

# Procedure file

Basic information		
COS - Procedure on a strategy paper (historic)	<a href="#">1995/2285(COS)</a>	Procedure completed
Consumer policy: priorities 1996-1998		
Subject 4.60 Consumers' protection in general		

Key players			
European Parliament	Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
	<b>ENVI</b> Environment, Public Health and Consumer Protection		09/01/1996
		PSE <a href="#">WHITEHEAD Phillip</a>	
	Committee for opinion	Rapporteur for opinion	Appointed
	<b>ECON</b> Economic and Monetary Affairs, Industrial Policy	The committee decided not to give an opinion.	
	<b>JURI</b> Legal Affairs, Citizens' Rights		24/01/1996
		PPE <a href="#">AÑOVEROS TRIAS DE BES Julio</a>	
	<b>DEVE</b> Development and Cooperation		24/11/1995
		V <a href="#">TELKÄMPER Wilfried</a>	
Council of the European Union			

Key events			
31/10/1995	Non-legislative basic document published	COM(1995)0519	Summary
17/11/1995	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
09/10/1996	Vote in committee		Summary
09/10/1996	Committee report tabled for plenary	<a href="#">A4-0317/1996</a>	
19/02/1997	Debate in Parliament		
20/02/1997	Decision by Parliament	T4-0057/1997	Summary
20/02/1997	End of procedure in Parliament		
17/03/1997	Final act published in Official Journal		

Technical information	
Procedure reference	1995/2285(COS)

Procedure type	COS - Procedure on a strategy paper (historic)
Procedure subtype	Commission strategy paper
Legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 142
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	ENVI/4/07252

### Documentation gateway

Non-legislative basic document		COM(1995)0519	31/10/1995	EC	Summary
Committee of the Regions: opinion		<a href="#">CDR0221/1996</a> <a href="#">OJ C 337 11.11.1996, p. 0049</a>	12/06/1996	CofR	
Economic and Social Committee: opinion, report		<a href="#">CES0889/1996</a> <a href="#">OJ C 295 07.10.1996, p. 0064</a>	11/07/1996	ESC	Summary
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		<a href="#">A4-0317/1996</a> <a href="#">OJ C 347 18.11.1996, p. 0005</a>	09/10/1996	EP	
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T4-0057/1997 <a href="#">OJ C 085 17.03.1997, p. 0101-0133</a>	20/02/1997	EP	Summary

## Consumer policy: priorities 1996-1998

**OBJECTIVE:** to present the working priorities for the next three years in order to illustrate the direction being taken by consumer policy and the uses to which the limited resources available will be put. **CONTENT:** the Commission states in its new plan entitled "Priorities for consumer policy 1996-1998" that it intends to extend its range of work in order to improve consumer policy. In defining the priorities for action, it has therefore decided to: - address the areas of immediate interest to consumers, especially financial services, essential public utility services, foodstuffs and consumer education; - work for a really user-friendly information society and sustainable consumer patterns; - help the central and eastern European countries and developing countries to take advantage of the consumer policy. Top priority needs to be given to consumer information and education in order to give concrete expression to Europe in all its dimensions on a daily basis. This priority can only be implemented by closely involving consumer representatives, as they represent the cornerstone of a real awareness by the civil society of a consumer policy. The Commission will therefore step up its action to develop consumer associations at both national and European level.?

## Consumer policy: priorities 1996-1998

The Commission's sixth Action Plan confirms the considerable importance now attached to Community consumer policy and sets out new guidelines which the Economic and Social Committee fully endorses. As regards the legislative framework, the Committee wishes to see the shortcomings of Treaty Article 129a corrected and urges the Commission to make firm proposals on guarantees and after-sales services, the inclusion of non-processed agricultural products within the scope of Directive 85/374/EEC on product liability. It also asks the Commission to launch new initiatives in respect of service liability and to review the CAP from the consumer's standpoint. Solutions must be found to the exclusion of financial services from the Distance-Selling Directive and the inadequacy of consumer protection in the field of payment systems. With a view to improving the efficiency and reducing the costs of public services, the Committee suggests that the establishment of performance and reliability standards for non-liberalized services might help to increase consumer confidence. The Committee calls on the Commission to examine ways of ensuring the active participation of consumers in building the information society, since they are crucial to its success. Whilst regretting that consumer organizations are still denied the right to choose their representatives, the ESC hopes that the new Consumer Committee will be consulted on all aspects of consumer policy. ?

## Consumer policy: priorities 1996-1998

The priorities of European consumer policy can be more successfully attained by the EU than by Member States alone, the Consumer Protection Committee concluded today in a report it adopted on consumer priorities for the next three years. The report by Mr Phillip WHITEHEAD on a Commission communication on priorities for consumer policy for the years 1996 to 1998 is stressing that subsidiarity must not be abused to prevent action in the interests of Europe's consumers. Produced under the consultation procedure, the report is calling on the Commission in future to pay greater attention to whether Member States transposed European directives promptly into their national legislation. "This is the only way of guaranteeing that consumers enjoy a minimum of protection and can also insist on such protection throughout the Union," it states. Urging the Commission to bring forward a detailed action plan as soon as possible, the report criticized the communication on the grounds that it lacked a timetable and concrete proposals to take consumer policy forward. The report is also calling for new European legislation on food labelling to provide the consumer with "complete information", including health risks. It noted, in this connection, that the number of people with allergies was increasing and that very few consumers understood the system of E codes. Turning to Europe's relations with developing countries, the report wants greater control on dangerous European products marketed in developing

countries. The aim is, gradually, to impose the same safety, health and environmental standards as applies to products marketed in the European Union: double standards should be ended and fair trade promoted. ?

## Consumer policy: priorities 1996-1998

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Parliament adopted the report by Mr Phillip WHITEHEAD (PSE, UK) on the communication from the Commission on priorities for consumer policy (1996-1998). Parliament urged the Commission to bring forward a detailed Action Plan setting out proposals upon which it intended to act and a timetable for their completion. It stressed that the subsidiarity principle should not provide an excuse for not strengthening consumer protection. Parliament hoped firstly for the completion of activities started during the previous period, calling on the Commission to monitor the transposition of directives into national law by the Member States and to submit a new proposal for a directive on service liability. With regard to new priorities the Commission was called on to focus on action in the following areas: 1. Facilitating access by consumers to justice. Parliament called for legislative actions to secure the mutual recognition of conditions for receiving legal aid, to enable consumer organisations to bring class actions and to establish the right to sue for infringements of Community law. 2. Representing consumers' financial interests. The Commission was called on a) to come forward with legislation that rendered mandatory the 1988 recommendation on payment systems, regulated the sales of financial services at a distance and established a single mathematical formula for calculating annual percentage rate across the Union; b) to follow up the Green Paper on mortgage credit; c) to consider the possibility of harmonizing legal procedures for the recovery of late payments. 3. Converting consumer information into consumer power. Parliament called on the Commission a) to develop the network of cross-border information centres providing free advice to consumers; b) to take measures to improve the systematic integration of consumer representatives into decision-making structures; c) to propose a product safety network to coordinate action in this field. 4. Promoting a sustainable food policy. Parliament called on the Commission to support the establishment of an independent food safety agency at European level. It also pointed out that it was essential to implement as soon as possible the new European legislation on labelling of foodstuffs. Consumers should be guaranteed full information including the clear indication of possible health risks. With regard to European products which are considered unsafe and are marketed in developing countries, the report advocated a strengthening of controls so that gradually these products become subject to the same health, safety and environmental standards as apply to those sold on the territory of the European Union. Double standards should be eliminated and fair-trade relations should be promoted. ?