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*(Information)*

## COUNCIL

## COUNCIL RESOLUTION

of 2 December 2002

on Community consumer policy strategy 2002-2006

(2003/C 11/01)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

RECALLING THAT:

1. The Community consumer policy, in order to ensure a high level of consumer protection and to promote the interests of consumers, shall contribute to protecting the health, safety and economic interests of consumers as well as to promoting their right to information, education and to organise themselves in order to safeguard their interests.
  2. The condition for a coherent Community consumer policy strategy is that consumer interests are integrated in defining and implementing other Community policy areas in order to strengthen consumer confidence, growth and welfare within the Community. The integration of consumer interests into other policies is a collective endeavour of all EU institutions and Member States.
  3. Consumers together with business are key players in the internal market. A well-functioning internal market promoting consumer confidence in cross-border transactions will have a positive impact on competition to the benefit of consumers.
  4. A targeted consumer policy with a solid evidence base should ensure that policy initiatives are in accordance with the needs of the consumers and the development on the market generally and aim at a balance between these interests and those of business. A goal-oriented consumer policy implies a development of the cooperation between the Commission and the Member States on a strategic and analytical approach to consumer policy.
  5. Community legislation should ensure a high level of consumer protection. Besides Community legislation, in order to enhance the advantages of the internal market and for strengthening safe trading across national borders, it is necessary that business and where possible consumers together contribute to securing confidence in products and services. In order to realise this objective, organisations should be encouraged to enter into a dialogue and take appropriate measures in order to establish the necessary balance between consumer interests and business considerations. The responsibility of consumers and business may be strengthened through better use of other forms of regulation, for example co-regulation and self-regulation, where appropriate.
  6. The enlargement of the EU will have an important impact on the functioning of the internal market, including in the area of consumer policy. Consumers, their representatives and national authorities from candidate countries should be helped to prepare for accession.
- I. WELCOMES the Commission consumer policy strategy 2002-2006 <sup>(1)</sup>, the objectives expressed therein:
- Objective 1: a high common level of consumer protection,
  - Objective 2: effective enforcement of consumer protection rules;
  - Objective 3: proper involvement of consumer organisations in Community policies, and the follow-up actions proposed therein.
- II. CALLS UPON THE COMMISSION to implement its strategy with its three policy objectives and to put a specific emphasis on the following issues:
1. to prioritise a high level of consumer protection also in other Community policies and activities,
  2. to take into consideration consumers' interests in services of general interest; to take note in this context of its Communication of 18 June 2002 on the horizontal evaluation of services of general economic interest <sup>(2)</sup>, in accordance with the relevant conclusions of the European Council,

<sup>(1)</sup> Doc. 8907/02.<sup>(2)</sup> Doc. 10387/02.

3. to consider as priorities for its work the development of guidance and appropriate standards under the general product safety Directive, the presentation of an analysis of the options for addressing the safety of services and the development of sectoral Community legislation concerning safety aspects, such as new legislation concerning chemicals,
4. in the light of its follow-up to the Green Paper on EU consumer protection to take steps in view of possible actions, while taking into account the results of the consultation process,
5. to continue its review of the existing Community consumer legislation and its reporting on the implementation of existing directives,
6. to present the appropriate proposals to complete the internal market for financial services,
7. in line with the eEurope 2005 Action Plan:
  - to continue its work on initiatives in order to promote security, good practices and awareness of security risks in all users, and report on progress by the end of 2003, and
  - to continue its work and take steps towards actions in order to increase consumer confidence in cross-border transactions including electronic payments in the internal market,
8. to present the results of the work on follow-up of the Communication on European contract law <sup>(1)</sup>;
9. to promote consumer interests in international bilateral and multilateral trade relations.
12. to continue discussions on and investigate the possibilities to develop a common approach and objectives for consumer statistics and other data which can form an evidence base for a strategic, goal-oriented approach to consumer policy and other policy areas for the benefit of the policy development in the entire Community,
13. to ensure that the proposal for a future legal act for Community activities in favour of consumers reflects and supports the objectives outlined in the Commission strategy,
14. to support representative consumer organisations so that they can independently promote consumers' interests at Community as well as national level and enable them to exert influence, enter, for example, into a balanced dialogue with business and participate in Community policy making. The development of capacity-building projects in order to strengthen consumer organisations where appropriate as well as education tools on specific aspects of cross-border transactions would be key to this end,
15. among other tools, to encourage the development of dialogue between consumer organisations and business to enable them i.e. to participate in the work with the preparation of other means of regulation, particularly self-regulation and co-regulation,
16. to ensure the representation of consumer interests in the standardisation work in relevant areas, both at European and national level. Consumer influence should also be encouraged in international standardisation, in particular through national standard bodies where appropriate,

### III. CALLS UPON THE COMMISSION AND THE MEMBER STATES:

10. to examine the existing enforcement systems in the Member States and, taking those results into account, to examine the possibilities of strengthening enforcement cooperation by and between the enforcement authorities and the Commission within the areas covered by the strategy. It welcomes the Commission's intention to present a proposal in order to strengthen cooperation on consumer protection between Member States,
  11. without prejudice to consumers' option for seeking judicial redress, to promote and support alternative dispute resolution mechanisms to facilitate for consumers to resolve disputes across borders, including the consolidation of the European Extra-Judicial Network, in the light of the report which the Commission will present in 2003,
  17. to generally consult with the consumer organisations in connection with the formulation of legislation and policy in all relevant policy areas.
- IV. CALLS UPON THE MEMBER STATES to ensure that the objectives of the consumer policy strategy are, where relevant, also taken into account in the national policies.
- V. INVITES the Commission to present to the Council every 18 months a review of the consumer policy strategy 2002-2006 based on a constant monitoring of the short-term rolling programme of actions including an assessment and evaluation of the effects of the Community and national activities in support of the objectives of the strategy.

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<sup>(1)</sup> Doc. 10996/01.