



INFO-C

Information from the Consumer Policy Service of the European Commission - Vol. IV, No 2, 1994

Spring

Spring is in the air, new growth is beginning and renewal is in sight.

Renewal is also the key word for the first half of 1994.

The proposal for a directive on 'time share' is currently the first to be subjected to the new post-Maastricht procedure of co-decision by the European Parliament; the next Council meeting is set for mid-May; and a new Parliament will be elected in June. Mr Ken COLLINS, the Chairman of the committee in the European Parliament specialising in consumer affairs, opens the election campaign by taking stock of what has been achieved in the current Parliament.

In the meantime, consumer policy progresses steadily: in this issue we cover recent decisions on renewal of the Consumers' Consultative Council, the establishment of a new structure, the Forum, and the re-launch of an important element of consumer safety - EHLASS.

Furthermore, as also mentioned in this issue, **INFO-C** is now entering the 21st century: the embryo of an electronic version has been launched via the European Parliament videotext system 'OVIDE'. We are extremely curious to see what results this may bring. For a bulletin with a print run of 5000 copies, which lives in order to achieve the multiplication and distribution of its content, the perspective of being able to reach large and completely new segments of the public is absolutely thrilling. We take the fact that this initiative came about at the request of the OVIDE service of the Parliament as a pat on the back for **INFO-C**.

INFO-C

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OF SPECIAL INTEREST

The Greek Presidency	2
European Consumer Information Centres	4
European Consumer Forum	5
Reform of the Consumers' Consultative Council	5
Legal Codification	6
News from Member States	11
Publications & Audiovisuals	13
Diary	15

THE GREEK PRESIDENCY AND THE EUROPEAN CONSUMER

In an earlier issue of **INFO-C** (8/93) we began publishing the priorities accorded by each Presidency of the Council of Ministers of the European Union to consumer policy. Now we publish the text of the Greek Presidency, which runs from 1 January 1994 to 30 June 1994. In Greece it is the Minister of Trade, Mr Constantinos Simitis, who is in charge of consumer affairs. Here is the Hellenic Republic's viewpoint on consumer protection.

The Greek Presidency believes that consumer protection policy is crucial for the development of a single European market. The strengthening of Community legislation in the form of a special article referring to consumer protection, the publication of the two Green Papers on consumer access to justice and on guarantees for consumer goods and after-sales services, as well as the existence of a second Commission three-year action programme in this domain, confirm the European Union's sensitivity in this area and justify the policy of the former Greek Presidency, which established the institution of the Consumer Affairs Council.

The Presidency considers that continuing technological developments and changes in the marketing and distribution of old and new products and services call for ongoing activity on the part of the European Union and the Member States with a view to ensuring optimal functioning of the market and the best possible consumer information and protection.

The Presidency's work programme comprises the following priorities:

1. Consumer protection in respect of contracts concluded at a distance

The objective is to strike a satisfactory balance between consumer protection and the need to avoid creating excessive counter-incentives to new and original techniques of marketing products and services and products, which in many respects can of course benefit the consumer.

2. Protection of the European consumer in the framework of the single market, comprising in particular:

- a) consumer access to justice and the settlement of consumer disputes in the single market;

- b) guarantees for consumer goods and after-sales services.

3. Comparative advertising

Comparative advertising is yet another issue which is particularly important in the context of the single market, where proper consumer information is of decisive importance and where national practices differ considerably.

4. Continuation of the Community system of information on home and leisure accidents (EHLASS)

Until now it was not possible to establish a permanent structure, financing being assured only until the end of 1993. Hence it is important to eliminate all the uncertainties which surround this system, whose usefulness is recognised by most of the Member States.

To these points, which are included on the Council agenda for 16 May, we wish to add the final adoption of the proposal for a Directive on the right to utilize immoveable property on a time-share basis, in respect of which the Council has already adopted a common position.

Likewise we will propose a Council Resolution urging the Commission to promote concrete actions to strengthen consumer protection in respect of the provision of services.

One highlight of the Greek Presidency is the Consumer Congress, which is being organised by the Ministry of Trade on 17 and 18 March 1994 in Athens. Mrs Scrivener, Commissioner responsible for consumer affairs, has been invited to attend, along with the ministers of the Member States responsible for consumer affairs and representatives of consumer organisations in the European Union.

This Congress will appraise the Common Policy on consumer protection and launch a fruitful discussion on how to exploit the opportunities offered in this domain through implementation of the Maastricht Treaty.

INFO-C ON OVIDE

Excerpts from **INFO-C** are now accessible on OVIDE on a trial basis.

OVIDE, **O**rganisation du **V**ideotex du **D**éputé **E**uropéen, is an informatics system offering MEPs a wide range of services, from a 'Who's Who' and electronic phonebook to an 'observatoire' of European legislation and Euro-pean Parliament procedures.

One of the sections, entitled 'Europe in the Making' (*L'Europe en devenir*), includes information and statistics on a number of issues. A selection of shorter notes and articles from **INFO-C** has now been included as a test.

MEPs and their staff have direct access to OVIDE. For the general public, OVIDE is presently available only via the French videotext system Minitel (3615/3616 CEE), but the Dutch and German systems will shortly be connected. However, Minitel

is accessible via most national videotext systems, and although the Minitel version is in French, OVIDE information in English, German and Italian can be extracted (by typing *LANG plus confirmation).

The Editorial staff of **INFO-C** is of course most interested to hear of the experiences of MEPs and others trying to access these notes and articles. If this trial run is successful, we intend to pursue this method of distributing **INFO-C** material.

For more information about OVIDE and opportunities for connecting:

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EUROPEAN CONSUMER INFORMATION CENTRES AT YOUR SERVICE - CONTINUATION

The previous issue of **INFO-C** (No 1/1994) introduced the rubric 'European consumer information centres at your service', primarily to survey information centres which are already operating. Here we publish the text provided by the Luxembourg Euroguichet.

The Euroguichet-Consommateur de Luxembourg is one of the oldest European crossborder consumer information centres. It is active mainly in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, the frontier regions of Trier and Saarbruecken in Germany, Arlon-Bastogne and Saint-Vith-Vielsam in Belgium, and Metz-Thionville in France.

As part of the Union Luxembourgeoise des Consommateurs (ULC), the Euroguichet is one of the few information centres operating within a consumer association and, hence, it has put the focus on defence of the individual consumer.

The Euroguichet has inherited the ULC's tradition, which is to encourage direct contact with the consumer. Apart from practical advice, it provides the consumer with a system of technical and legal aid.

Technical aid consists in giving the consumer access to expert opinions in such domains as taxation, financial services and construction. Legal aid is organised around two services. The Euroguichet provides consumers with a complaints service. This service helps consumers in problems with suppliers and the idea is to settle the dispute amicably. If this fails, the dossier is sent to a lawyer chosen by the consumer or to one of the lawyers in the ULC's network. Moreover, quite apart from disputes, the

consumer may consult these lawyers on individual problems free of charge.

In order to fulfil its task effectively the Euroguichet has established partnership with consumer organisations in neighbouring countries - in France with the *Confédération Syndicale du Cadre de Vie de Talange* and in Belgium with *Test-Achats*. This partnership consists of pooling information and gives each partner the opportunity to transmit to the others files on disputes for handling.

From the beginning the Euroguichet's activities have expanded steadily. In 1992-93 there were 7 803 telephone calls, 1 036 letters, 626 consumer visits and 525 dispute dossiers. The number of disputes handled went up by 25% by comparison with the preceding year. Given the shopping patterns of the Luxembourg consumers, this increase cannot be the direct consequence of the opening of frontiers on 1 January 1993. Rather, it seems that through its role as mediator the Euroguichet has filled a gap which existed in the domain of crossborder consumer disputes. Of the 525 dossiers mentioned, something less than 5% led to legal proceedings.

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ERRATA

In the preceding issue of **INFO-C** (01/94), we published a text from the Courtrai agency in Belgium (EUROCONSUMENT) presenting its activities.

EUROCONSUMENT wishes to point out some errors in the text:

- the good contacts with other associations do not concern the '*Ligue des Familles*' situated in the French-speaking region but the '*Bond van Grote en van Jonge Gezinnen v.z.w*' located in the Dutch-speaking region of the country;
- the study took place on 7 December 1993 as mentioned in the French version of **INFO-C** but not on 7 September 1993 as mentioned in the English and German versions of **INFO-C**.

The editors wish to thank in advance all those who draw attention to errors in our publication.

EUROPEAN CONSUMER FORUM

A forum at which representatives of consumers and the productive sector will come together once or twice a year is to be launched at the initiative of Mrs Christiane Scrivener - European Commissioner responsible for consumer affairs - in September 1994.

The purpose of the forum is to pave the way to wider and more flexible consultation on the big consumer issues, with the participation of the parties concerned.

The agenda of the first meeting will include consumer access to justice and guarantees and after-sales services.

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REFORM OF THE CONSUMERS' CONSULTATIVE COUNCIL

On 8 February 1994 the Commission adopted a decision to reform the Consumers' Consultative Council (CCC). The CCC, which contains representatives of national and Europe-wide consumer organizations as well as experts, is the official body consulted by the Commission on all consumer policy matters.

The main changes in the CCC, which was set up on 1 January 1990, are as follows:

- number of members increased from 39 to 45;
- BEUC (European Office of Consumer Unions) to have twice as many seats (eight) as the other three European organizations - ETUC (European Trade Union Confederation), Eurocoop (European Community of Consumer Cooperatives), COFACE (Committee of Family Organizations in the European Communities): four seats each;
- the IEIC (European Interregional Institute for Consumer Affairs) to be included for the first time as a regional consumer institute with two seats (previously they had one seat as an expert);

- a clause reviewing the CCC's composition after three years in the light of experience;
- some technical changes to terms of office and voting rules.

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EHLASS PROGRAMME:

Information on home accidents

On 8 February 1994 the Commission, at the initiative of Mrs Scrivener, decided to present a proposal for a Council Decision establishing a Community information system on home and leisure accidents (new EHLASS programme for 1994 to 1997).

In Mrs Scrivener's words, this is an "essential aspect of Community action in the interests of consumer safety. Home accidents are a real scourge in the Community, causing more victims than road accidents and mainly affecting children and elderly people".

After a pilot phase, the EHLASS project had already been proposed in 1993. However, the Council adopted it only for a one-year period, while inviting the Commission to propose a continuation of the system for the years to come.

EHLASS involves establishing databases based on information on the nature and origin of home accidents obtained from emergency services in hospitals and through household surveys. By analysing this information the Member States and the Commission can take measures designed to reduce the number of accidents and victims. These measures consist of information campaigns, negotiations with industry and the preparation of technical standards or rules.

For example, EHLASS has made it possible to pinpoint the causes of accidents caused by certain toys and childcare articles, play areas, paragliding, physical train-

ing equipment, aqua parks and swimming pool covers, fireworks, poisoning, falls, in particular those involving ladders, electrical garden and DIY equipment, and electrical kitchen appliances.

The measures undertaken on the basis of these results have already led to a measurable reduction in accidents in several Member States.

The new EHLASS decision is being proposed for a four-year period (1994-1997). The Member States will ensure the functioning of the system, which will benefit from substantial but degressive Community financial support (80% Community financing in 1994, 50% in 1997).

'The Commission is determined to continue its endeavours to reduce home accidents and to encourage consumer safety. The EHLASS system is the linchpin of this operation and should enable the Community and the Member States, thanks to the information gathered, to adopt the most effective measures to reduce the number of victims of such accidents', Mrs Scrivener has said.

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LEGAL CODIFICATION

Following the European Council at Edinburgh and in order to improve the clarity and transparency of instruments and make Community law more accessible and comprehensible to the citizen, it has been decided to codify a certain number of instruments which have been amended on numerous occasions, by collecting the scattered provisions in a single document.

On this basis, on 24 and 25 January 1994, the Commission approved the following codified texts:

- Council Directive 71/307/EEC (and successive amendments) on the approximation of the laws of the Member States relating to textile names;

- Council Directive 72/276/EEC (and its amendments) on the approximation of the laws on Member States relating to certain methods for the quantitative analysis of binary textile fibre mixtures.

These two proposals for directives (COM(93) 721 final and COM(93) 713 final) are about to be transmitted to the European Parliament and the Council, in line with the new Article 189b procedure (codecision).

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CONSUMER POLICY IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

The elections for the European Parliament are approaching. The editorial staff of **INFO-C** have asked Ken Collins Chairman of the European Parliament's Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Protection, to give a brief overview of the results achieved in the current legislative period.

European consumer policy has been a growth area for the European Parliament since the last elections in 1989. Recognising the importance of this policy area, the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Protection has actively collaborated with the Commission to ensure that the internal market is matched by a parallel development in the protection of consumers.

The clearest example of Parliament's influence is to be found in food law. Highly complex and controversial, food law is also a very emotive subject. There are over 100 000 technical provisions relating to food additives in the European Union, and out of this chaos the European Parliament, together with the other European Union institutions, has a responsibility to European citizens to ensure that adequate guarantees are in place to protect public health.

We have not focussed exclusively on food however. From helping to safeguard the consumer from timeshare sharks, to protecting hotel guests from fire hazards, we have always been active in consumer protection measures. Furthermore, our contributions to legislation on food labelling and misleading advertising have helped to ensure that the consumer is able to make informed choices.

The Treaty on European Union provides enormous opportunities for Europe's citizens, through their elected representatives, to voice their opinions on EU consumer legislation and to shape its future development.

Consumers are vital to the successful functioning of the internal market. An unfettered free market with little or no regulation can never hope to provide sufficient guarantees for consumers throughout Europe. In the next Parliament we will continue to ensure that we highlight clarity, consistency and maximum access to information as the three essential components of European consumer policy.

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SEMINAR ON GENERAL PRODUCT SAFETY

On 24 and 25 February 1994, the Consumer Law Centre at Louvain-la-Neuve organised, with the support of the EC's Consumer Policy Service, a seminar entitled 'For a harmonised implementation of Directive 92/59/EEC on general product safety'.

Professors of consumer law from different European universities and - on an informal and personal basis - officials responsible for implementing and monitoring application of the Directive in the different Member States, participated actively in this seminar.

Various notions contained in the Directive were discussed in depth.

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THE BEUC IS AGAINST THE EU'S MOTOR VEHICLE DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM

The European Office of Consumer Unions (BEUC) organised a press conference in Brussels on 26 January 1994 on motor vehicle distribution in the European Union and in particular on Regulation (EC) No 123/85¹.

Below we reproduce the BEUC's position².

INTRODUCTION

For numerous years the European car industry has enjoyed exemption to the competition rules according to which exclusive and selective motor vehicle distribution is authorised in the Member States of the European Union. This system, enshrined by Regulation No 123/85, allows motor vehicle manufacturers to organise their distribution in such a way as to restrict the sale of new vehicles in the European Union to their own selected distributors. It will remain in force until 30 June 1995.

In 1993 the European Commission invited all interested parties to submit their comments and opinions on the abovementioned Regulation, in particular as to whether it should be renewed, amended or withdrawn. A report setting out the Commission's viewpoint on this issue is expected at the beginning of 1994. Hearings with the interested parties - consumers, distributors, manufacturers, - will follow, enabling these parties to present their viewpoints on the future of motor vehicle distribution.

1 Commission Regulation (EEC) No 123/85 of 12 December 1984 on the application of Article 85(3) of the Treaty to certain categories of motor vehicle distribution and servicing agreements, OJ No L 15 of 18 January 1985, p. 16.

2 This position does not bind the European Commission.

Consequently, this document covers the main aspects of the motor vehicle sector which interest European consumers, and represents the BEUC's formal reply on this fundamental issue.

POSITION OF THE BEUC

The BEUC believes that the European Commission should abolish the system according to which motor vehicle manufacturers are protected from competition rules in the EU. Speaking on behalf of consumers at consultations organised by the Commission with interested parties on the future of motor vehicle distribution in Europe, Jim Murray, Director of the BEUC, explained that 'all restrictions on competition should be limited to what is strictly necessary, on the economic and legal level, in order to ensure the appropriate benefits'.

The BEUC acknowledges that repair work and servicing in garages must be assured by competent and duly trained technicians (this is the notion of 'selectivity'), but maintains that nothing justifies authorising manufacturers to limit the number of points of sale on a geographical basis, or to oblige them to stock only a single brand (notion of 'exclusiveness'). 'Why should one refuse a person who wants to buy a new car the opportunity to compare several brands at the same point of sale', asks Jim Murray. Here is the kind of consumer-friendly distribution system we would like to see established after 1995.

CONSUMER INTEREST IN THE EUROPEAN MOTOR VEHICLE MARKET

Consumer interest in an open market is particularly strong, given the high cost of cars. In terms of price, purchasing a car is often a household's biggest investment after accommodation. Widescale drops in income have led to a significant reduction in the number of new cars registered, given that in the short term consumer demand largely depends on personal income.

Consumer interests are directly linked to competition and integration. The more competitive and integrated the market, the greater the benefit for the consumer - in terms of choice and price. Moreover, given the major role of this sector in Europe, the entire economy would benefit from integration, notably in terms of improved efficiency and economies of scale. On the other hand consumers' interest in the motor vehicle market is not confined to the cars themselves, but includes the competitive environment in which spare parts

are made available. In particular, consumers are interested in:

- inter-brand competition;
- intra-brand competition;
- price competition (including rebates);
- the speed with which new models are introduced and the rhythm of innovation;
- (non-artificial) differentiation of products;
- access of new competitors to the market;
- market transparency;
- availability (in terms of time and space), price, and quality of spare parts;
- an effective and comprehensive distribution system;
- quality of the guarantee and servicing.

Consumers are also concerned about the safety and environmental aspects of the motor vehicle industry. Any assessment of the alleged costs and benefits of the existing system must hence duly take all these parameters into consideration.

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NETWORKING FOR THE CONSUMER³

The International Marketing Supervision Network was formed just over a year ago by the consumer protection agencies of 20 countries. Ian Edwards, former head of the (UK) Office of Fair Trading's Consumer Affairs liaison section, describes its progress.

Improved communications and more liberal trading regimes mean suppliers can increasingly offer consumer goods and services without establishing local business premises. And they are selling to consumers who are becoming more likely to contemplate a cross-border pur-

³ Article first published in 'Fair Trading' No 5, December 1993 (Quarterly publication of the Office of Fair Trading, UK).

chase. Indeed, in the European Union and EFTA countries (the European Economic Area), they are being actively encouraged to broaden their spending horizons by shopping in a single market.

Within the European Union, uniform regulations have already been adopted to prevent malpractices in a number of areas - for instance, package travel, advertising, product liability and safety, and unfair contract terms. Other areas are under discussion - guarantees, redress mechanisms and time-share for example.

But even within the European Economic Area there are variations in how Member States have transposed this European legislation into their own domestic law, and enforcement procedures vary widely from country to country - and cross-border consumer transactions are not limited to these countries. Consumers in the UK, for example, also make purchases direct from the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere.

Their laws and enforcement procedures also need to be taken into account in any initiative on cooperation between enforcement agencies.

Where does this leave the consumer who wishes to purchase from abroad? Which law will apply to the purchase, what happens if something goes wrong, how can redress be gained? What regulatory action can be taken to put an end to malpractices?

In the absence of an agreed system for forwarding matters from one country to another, the enforcement authorities have in the past relied on goodwill and informal contact to keep check on cross-border malpractices. But this, it was increasingly felt, was no longer enough. At a conference in Copenhagen in 1991 the idea of an informal network was mooted and in October last year representatives from 20 countries met in London, along with observers from the European Commission and OECD, to establish a network and agree how it would operate. The UK (OFT) was elected chairman at this first meeting, and France as chairman-elect. A memorandum was agreed, setting out the Network's aims:

- to establish an up-to-date list of contacts in each participating country;
- to maintain regular contacts and exchanges of views;

- to exchange information to enable participating organizations to build up a picture of each other's methods and legal and administrative arrangements; and
- to cooperate at an operating level in preventing malpractices as they arise. Cooperation is on an informal basis. Participants agreed to use their best endeavours to help each other, subject to national law and practice and availability of resources.

Notifications and requests for help are routed direct from country to country. Where the matter falls to another organization in the receiving country to consider, the recipient member is responsible for liaising internally and reporting back to the notifying country.

In the first year, around 100 bilateral and multilateral case contacts were made, a number of bulletins circulated, and a conference on credit regulation held in London in June. All these contributed to a successful start.

But progress has been gentle and gradual. If it is to succeed, the Network needs to develop in the light of the major regulatory problems which are identified, and must take account of members' ability to devote resources to cross-border regulatory action. Too much prescription on the way forwards or over-precise reporting and liaison requirements early on would almost certainly have been counter-productive.

If year one needed to be an easy-paced experiment, the first annual meeting held in Paris in September suggested that future progress is likely to be more tangible and undertaken at a faster pace. The nature of all contacts between members will be analyzed and problems identified.

The short-term aim, of developing the Network as a means of sharing expertise and information on matters of fair trading, will be specifically case- and enforcement-practice led. Even this early in its development, the Network has demonstrated that it has a unique and valuable enforcement cooperation role. The longer term must be more speculative, but experience of the long-standing cooperation between competition law enforcement bodies is instructive. There has been a clearly identifiable convergence in law and underlying economic analysis.

On the consumer protection side, national laws will no doubt continue to differ. But, as case exchanges de-

velop, experience may suggest that certain approaches to enforcement may be more effective than others.

Members should be able to learn from others what works well and, for example, the best ways to prevent traders from adding 'extras' to the bill as a matter of course, or to stop the publication of advertisements that suggest more than will actually be delivered.

There are a number of long-term possibilities. One advance which, it is hoped, will definitely come about, is a general increase in the standards and consistency of enforcement.

It is of no value for a consumer to know that a firm will be punished for an offence in one country, simply be warned for the same offence in another, and be left to its own devices in a third. This, of course, is equally unacceptable for firms in different jurisdictions but which are competing in the same market.

For the consumer who wants to buy from abroad, the benefits could be significant. To know that the domestic enforcement authorities can and will call on the assistance of their counterparts abroad to try to prevent a malpractice, just as they will act directly against national firms which breach fair trading laws, should help to instil greater confidence when considering a purchase from a third country.

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BELGIUM

Sport and Leisure Campaign

'Sports and games' is the title of an awareness campaign designed to prevent sport and leisure accidents among five to nine-year-old children in schools in the French-speaking community of Belgium, launched by the Centre Coopératif de la Consommation. The Centre hopes that this will help reduce the number of home accidents, now running at 110 000 annually in Belgium. The approach comprises four teaching aids - an illustrated album, a teacher's guide, a poster and an information folder. The objective is to make children more aware of the risks and to behave more carefully.

This is why all Belgian schools will be contacted. Moreover, the album '*Raymond le Champion*' (BF 475) will be on sale in bookshops, while the information folder may be obtained in exchange for a 16 franc stamp.

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SPAIN

The '*Confederacion Estatal de Consumidores y Usuarios*' - CECU - (National Confederation of Users and Consumers in Spain) has sent **INFO-C** a contribution for this section. It sets out the CECU's viewpoint on consumer protection in Spain since the adoption of the 1984 Act.

Below we reproduce the text sent to us:

The novelty in our legal order of the General Consumers and User Protection Act (Act 26 of 19 July 1984) should not make us forget that such a legal instrument is merely a beginning, one aspect of the endeavour to bridge a number of legal gaps and to bring the law into line with a changed environment.

With the entry into force of this Act, Spain has officially recognised consumer law as part of its legal order, with the focus on conflicts arising in the economic relations between buyers and suppliers of goods and services, from the perspective of defending the interests of the weaker party in this relation, namely the consumer.

Nonetheless, and although a lot has been achieved over the past nine years, much remains to be done in a number of areas. Just as one speaks of a Europe of several speeds one might also say that consumer law is developing at an uneven pace.

These delays constitute genuine statutory gaps or legal anachronisms which distort the constitutional purpose.

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DENMARK

'GREEN INFORMATION'

Det Grønne Informationscenter (the Green Information Centre) is a Danish NGO founded by five major environmental organizations in November 1993. The main objective is to increase consumers' and citizens' knowledge of the environmental aspects to their daily life. The aim is to increase ordinary people's involvement in environmental activities and also involve them in efforts to change lifestyles and consumption patterns. *Det Grønne Informationscenter* runs a public information centre - *Grøn Information* (Green Information) - funded by the Danish Ministry of the Environment.

Grøn Information has established a data and resource base on consumption and environmental issues on which the centre's other information activities are based. A telephone line will be established in April 1994. *Grøn Information* produces a newsletter - *Miljøfakta* (Environmental Facts) and *Grønne Råd* (Green Advice) - with short and easily understood information and advice about relevant environmental issues such as 'green

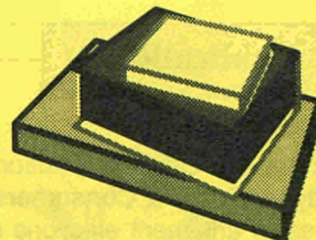
taxation', 'environmental labelling', 'laundry and the environment' and other consumer questions related to the environment. *Grøn Information* will run environmental campaigns focusing on major environmental problems such as 'packaging and wrapping', 'waste disposal' and 'do-it-yourself and the environment'. Furthermore the centre is in touch with, and supports, regional and local environmental centres and activities.

All activities - PR, information, education or support to local environmental activities - are targeted at ordinary people. The activities are based on the idea that every individual can do something to help solve large and small environmental problems. Their motto is '**It Makes a Difference to Help the Environment**'.

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PUBLICATIONS AND AUDIOVISUAL



- * "*Estudio sobre situaciones de desprotección de los consumidores en el ordenamiento jurídico español*" (Study on gaps in consumer protection in Spanish law) is a brochure published by the *Confederación Estatal de Consumidores y Usuarios (CECU)* in Spain. This study, published in September 1993, was based on collections of complaints from consumers filed with organisations working in this area. The objective is to diagnose the situation in Spain since the entry into force of a new law (General Consumer Protection Act No 26/1984) which, although it is a good starting-point for recognising consumer rights, is silent on many issues. The study discusses different subjects such as travel agencies, foodstuffs, cross-border shopping, contracts, as well as legal problems encountered by residents and tourists.

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* **Consumer guide to medicaments**

Taking medicine is a serious business that - sadly - is all too often taken for granted. Does the consumer lack tools for understanding and familiarizing himself with the mechanisms and effects of medication? Apparently, Yes.

It was time to do something and give the consumer an opportunity to participate more actively in his health management.

It was with this in mind that the Belgian Public Health Minister, Jacques Santkin, commissioned the *Centre coopératif de la consommation* (Belgium) to publish a series of information brochures. The first two brochures concern the use of medicaments during pregnancy and breast feeding. Other issues will follow - fatigue, cardiovascular disorders, sun and medicaments, digestive disorders, antibiotics, pain, tranquilisers, medicament synergy, sleep in children, etc.

The objective of the series is to encourage dialogue between doctors and patients, chemists and their clients, and not to take their place.

Each issue - depending on the life situation or disorder in question - reproduces the list of medicaments available on the market, which may be prescribed, indicated or counter-indicated. The brochures also contain particulars on these medicaments - active principle, counterindications, health effects - and frames containing general advice on how to stay healthy, or explanations of certain mechanisms of the human body.

The series kicks off with an introductory issue on the good use of medicaments, which discusses the historical aspects of medication and its place in modern society.

Further information from:

Centre coopératif de la consommation
rue Haute 28
B-1000 Bruxelles
Tel: +32/2/500.52.12
Fax: +32/2/514.54.43

- * In the context of preventive information for consumers on matters relating to crossborder operations, the *Centre d'Information et d'Accueil des Consommateurs (CIAC)* at Montpellier (France), has published two brochures on **purchasing real estate in Spain and on opening a bank account in Spain**. Each of these brochures is written in plain language and contains vital information (administrative and tax formalities, what to do in the event of a dispute, useful addresses), the objective being to provide information on practical matters and on the law governing the domain in question and hence to give people greater confidence when entering into contracts.

These brochures - which the CIAC has published in cooperation with the *Institut Català del Consum* (Spain) and with the support of the European Commission and the Languedoc-Roussillon Region (France) - can be had free of charge from the Centre Technique Régional de la Consommation or affiliated consumer associations (mailing cost of FF 4.40 in postage stamps for each brochure).

Further information from:

CTRC
18 rue Marceau, BP 2123
F-344026 Montpellier Cedex 1
Tel: +33/67.92.63.40
Fax: +33/67.92.64.67

- * The European Office of Consumer Unions (BEUC) recently published a **Consumers' Manifesto** for the European Parliament elections of June 1994. Convinced that the new European Parliament will be better placed than ever to influence the policy of the European Union in favour of consumers, thanks to the Treaty on European Union, the BEUC in this manifesto outlines the main issues on the consumer affairs agenda for the next five years. Specific measures are discussed under the following headings: single market, foodstuffs/health, safety, economic interests, publicity/marketing, agriculture/trade, competition, redress/access to justice, representation and integration.

This document is available in French, English and German.

Further information from:

BEUC

Avenue de Tervueren 36, bte 4

B-1040 Bruxelles

Tel: +32/2/735.31.10

Fax: +32/2/735.74.55

- * The Euroguichet-Consommateur (Luxembourg) has published the **proceedings of a colloquium on protection of the crossborder consumer**, which was held in Luxembourg on 8 October 1993. This event was organised with the support of the Luxembourg government and the European Commission.

The objective of the colloquium was to conduct an initial appraisal of the single market. Insofar as, since 1 January 1993, consumers, economic operators and authorities have had to deal with a new set of rules, it was important to highlight the problems from a global perspective, to evaluate the measures taken and to identify innovative areas of research and debate.

This evaluation took place in the context of the Sarre-Lor-Lux area (France, Germany and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg) which constitutes a genuine laboratory for testing crossborder behaviour and for drawing useful lessons for the European Union in its entirety.

Further information from:

Andrée COLOMER

Euroguichet-Consommateur

55 rue des Bruyères

L-1274 Howald

Tel: +352/40.63.08

Fax: +352/49.49.57

- * **'Borderless Trade' - Shopping in Denmark and Germany**

'Forbrugerrådet', the Danish Consumer Council, has produced three leaflets on aspects of cross-border trade in the Danish-German border region. The themes of the leaflets are:

- Rights: where are the differences (or traps) in the rights on either side of the border?
- Prices: which products does it pay to buy on which side of the border? (read 'how much cheaper are consumer products in Germany?')
- Drugs: differences in prescription rules, prices, etc.

The leaflets are published in the context of the activities of 'Eurocon', the European Consumer Information Centre in Flensburg established by the Consumer Council, and the 'Verbraucherzentrale' of Schleswig-Holstein. As indicated, the cross-border trade in this region is somewhat one-way: the Danes flock to Germany to get a wider variety of products at, generally, lower prices; the Germans go north to purchase products like furniture and hi-fi systems, associated with design and quality, rather than advantageous prices. Therefore the leaflets have been produced in Danish only; but summaries in German are available at the 'Eurocon' centre.

Contact:

'Eurocon'

Rathausstrasse 20

D-24937 Flensburg

Tel: +49/461.28.705

Fax: +49/461.27.578

- * The European Affairs Service of the French Senate has published a document entitled '*Les Horaires d'Ouverture des Magasins dans les Pays Européens*' (Opening Hours in European Countries). This study, in the form of comparative tables, covers all the Member States of the European Community as well as Sweden.

In almost all these countries the question of shop opening hours and, more particularly, Sunday opening, is the subject of heated debates.

Further information from:

Le Sénat

Service des Affaires Européennes

Division des Etudes de législation comparée

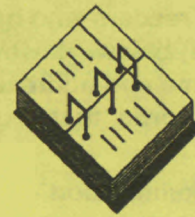
15 rue de Vaugirard

F-75291 Paris Cedex 06

Tel: +33/1/42.34.22.30

Fax: +33/1/42.34.38.40

D i a r y



28 April 1994

Colloquium on **New Belgian Travel Legislation**, organised by the '*Commission de Litiges Voyages*' (Travel Disputes Committee) following the transposition into Belgian law of the Directive of 13 June 1990 on package travel, package holidays and package tours. Four specialist rapporteurs will scrutinise the new provisions in the light of case law developed under earlier Belgian legislation.

These contributions will be followed by more detailed panel discussions involving Belgian and foreign specialists, representatives of the Travel Disputes Committee, the travel sector, public administration and consumer organizations. Participants will be given an opportunity to put questions to the panels.

Particular attention will be devoted to tourism and its transfrontier aspects.

Enrolment fee: BF 5 000
Venue: Hotel Sheraton, Brussels
Languages: French, Dutch and English

Information from:

Miek NAESSENS
Secrétaire générale de la Commission de Litiges Voyages
Tel.: +32/2/233.60.36
Fax: +32/2/230.38.96
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rue J A De Mot 24-26
B-1040 Bruxelles

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European Commission
Ms S. REYNOLDS
Consumer Policy Service
rue de la Loi 200
J 70 - 4/14
B - 1049 Bruxelles



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Contact:
'Eurocon'
Rathausstrasse 20
D-24937 Flensburg
Tel: +49 461 26 705
Fax: +49 461 27 578

The European Affairs Service of the French Senate has published a document entitled 'Les Horaires d'ouverture des magasins dans les pays européens' (Opening Hours in European Countries). This study

Member States of the European Community as well as Sweden.

In almost all these countries the question of shop opening hours and, more particularly, Sunday opening is the subject of heated debates.

Further information from:
Le Sénat
Service des Affaires Européennes
Division des Etudes de Régulation comparée
15 Rue de Valenciennes
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