

INFO-C

Information from the Consumer Policy Service of the European Commission - Quarterly n°5

A Community Close to Its Citizens.

Since our last issue was published, the European Communities have gone through turbulent times: the referendum on the Maastricht Treaty in France revealed a deeply split population, as did the Danish referendum in June; the European Monetary System came under great strain; and, as a consequence of these two events, an extraordinary European Council was held in Birmingham on October 16.

The Birmingham Declaration, entitled "A Community Close to Its Citizens", underlines among other points the need to demonstrate to the citizens of Europe the benefits of increased European cooperation; but also the need to make the Community more open so that the public debate on the activities of the Communities becomes better informed.

In all modesty, we believe that **Info-C** contributes to these objectives. In this issue we report on the Council of Ministers on Consumer Affairs, held on

November 3, which made substantial progress on a number of issues. A topical article covers Community data bases of interest to consumers: what they contain, how to interrogate them. Notes on cross border shopping and on Community-wide testing of products are also in the same vein.

Furthermore, with this issue the **German version of Info-C** is born. In a letter sent to us recently, the German authorities requested that "in the interest of the nearly 80 million German-speaking consumers" a German version be also issued.

It was a great pleasure to confirm that such a version was already underway - although the number of copies foreseen, 700, reflect the target groups of **Info-C**, i.e. the relay of information multipliers, not the individual consumers. And if present experiences with the French and English versions are anything to go by, the content of even such a modest number of issues will travel far and wide.

"The Internal Market After 1992: Meeting the Challenge"!

The "High Level Group on the Operation of the Internal Market" set up by Messrs Bangemann and Van Miert has published its report under this title. **Chaired by Peter Sutherland**, a former member of the Commission, the HLG draws i.a. the conclusion that the expectations and anxieties of consumers must be taken more strongly into account: without confidence of consumers in the new rules of the game the Single Internal Market will not work properly.

Our readers are encouraged to read the report. It can be obtained from the Commission offices in memberstates.

INFO-C

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OF SPECIAL INTEREST

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CEE: XXIV/14

**Press Release Council Meeting
Consumer Protection and Information
Brussels, 3 November 1992**

President : Baroness DENTON OF WAKEFIELD,
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Department of Trade and Industry
(Consumer Affairs), United Kingdom

COSMETICS

The Council agreed to the substance of a common position on the Directive amending for the sixth time Council Directive 76/768/EEC on the approximation of the laws of the Member States relating to cosmetic products.

The new Directive is designed to improve and harmonize information for consumers and supervisory authorities on cosmetic products marketed in the Community and thereby to eliminate the last remaining risks of barriers to the free movement of such products in the single market. It also deals with the banning of animal experiments in the cosmetics industry.

In the area of information, the common position provides specifically for the compiling of an inventory of ingredients used in cosmetic products with a view in particular to establishing a common nomenclature for such ingredients. The text also provides for an obligation on producers to indicate the ingredients on the packaging of cosmetic products. In addition, it lays down criteria for the form and content of the information which the manufacturer must keep available for the supervisory authorities, in particular on the identity, quality, efficacy and safety of the product.

With regard to the testing of cosmetics on animals, the common position provides that the Member States shall ban the marketing of cosmetic products containing ingredients or combinations of ingredients tested on animals as from January 1998.

However, in cases where, because of insufficient progress in developing alternatives to animal testing, there are no scientifically validated alternative methods offering an equivalent level of consumer protection, the date of application of the ban will be deferred by decision of

the Commission assisted by a committee composed of representatives of the Member States.

The common position will be formally adopted by the Council as soon as possible, after finalization of the texts.

TIMESHARING

Pending receipt of the European Parliament's Opinion, the Council held a policy debate on the proposal for a Directive designed to afford consumers greater protection in the single market when concluding contracts relating to the utilization of immovable property on a timeshare basis.

The debate, which showed that most delegations were interested in an instrument of this kind, covered a number of key issues relating in particular to the scope of the Directive, the level of information to be provided by vendors and the opportunities for withdrawal offered to purchasers.

The Council instructed the Permanent Representatives Committee to continue examining the proposal on the basis of the Council's debate and in the light of the European Parliament's Opinion.

DISTANCE SELLING

The Council discussed the proposal for a Directive designed to establish a minimum basis for the protection of consumers in respect of contracts negotiated at a distance (distance selling).

Delegations expressed their views on whether Community legislation in this field was desirable and on certain major aspects of the proposal, namely the types of

contract covered by the Directive, the information to be provided by suppliers and arrangements for credit card payments.

The Council instructed the Permanent Representatives Committee to continue examining the proposal, with particular reference to the Opinion of the European Parliament.

SUTHERLAND REPORT

The Council heard a brief presentation by Commissioner VAN MIERT of the report drawn up by the High-level Group on the Operation of the Internal Market (Sutherland Group).

ENFORCEMENT OF CONSUMER PROTECTION LAW

On the basis of a Presidency note the Council discussed closer co-operation between authorities responsible for enforcing consumer protection law in the Community.

Following that discussion, the Presidency noted that delegations were interested in such co-operation, particularly if based on existing structures.

COMMUNITY SYSTEM OF INFORMATION ON ACCIDENTS INVOLVING CONSUMER PRODUCTS (EHLASS)

The Council discussed the EHLASS project (European home and leisure accidents surveillance system).

The aim of EHLASS, which was set up in 1986 as a five-year demonstration project, is to collect information at Member State level on home and leisure accidents involving consumer products, in order to take preventive action in the Community.

The debate showed that there was broad agreement in the Council in favour of continued Community financing for the project.

COMMUNITY SYSTEM FOR THE RAPID EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION

The Council noted the progress made at the Commission in preparing an initiative to ensure the rapid exchange of information with regard to certain products likely to endanger the health and safety of consumers in the period before entry into force, on 29 June 1994 at the latest, of the rapid exchange system provided for the Directive on general product safety.

Databases of the Commission

How can you find out about what is happening in the European Communities?

In Info-C No 3 we already published information on the Consumer Euroguichets network, which is of particular interest to consumers. This time we thought you might appreciate a brief overview of the Commission's online databases. Although there are no databases designed exclusively for consumers, all the general databases are of potential interest to those working in the consumer domain.

Some of the Commission's databases are accessible to the general public. Access is normally online and users are charged for the service. Access contracts can be concluded

- either directly with the Commission through the Office for Official Publications of the European Communi-

ties (OPOCE), Eurobases or Echo (addresses at the end of this article);

- or with a national host (as listed in OPOCE's "Directory of public databases").

Below we provide a brief survey of the bases listed in the alphabetical order of their names or acronyms:

- **ABEL** ("Amtsblatt elektronisch") is a bibliographical database for searching, selecting and ordering documents published in the Official Journal of the European Communities. The documents are entered on the day of publication in the OJ. They are kept for 90 days. The data are available in the nine Community languages.

Consumer Protection

Access is online, after conclusion of a contract with the OPOCE or the national hosts.

- **CATEL** (OPOCE's electronic catalogue) is also a bibliographical database, consisting of two parts:
- * Catel, for searching, selecting and ordering publications and documents by the Community institutions, and
- * J.O., for same operations on documents published in the L series of the Official Journal. This base also permits access to documents by the Court of Justice which are contained in the C series of the OJ (only these documents can be consulted in the C series!).

This database is updated once a month (without "rolling data" as is the case with ABEL). It is available in the nine languages.

Access to the database is free of charge. Naturally, you have to pay for any publications you order!

- **CELEX** ("Communitatis Europae Lex") is the inter-institutional computerised documentation system for Community law. It covers
- * Community legislation - treaties, secondary legislation and supplementary legislation, and agreements resulting from external relations
- * Case law: judgments and other decisions of the Court of Justice and the Court of First Instance, opinions of the Advocate-General;
- * Preparatory acts: Commission proposals; communications, reports, programmes, European Parliament resolutions; opinions of the Economic and Social Committee and the Court of Auditors;
- * Parliamentary questions, oral and written, addressed to the Commission and the Council
- * National provisions implementing directives: references to national provisions adopted by each Member State to comply with the Community directives.

CELEX is available in all Community languages except Spanish and Portuguese, which are currently being integrated. It is closely linked with the "Directory of Community Legislation in Force" which is updated every six months and published by the OPOCE in the nine Community languages.

The database is accessible:

- * online, on a fee-paying basis, on Eurobases and numerous national hosts;
- * on CD-ROM, from hosts located exclusively in Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom.
- **ECLAS** ("European Commission Library Automated System") is the database of the Commission's Central Library. It contains bibliographical references on European integration - monographs, periodical articles of lasting interest, publications and non-legislative Community documents, publications by other international organisations, and university theses. The database was created in 1978 and now holds approximately 100 000 records. It is growing by approximately 7 000 records per year. It is updated several times per month. Associated with this database is a monthly bibliography on the Communities, a cumulative annual catalogue of Community publications and listings/bibliographies generated on request. These publications can be purchased from the OPOCE.

The databases are accessible online, on a fee-paying basis, on Eurobases and the national hosts.

- **EPOQUE** (European Parliament Online Query System) is the European Parliament's documentary database. It contains
- * references (but no texts or abstracts except for written questions) on all documents prepared or examined by the EP and studies produced by the EP and national parliaments;
- * catalogue of the EP library
- legislative procedures: references and state of progress.

The database was created in 1987 but covers session documents since July 1979. It is in full development: for example, it is planned to integrate data on petitions addressed to the Parliament.

The database is updated on a daily basis and is accessible online, TTY and the EP videotex system OVIDE.

- **EURISTOTE** (Database of theses and university research on European integration) contains two types of entries: professors (approximately 5 900) and studies (13 400). The objectives of this data base are:
- * to give a comprehensive view of existing and ongoing research in hand in the field of European integration
- * to encourage the exchange of information between researchers

- * to develop cooperation between researchers with a view to setting up an interactive dialogue via ECHO;
- * to create an inter-university communication network on the study of European integration.

Titles are in the original language, sometimes with translation into one of the official languages. An abstract is prepared in an official language with descriptors in English, German and French.

The database is accessible online, TTY and videotex, free of charge on ECHO host.

- INFO 92 (Information on the single market) covers:
- * completion of the internal market:
 - news items;
 - implementation of the White Paper;
 - national implementing measures

The news items include data on the state of progress of the work of the institutions and the dates of entry into force of the directives.

- * the social dimension of the internal market, i.e. the implementation of the Community Charter on the basic social rights of workers.

The data are consulted via a hierarchical menu - for example, the data on the completion of the internal market have the same arborescent structure as the White Paper.

The database is available online in nine languages, on a fee-paying basis, on Eurobases and the national hosts.

- **RAPID** (Spokesman's service of the Commission) contains the full text of all spokesman's service documents:
- * press releases
- * notes/summaries of Commission proposals and reports
- * "background information" memos
- * speeches by members of the Commission
- * key documents such as European Council conclusions and the Economic Summit communiqués

The base is trilingual - English, German, French. It is updated daily two hours after hardcopy publication.

Access: same as INFO 92.

- **SCAD** ("Community system for accessing documentation") is a news database comprising:

- * references to Community acts, including history of their procedure
- * references to publications of the European Institutions
- * references to articles from periodicals selected because of their Community relevance
- * references to position statements by the two sides of industry.

The languages used are:

- * English and French for the acts, etc.
- * English, German and French for official publications
- * language original for articles, provided it is an official language of the Community;
- * language original for position statements (i.e. English, German or French).

Currently, the database contains approximately 125 000 references. It is growing by approximately 15 000 records each year. There is also a weekly SCAD bulletin and regular SCAD bibliographies.

Access: same as CELEX.

The Commission is currently considering integrating certain private databases which might be of particular interest to consumer organisations (comparative tests, for example). We will keep you briefed.

Office des Publications Officielles des Communautés Européennes

2 rue Mercier
L-2985 Luxembourg
Tél: +352/499.28-1
Fax: +352/48.85.73

Eurobases

Rue de la Loi, 200
B-1049 Bruxelles
Tél: +32/2/295.00.01/03
Fax: +32/2/296.06.24

ECHO

Airport Centre
Rue Höhenhof
Luxembourg
Tél: +352/34.98.11
Fax: +352/34.98.12.34

SANTANDER Film Festival

The second cinema/television festival on consumer goods and the quality of life was held on 4-9 October 1992 in Santander (Cantabria - Spain).

A NUMBER OF ACTIVITIES WERE ORGANISED FOR THE FESTIVAL:

1. THE OFFICIAL COMPETITION (FOUR SECTIONS):

A) Short and full-length films

Full-length films:

- * First prize:
La Côte d'Adam (Adam's Rib / French-Soviet film directed by V. Krishtofovi), for the sensitivity and balance with which this film dealt with inter-generation solidarity and respect for the individual.
- * Second prize:
Il portaborse (The Briefcase Carrier / Italian film directed by D. Luchetti), for its vivid presentation of the problem of political honesty in a society in which consumer goods have such an important role.
- * Third prize:
Im Westen alles nach Plan (All goes well in the West/ German film directed by H. Clashen and F. Huse), for providing an opportunity for men and women to describe a society which does not always have the means to guarantee all its citizens the same basic rights.

The following films were also given a special mention for their good cinematographic quality:

- * *La Lanterne rouge* (The Red Lantern / Chinese film by Zhang Yimou)
- * *Vacas* (The Cows / Spanish film by Julio Meden)

Short films

- * First prize:
La Hiedra (The Ivy / directed by A. Conesa).

- * Second prize:
Entretiempo (The Off-season / directed by S. Garcia de Leaniz).
- * Third prize:
La última respuesta (The Last Reply / directed by M. Olid Suero).

B) TV productions

- * First prize:
Op de koop toe (Belgian (BRTN) consumer programme produced by L. Wetter and E. Bruijlandt). This programme was chosen for the direct and useful way in which it drew public attention to topics of interest to consumers.
- * Second prize:
Interpol für gefährliche Produkte (Interpol for Dangerous Goods, by B. Lepthin).
- * Third prize:
Mala Suerte (Bad Luck, produced by G. Quintana - TVE). This programme was chosen because its subject, the quality of life, was universally comprehensible thanks to its narrative technique.

C) Information and education videos

- * First prize:
Vivir en movimiento (Life and Movement / video produced by A. Mejias for the "Direccion General de Trafico").
- * Second prize:
Gente de talia menuda (Short People / video produced by E. Rodriguez Bosch for "Viavideo Television").
- * Joint third prize:
 - *Le canapé vert* (The Green Couch / video produced by E. Juillac for the "Centre technologique régional de consommation").
 - *Oficina movil de informacion al consumidor* (Mobile Information Bureau for the Consumer / produced by L. Alvarez Guerdiga for the "Diputacion de Valladolid").

The following videos received an honourable mention:

- * *Es divertido, pero no es un juego* (Amusing, but not a Game), for its realistic presentation of youthful sexuality.

- * *Una nueva mirada* (A New Look) for its suggestion that closer attention be paid to the reality of drug taking.
- * *Il Curso de la Escuela Permanente del Consumo* (The course of the permanent school for consumers) and
- * *El sueño Consumista* (The consumer dream) for the way they presented the training and education of consumers.
- * *Save the Whales*, for drawing attention to the need to protect species.

D) Spots

- * First prize:
Aburrido (Boring: spot about the Spanish railways - RENFE/produced by I. Single). The jury thus signified its approval of the general campaign undertaken by RENFE to promote rail traffic; the spot looked at the question from different points of view and can be understood in different contexts.
- * Second prize:
Sale el metro (The Tube is starting / spot produced by J. Gershfield). This spot presents, in a straightforward and humorous way, the advantages of the introduction of the underground railway for the city of Bilbao.
- * Third prize:
Droga olos (spot on drugs, produced by J. J. Diaz). This spot shows that the social rehabilitation of drug addicts is not just a problem for the individual but for society as a whole. It effectively conveys a social message thanks to its artistic quality.

Prize of the Commission of the European Communities

A panel nominated by the Commission of the European Communities awarded this prize to the audiovisual production (of whatever category) which made the greatest contribution to the promotion of the rights of European consumers.

- * EC prize: *Im Westen alles nach Plan* (German full-length film which had already won a prize in its own category). With its presentation of the everyday life of disadvantaged people this film poses the problem of the exclusion from the consumer society of certain categories of citizen.

The prizes were presented by various actors including Ursula Andres who honoured the event with her presence.

2. THE CINEMA FORUM

Four debates, with the participation of specialists, were organised in relation to films which were presented "hors concours":

- * "*My Father*": debate on third-age problems.
- * "*The General*": debate on public services.
- * "*The Accidental Tourist*": debate on tourism.
- * "*Double Indemnity*": debate on insurance.

3. A TRIBUTE TO JOSE FERNANDEZ AGUAYO

Presentation of this cameraman and screening of two films on which he worked.

- * *Tristana* by L. Buñuel
- * *La Duda* (The Doubt) by Rafael Gil

4. A TRIBUTE TO THE BBC

Presentation of the work of the BBC by Bryher Scudamore, director and programme manager of the programme "That's Life".

Screening of TV programmes, including "Watchdog" and "Crimewatch".

5. INFORMATION STANDS OF SPANISH CONSUMER ASSOCIATIONS

There was a large attendance, mainly Spanish, at the screening of the full-length films and at the closing ceremony of the festival.

EFTA CCC

At their meeting in Reykjavik on 20-21 May this year, the ministers of EFTA decided to set up a Consumer Consultative Committee, CCC, as part of the follow-up to the signing of the Agreement on the European Economic Area (EEA) on 2 May 1992.

This decision has now been implemented. The EFTA CCC is composed of up to three representatives from each country. They should come from the national consumer organisations and institutions or as individuals, and should be specially qualified in consumer affairs, as well as independent of producer interests and government policy.

The EFTA CCC may be consulted or may give opinions on its own initiative. The Committee exchanges in-

formation and co-operates with EFTA government experts on consumer protection.

The EFTA CCC has grown out of this so-called Subcommittee (to the EFTA Consultative Committee) on Consumer Policy Affairs, which was a forum for co-operation between consumer organisations and cooperations, unions as well as producer interests.

For further information, please contact

EFTA
European Free Trade Association
SIRKKA POTILA
Senior Officer
Specific Integration Affairs
Rue d'Arlon 118
1040 BRUXELLES
TEL : 32/2.230.66.31
TELEFAX : 32/2.230.75.11

CROSS-BORDER SHOPPING

In the September 1992 issue of "Which?", the magazine of the British "Consumers' Association", you will find an article entitled "Buying in the EC : Your Shopping Guide". The article consists in particular of imaginary - but entirely feasible - cases of cross-border purchasing that go wrong, followed by advice on what to do in these circumstances. The article includes a list of tips for trouble-free (cross-border) shopping. Among the general policy recommendations made is a suggestion to establish a network of small-claims courts in all European Countries.

Contact :
WHICH ?
2, Marylebone Road
LONDON NW1 4DF
Tel : 44/71.486.55.44
Fax : 44/71.935.16.06

EUROPEAN CAMERA AND CAMCORDER GUIDE

November 1992 sees an International milestone for Consumer organisations with launch of the first ever jointly published magazine, the Guide to Cameras and

Camcorders which will appear in eight languages in thirteen countries.

The 112 page guide carries results on 150 cameras and camcorders all independently tested in joint tests by leading European Consumer organisations with the backing of International Testing (IT), a leading international consumer testing and research organisation.

The Guide (produced with a subsidy from the European Commission) carries detailed test results with advantages, drawbacks and verdicts on each model. A round-Europe price survey pinpoints the cheapest place in Europe to buy each camera along, with the price in the readers own country - well-timed to help consumers take advantage of the Single Market. Buying information includes a unique worldwide survey showing where to buy the Best Buys at the lowest prices further afield and what to look out for when buying mail order. Also included are tips for getting the best results from your cameras or camcorder.

Contact:

International Testing for details of where to order copies:

2, Marylebone Road
LONDON NW1 4DF
Tel : 44/71/486.55.44
Fax : 44/71/935.16.06

Languages available :

English	Italian
German	Portuguese
French	Danish
Spanish	Dutch

Available in :

England	Italy
Germany	Holland
France	Finland
Belgium	Switzerland
Spain	Austria
Portugal	Australia
Denmark	

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

Barriers

There are several types of barriers which are used for improving child safety. Examples are fire-guards, baby-gates for stairs and railings around platforms of playground equipment. In order to improve the safety of these barriers a hazard-based approach seems feasible, taking into account both ergonomic data and information on the psychomotor development of children.

For this purpose information is needed on accidents; both on accidents that have happened because of the absence of barriers or because of their improper functioning. For this the Dutch Consumer Safety Institute would like to receive information on research dealing with these kinds of accidents, and on criteria to assess barrier safety.

Drownings

The Consumer Safety Institutes is performing a study on the prevention of rowing accidents. Although it is already possible to give general instructions on how to improve water safety, a number of questions remain in which the pros and cons of certain measures seem to balance out. An example of this is the use of dense, prickly bushes along the waterside. Although they may prevent children from reaching the water, they hinder supervision. The Institute would like come into contact with others working in this field to discuss this and other items. People who are interested in giving information, in some detail, about measures taken, with the pros and cons known so far, are invited to respond. Afterwards all contributors will receive copies of the information gathered.

For information, please contact

Consumer Safety Institute

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1070 AD Amsterdam
The Netherlands
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Fax: +31/20/511.45.10

CENTRAL AND EAST EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

1. Consumer Protection in Europe Agreements

The relations between the European Community and these countries are subject to expansion also in the Consumer Protection Policy area.

In the Europe Agreements with Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Roumania, one finds an article on consumer protection:

1. The parties shall cooperate with the aim of achieving full compatibility between the systems of consumer protection in Roumania and the Community.
2. To this end, the cooperation shall comprise, within existing possibilities:
 - * the exchange of information and experts,
 - * access to Community data bases,
 - * training operations and technical assistance.

For further information please contact :

Commission of the European Communities

Unit I/E/3
Rue de la loi, 200
B - 1049 Bruxelles
Tel : +32-2-295.14.74/ 295.22.48

2. The KERMI Institute of Hungary

The KERMI Institute is the Institute of Commercial Quality Control, working under the supervision of the Hungarian Ministry of Trade and Industry.

It has various laboratories at its disposal equipped for carrying out precise, objective tests on consumer products placed on the market.

Its experts play an important role in deciding on consumers' complaints, in performing control-tasks and in other activities to safeguard consumers' interests, as for example making product tests and publishing the results.

KERMI is an independently managed institution with varied interests.

It charges expenses for the tests carried out on behalf of enterprises. The tests arising from consumers' complaints are free of charge to the consumers.

For further information please contact :

KERMI

Institute of Commercial Quality Control
Kereskedelmi
Minőségellenőrző Intézet
1428 Budapest VIII
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H - 1428 HUNGARY
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FRANCE:

COUNCIL OF MINISTERS COMMUNIQUE, 9 SEPTEMBER 1992 "EUROPE AND THE CONSUMER"

The Secretary of State for Women's Rights and Consumer Policy has presented a communication on Europe and the consumer.

I. Consumer protection is a long-standing concern of the Community and the French Government has contributed substantially to making it a reality.

Although the first action programme in favour of consumers dates back to 1975, the Single Act breaks new ground. It specifies that the measures designed to bring about the internal market must be based on "a high level of protection".

Implementing this principle called for a political impetus which the French government strongly supported.

Thus, on 19 November 1989, the Council of Ministers responsible for consumer policy, under the French presidency, adopted a resolution on future priorities for re-launching consumer protection policy. This document was the basis for a programme of work which was implemented by the Commission from 1990 to 1992.

II Concrete results have been achieved

During the past three years, important documents have been adopted to improve the daily life of consumers. These documents concern:

- assurance of product safety

On 29 June 1992 a Directive of very general scope was adopted which imposes a safety requirement on all economic agents (cf. Info-C No 4).

- preservation of the quality and diversity of foodstuffs
- protection of economic interests

- * The Directive of 22 December 1986, amended by that of 22 February 1990, lays down precise rules on the definition of contracts and credit advertising in the field of consumer credit.

- * The Directives of 7 June 1988 set out conditions concerning information on the indication of prices of foodstuffs and non-food products.

- * The Directive of 13 June 1990 on package travel, package holidays and package tours stipulates the provision of detailed information on the packages proposed by travel agents, defines rules on price reviews and specifies that the price may not be increased during the twenty days prior to departure. It also lays down conditions triggering the organiser's liability and mandates the provision of a security for the refund of money paid over and for the repatriation of the consumer in the event of insolvency.

- assurance of clear and fair information on environment-friendly products.

On 11 April 1992 a regulation was published which defines the conditions for the award of a label to products which have the least impact on the environment.

This award makes it possible to exploit the efforts of professionals in the design, production, marketing and use of their products and to provide better information to consumers on the real effects of products on the environment.

III The Maastricht Treaty opens new perspectives

With the completion of the internal market on 1 January 1993, consumers will have access, with all necessary guarantees, to an unprecedented diversity of products and services. In France, since 1986, they have benefited from a reduction in indirect taxes on products in the amount of 50 billion francs (elimination of the higher VAT rate of 33.3% and cut in the reduced rate from 7% to 5.5%).

The Maastricht Treaty expressly recognises consumer policy as an objective of European Union. Article 129 A stipulates that the Community shall contribute to the attainment of a high level of consumer protection.

**CONSUMERS' SCHOOLS IN LILLE,
NORD-PAS-DE-CALAIS**

Consumers' schools have been established by the Regional Consumer Centre in Lille at the municipalities' request. Their objective is the social integration of residents in sensitive areas, by providing citizenship training to these residents in the consumer domain.

This training draws mainly on popular education methods and endeavours to draw on the trainees' knowledge and to fill in the gaps with the aid of field workers and specialists.

The Consumers' Schools wish to help trainees:

- escape their isolation
- develop their sense of personal and collective responsibility
- achieve concrete results in managing their everyday affairs
- learn how to communicate and pass on their knowledge to others.

This training activity involves all local actors - representatives of the communes, the Municipal Social Action Centre, the Family Allowances Fund, Education, and public facilities and bodies such as social centres, health centres, community centres, and consumers' and users' organisations. Sources of finance include the city, department, region (in the context of district social development), the Family Allowances Fund, etc.

These partners, together with trainees' representatives, belong to a Steering Committee responsible for running the school.

The Regional Consumer Centre provides the schools with all its findings in the consumer domain in the Nord/Pas-de-Calais region and at European level. It provides training for the field workers and teaching aids. It also participates in the Steering Committee, where it can draw on its experience in the coordination of other schools.

Currently there are nine of these schools and seven others are due to open in the second half of 1992. Five projects are planned for 1993.

Relations between consumers and public providers of services are always of topical interest. Here are recent developments in :

UNITED KINGDOM**CENTRAL TRANSPORT CONSULTATIVE
COMMITTEE: ANNUAL REPORT
1991-92 AND RESPONSE TO PRIVATISATION
WHITE PAPER.**

The CTCC, the rail users' watchdog, has published its annual report:

"A gloomy year for passengers as short- and long-term investment cutbacks bite deeper" is the summary headline. British rail is given credit for doing its best with outdated equipment.

But CTCC insists on a "firm and brave" commitment from the British government to ensure an adequate level of investment in coming years.

In its response to a White Paper on rail privatisation issued by the British government, the CTCC repeats the title of the White Paper: "New Opportunities for Rail Passengers".. but adds: "?"

Among the recommendations, one notes the following of interest to consumers in general:

- fares, frequencies and quality standards should be fixed first and any necessary subsidies provided at the level required to enable these specifications to be achieved when companies bid for contracts to run railway services.
- separate statutory consumer representative bodies should be set up, independant of the regulatory bodies.
- the CTCC should gain the right to be consulted on railway legislation.

Source:

CTCC

Golden Cross House

Duncannon Street

UK - London WC2N 4JF

Phone: +44/71/839.73.38/ 930.13.04

Fax.: +44/71/925.22.28

Member States

BRITISH GAS : COMMITMENT TO CUSTOMERS

British Gas has published 3 leaflets:

- * Commitment to Customers
- * Standards of Service
- * Complaints Handling Procedure and Compensation Scheme

An extract from the "Commitments" leaflet dealing with appointments indicates the level of quality aimed for:

- * Appointments will be fixed so as to suit both parties;
- * If required, either morning or afternoon appointment may be made;
- * If British Gas does not keep the appointment, and did not cancel it with a day's notice, there is a fixed compensation payment of £ 10.
- * If the new appointment is changed by British Gas, the fixed compensation payment will be a further £ 10, even if more than a day's notice is given.

British Gas intends to publish reports in future to indicate how performance actually compares with standards

Source:

British Gas plc
Rivermill House
Grosvenor Road, 152
UK - London SW1 U3JL
Phone: +44/71/821.14.44

GAS CONSUMERS COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT

The Gas Consumers Council Annual report 1991 does not take these commitments by British Gas into account. The Report indicates the importance, however of reaching high-level standards of service. The number of complaints about British Gas are in fact rising: 5,3% from 1990 to 1991.

The main theme of the Chairman's foreword is the increased competition for the supply of gas, due to increased demand for electricity generation; the potential risks for prices of consumer gas are highlighted.

Source:

Gas Consumers Council
Abford House, 15 Wilton Road
UK - London SW1V 1LT
Phone: +44/71/931.09.77
Fax: +44/71/630.99.34

CONSUMER DISSATISFACTION SURVEY

Since 1985 the Office of Fair Trading has investigated the extent to which consumers perceived they had had "cause for complaint" about goods or services during the previous 12 months. It has done so by commissioning an annual "Dissatisfaction Survey". The most recent survey was carried out in November 1991.

The aim of the survey was to probe a representative sample of adults on the following key issues:

- * whether any cause for complaint about goods or services had been experienced during the last 12 months;
- * on how many occasions cause for complaint had been experienced about each grouping of goods or services;
- * on how many occasions giving rise to cause for complaint, action was actually taken;
- * why some causes for complaint were not pursued;
- * what actions were taken when a cause for complaint was converted into an actual complaint;
- * whether satisfaction was achieved as a result of complaint action;
- * whether further action was taken if a respondent was dissatisfied with the outcome of the first action; and
- * what this further action was;

The survey implied that in 1991 just over 43% of the adult population (approximately 19.8 million people aged 16 or over in the UK) had experienced cause for complaint about goods and/or services during the previous 12 months. Figures for preceding years were not dissimilar, fluctuating in the range 42% to 46%.

The survey suggests that goods bought regularly and in comparatively large quantities (food and drink, clothing and textiles) cause larger proportions of respondents to perceive that they had cause for complaint about them than those purchased less frequently e.g. furniture. In 1991, professional services (insurance, legal, medical, banking, etc.) succeeded post and telephone services as the services category about which the greatest proportion of respondents said they had had cause for complaint.

Approximately four-fifths of respondents in 1991 who perceived they had had cause for complaint had actually taken at least one action (i.e. had complained on at least one occasion when they had cause for complaint). The obverse of this is that one-fifth of respondents with cause for complaint on one or more occasions (nearly 4 million people aged 16 or over in the UK) had taken no actions whatsoever despite being dissatisfied with the good or service purchased.

The most popular reason given for not taking action about goods which give cause for complaint was that it was "too much bother". Most popular response for those not raising their cause for complaint about services was that it "wouldn't help".

Source:

BEELINE 92/2 - August 1992
Consumer Affairs Division
Office of Fair Trading
Field House, 15-25 Bream's Buildings
UK - London EC4A 1PR
Phone: +44/71/242.28.58

GERMANY

POLICY GUIDELINES FOR ADVERTISING

* Advertising in the Single European Market

The German Advertising Federation (Der Zentralverband der Deutschen Werbewirtschaft (ZAW) has made a fundamental contribution on the advertising sector : the "ZAW guidelines for European policy on advertising". These guidelines advocate a basically liberal approach to policy making. This has been prompted by increasing concern about free-market structures in the Single European Market. According to ZAW, EC institutions are developing ever more plans for restricting advertising.

To obtain a (free) copy in English, please contact :

ZAW
Postfach 20 14 14
Villichgasse 17
D - 5300 BONN 2
Phone: +49/228/82.09.20
Fax: +49/228/35.75.83

DENMARK

COST OF LEGAL REDRESS

The cost of obtaining legal redress within the Danish legal system has exploded in recent years, notably due to steep rises in lawyers' fees but also fees payable to the courts.

The total cost of a case fought over something worth e.g. 20.000 Danish Kroner (app. 2.700 ECU, 1 ECU = 7,5 Danish Kroner) these days amount to 7.800 Kroner, VAT included - provided you win the case; if you loose or your opponent is insolvent, the cost may well be double.

Lawyers' fees being largely a question of supply and demand, the public interest is particularly concerned with the evolution in court fees and no less so since the court system fed the coffers of the Exchequer with 700 million Kroner in 1991.

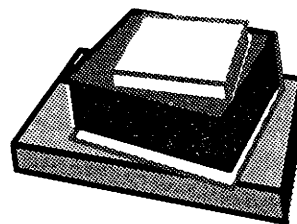
For example, whereas court fees for a case fought over 600 Kroner in 1989 were 130 Kroner, they are now exactly the same as the amount at stake, 600 Kroner! Seen from a consumer policy point of view, this state of affairs is in itself regrettable, since it in fact rules out the possibility for legal and economic redress in many disputes between consumers and business. But the situation is even more deplorable when you compare it with the equivalent figures for a case worth say 100.000 Kroner. which are 1.100 and 1.728 Kroner respectively. The smaller the claim, the steeper the growth in court fees.

"Den danske Dommerforening", the professional and collective body of Danish judges raises this matter regularly with the authorities. The main solution proposed to the Ministry of Justice is a small claims procedure; success has, however, so far eluded the Dommerforening.

For further information please contact :

Den danske Dommerforening
Retten på Frederiksberg
Howitzvej 32
2000 Frederiksberg
DENMARK
Tel : +45/38.33.09.99
Fax : +45/31.19.64.45

PUBLICATIONS



The British Consumers' Association, the publishers of "Which ?" magazine, have just published the first issue of a new monthly magazine, probably the only of its kind in the world : a magazine aimed specifically at teenager consumers, "Check it Out !". Lay-out, language, themes are all adapted to the generations brought up on music videos, rap music and fast food. Articles on a lighter note (comparative test of the pizzas of major pizza restaurant chains) mix with more "serious" ones on budget management : how to get the most out of your money by shopping around and planned vs. impulse purchases. To quote the "word from the Ed", Sue Harvey, the magazine is "all about being one step ahead, and not letting the world put one over you."

Readers will play a big part in "Check it Out!" in particular in that much of the testing will be done by the CHECKMATES team, a core panel chosen from readers.

Check it Out! is available on subscription at £ 5.95 a quarter.

For an information leaflet, please contact:

Consumers' Association
2, Marylebone Road
London NWT 4DF
Tel : 44/71.486.55.44
Fax : 44/71.935.16.06

In connection with the "Citizens' Audit on EC Advice and Access to Justice", 22-23 September 1992, ECAS, Euro-Citizen-Action-Service, has published a special issue of their magazine The European Citizen on this theme. It contains among other articles on overview

of rights that are protected (and of those that are not) and a "Who's Who" in this field.

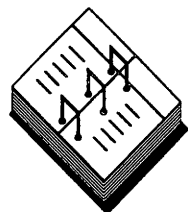
Contact :
ECAS
98, rue du Trône - Bte 8
1050 BRUXELLES
Phone: +32/2/512.93.60
Fax: +32/2/512.66.73

The **IOCU**, International Organisation of Consumer Unions, which has links with 174 consumer organisations in 67 countries and represents consumer interests in a number of international fora, has published its **annual report**.

Contact :
IOCU
Emmastraat 9
NL - 2595 EG DEN HAAG
Phone: +31/70/347.63.31
Fax: +31/70/383.49.76

EUROCOOP has published a free brochure "On the Eve of a European Market for 380 Million Consumers" (available in English, French and German). It gives a progress report on the completion of the internal market and deals also with other subjects of particular interest to consumers.

It is obtainable from :
EUROCOOP
Rue Archimède 17, Bte n° 2
1040 BRUXELLES
Phone: +32/02/230.32.44
Fax: +32/02/231.07.57



Diary

**3 and 4 December
1992**

Touchstone Exhibitions & Conference Ltd is organising a conference, "Service for the Citizen". This conference will be hosted by the Cabinet Office and "Citizens Charter".

In the United Kingdom in 1991 the Prime Minister launched the Citizen's Charter, an initiative aimed at raising the standards of public services and making them more responsive to the needs of their users.

Through a series of case studies the conference will look at how the Charter principles are being put into practice and the results to date, demonstrating how the initiative is helping to raise the standards.

There will also be case studies of best practice from outside the UK, enabling participants to draw comparisons, select ideas and debate the issues.

There are two streams to the conference which run in parallel: one will look at the pertinent issues by service sector and the other at common questions facing all public service providers.

Registration fee: £ 656,83 (including VAT)

Information and registration:

Mr. Gill STODDART, Conference Manager
Service for the Citizen Conference
Touchstone Exhibitions & Conferences Ltd
Haleon House, 4 Red Lion Street
UK - Richmond, Surrey TW9 1RW
Phone: +44/81/332.00.44
Fax: +44/81/332.08.74

Only those readers who have not yet asked for their (free) subscription to INFO-C, are invited to fill in the reply-coupon(s) below. However, if you have already sent in a request, we should be grateful if you would check your name and address on the label of this bulletin and inform us of any errors or of any changes in your address in order that your copy arrives without delay.

Commission of the European Communities
Mr K.I. Roberts
Consumer Policy Service
Rue de la Loi, 200
B - 1049 Bruxelles



NAME AND ORGANIZATION :

ADDRESS :

Wishes to receive INFO-C.

In French - in English - in German (1)

(1) Please underline your preference(s)

As some of our readers have already discovered "the hard way", the CPS has now been **connected to the new telephone switchboard of the Commission**

The prefix (02) 23..... has been replaced by (02) 29..... - however, fortunately the extension numbers stay the same.

So, if you know the the direct line of an official,
you now dial 29x.xx.xx instead of 23x.xx.xx.

The general telephone number of the Commission switchboard has also been modified. It is now: (02) 299.11.11