quality and safety of organs across Europe, increasing organ availability and making transplant systems more efficient and accessible.

The Directive provides a clear legal framework for organ donation and transplantation in the European Union. Concretely this means that in every Member State a national competent authority will be created



or designated to ensure compliance with EU quality and safety standards. These standards include establishing a traceability system of human organs and a reporting system of adverse events and reactions. To facilitate exchange of human organs, data collection on specific organ characteristics will be standardised. Finally, national quality programmes will ensure continuous monitoring of performance and result in improved processes and learning. The goal of this Directive is to minimise the risk for the organ transplant recipient, to improve and optimise the allocation of organs across the European Union and to provide the transplant surgeon with the necessary information to make the best choice.

The Directive and the Action Plan can be found at:

[http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph\\_threats/human\\_substance/organs\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_threats/human_substance/organs_en.htm)

## EU online consumer education programmes widen appeal

EU Consumer Commissioner Meglena Kuneva launched on 8 December in Sofia a new internet programme designed to help adults and children know more about their basic consumers rights. The EU online information consumer education programme DOLCETA sets out clearly, in three levels for basic to more advanced users, consumer rights on issues from sales contracts, to guarantees, to settling disputes and taking out a credit loan. Already existing in other EU languages, today this online consumer education tool is extended to Bulgaria and Romania.

The EU's online consumer education programmes are designed to help people of all ages learn more about their consumer rights. They are available in all EU languages and have been adapted by national teams/experts to take into account national legislation/culture.

There are four modules on line concerning: basic consumer rights; financial services; safety of products and services and a special module aimed at teachers with pedagogical materials.

To test your knowledge or find out more, please see:

<http://www.dolceta.eu>

## In brief



### Green Paper on Consumer Collective Redress

The Commission has been examining the problems that consumers face in obtaining effective redress. One problem which it has identified is that EU consumers who have small or scattered claims refrain from bringing an individual court action because the cost of bringing the action is likely to outweigh the amount of claimed damages.

Collective redress, both judicial and non-judicial, could be a means of addressing this problem.

On 27 November 2008 the Commission has adopted the Green Paper on Consumer Collective Redress. The Green Paper sets out 4 options. These include:

- No immediate action;
- Co-operation between Member States extending national collective redress systems to consumers from other Member States without a collective redress mechanism;
- A mix of policy instruments to strengthen consumer redress (including collective consumer alternative dispute mechanisms, a power for national enforcement authorities to request traders to compensate consumers and extending small claims to deal with mass claims);
- Binding or non binding measures for a collective redress judicial procedure to exist in all Member States.

In its Consumer Policy Strategy for 2007-2013 the Commission underlined the importance of effective mechanisms for seeking redress and announced that it would consider action on collective redress mechanisms for consumers.

One key priority for both the European Commission and Member States is to take action to improve access to justice by creating measures which simplify and help access to the courts, particularly in cross border cases.

For further information, please see:

[http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/redress\\_cons/collective\\_redress\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/redress_cons/collective_redress_en.htm)





# High level conference on Behavioural Economics in Brussels

On 28 November the EU Commissioner for Consumers, Meglena Kuneva, welcomed top international academics and policymakers, business representatives and consumer NGOs to a conference in Brussels, to discuss the role that Behavioural Economics can play in development of policies that better serve the consumer.

Behavioural Economics is a relatively new, but rapidly expanding discipline that combines economics and experimental research on behaviour in order to examine and explain why consumers choose to shop and buy the way that they do, what influences them in their purchasing decisions and how these affect the market.

The conference focused on examples of where behavioural economics has already led to better policies, both in the EU and elsewhere, and invited debate on its potential use and impact. Participants also debated important questions, for instance whether it is really the right or responsibility of policy makers to intervene in consumers' decisions.

The conference was well attended and the speakers' presentations stirred a lively debate. There was general agreement that the evidence, on a number of behavioural biases but also on the importance of

education and learning, is too strong to be ignored. Policymakers should make use of this evidence, as firms already do so. Across the board, the opinion was that policymakers need to intervene to ensure that there is competition on real preferences, rather than on biased preferences.

As to the future, it was suggested that substantial resources be directed towards collecting more field evidence, understanding the motives underlying firms' specific strategies, encouraging price/product comparison tools and carrying out market-specific research. If behavioural economics is properly incorporated in day-to-day policymaking, it could become the equivalent to what the "wind tunnel" is for cars: a tool to test, optimise and streamline EU policies seeking to influence consumers in a wide array of fields, from consumer affairs, to energy, to health, to environment.



For more information (presentations, videos and other material), please see:  
<http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/dyna/conference/index.cfm>

# A healthy start for EU children

The European Commission held a conference on the EU-wide School Fruit Scheme on 15-16 December 2008. During the two days, the Commission and around 300 stakeholders discussed the background and objectives of existing schemes as well as looking into the many issues connected with running school fruit schemes effectively.

On 19 November 2008, EU agriculture ministers reached a political

agreement on a Commission proposal for a European Union-wide scheme to provide fruit and vegetables to school children. The scheme will also require participating Member States to set up strategies and to share best practices. The scheme will begin at the start of the 2009/2010 school year.

For further information, please see:  
[http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/markets/fruitveg/sfs/events/conference/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/markets/fruitveg/sfs/events/conference/index_en.htm)

## In brief



### World AIDS Day 2008

Twenty-five years after HIV was first isolated by researchers, there is still no cure or vaccine against AIDS. It is estimated that today, more than 30 million people worldwide live with HIV/AIDS, and about 2 million people die every year. In Europe, more than 700,000 people are living with HIV/AIDS with 30,000 new infections reported annually.

The Commission is alarmed by the increasing number of young people, and people belonging to risk groups, who are being infected with HIV. A second EU strategy document to combat HIV/AIDS is currently being prepared, and will be adopted by the Commission in autumn 2009. A focus on prevention remains the central element of the Commission's policy.

HIV testing is a key to early diagnosis. Health Commissioner Vassiliou recently took part in a discussion organised by Members of European Parliament, where she agreed to support political cooperation to improve the situation. The goal: Increasing the number of patients who know their HIV status. In this respect, the Commission welcomes the resolution of the European Parliament on HIV testing adopted on 20 November 2008.

The European Commission is involved in the fight against AIDS at European and Global levels. A central element of the Commission's work is built around structures such as the HIV/AIDS Think Tank and The Civil Society Forum where Member States and European NGOs meet to discuss common aims, strategies and actions.

For more information please view:  
[http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph\\_threats/com/aids/aids\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_threats/com/aids/aids_en.htm)



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