

Consumer policy: Community action programme 2007-2013

2005/0042B(COD) - 23/03/2006 - Text adopted by Parliament, 1st reading/single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution drafted by Marianne **THYSSEN** (EPP-ED, BE) and amended the Commission's proposal. It should be recalled that the Commission had originally suggested a single action programme for health and consumer protection in hopes of achieving more synergies between the two areas. However, following the decision of the Parliament's Conference of Presidents, the integrated programme was separated into two parts in June 2005.

The principal amendments were as follows:

- a new recital states that implementation of the programme should take into account that the internal market will not function properly if consumers are less well protected in some Member States than in others. The programme should therefore put a special focus on strengthening consumer protection and consumer awareness in the new Member States in line with the European Parliament's resolution of 15 December 2005 on the promotion and protection of consumers' interests in the new Member States;
- if the Commission takes a decision to delegate powers in respect of the logistical and administrative aspects of the implementation of the programme, it should do so after a cost-benefit analysis which produces positive results and it should investigate whether it is not preferable to extend the powers of the 'Executive Agency for the Public Health Programme' rather than set up an additional executive agency. Parliament added a new operative clause stating that the overall administrative expenditure of the programme, including internal and management expenditure for any Executive Agency created or extended to administer the programme, should be proportionate to the tasks provided for under the programme and is subject to decision of the budgetary and legislative authorities;
- the aim of the programme is to complement and support the policies of the Member States "by means of added value actions;"
- the objectives of the consumer protection action programme include paying special attention to "the different needs of various age groups", ensuring that consumer protection regulation involved greater participation of consumer representatives, other civil society stakeholders and research bodies, ensuring that such regulation could be complied with by small businesses and craft industries, and providing for both judicial and extra-judicial means of redress;
- the indicative financial framework for the implementation of the programme for the 7-year period beginning on 1 January 2007 specified in Article 1 is EUR 233 460 000;
- the ceilings for Community financing for "actions in pursuit of the aims and objectives" of the programme should be decreased from 60% to 50%. However, Parliament introduced a new clause providing for a ceiling of 95% for "the functioning of European consumer organisations representing consumer interests in the development of standards for products and services at Community level". It also adopted an amendment defining the eligibility criteria for bodies and legal persons seeking to qualify for Community financing;
- Parliament added to the list of actions eligible for Community support, putting particular emphasis on strengthening consumer rights and awareness in the new member states, arguing the Internal Market could not function properly with some consumers having less protection than others. Another point was the need

to support older consumers and other vulnerable groups that could have difficulties defending their interests. Parliament also passed an amendment on the impact of consumer legislation on small businesses, which stresses the importance of supporting SMEs and craft industries in their efforts to implement EU legislation. Systematic impact studies should be carried out before adopting new legislation that could affect small businesses. Other actions include: setting up a permanent consumer information and observation system at EU level; establishing an inventory of existing legislation, regulations and practices in the Member States; establishing a general institutional and legal framework for cooperation between Member States; improving communication with EU citizens on consumer issues; and helping consumers to obtain access to legal aid and advice, mediation and other forms of alternative dispute resolution, including the Commission's SOLVIT system.