



Health & Consumer Voice

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Europeans support alcohol health warnings to protect vulnerable groups

Seventy-seven percent of Europeans agree with putting warnings on alcohol bottles and adverts in order to warn pregnant women and drivers of the dangers of alcohol. This was revealed in a special *Eurobarometer* on alcohol presented on 14 March. The survey shows that European public opinion is mostly supportive of measures aimed at protecting vulnerable groups in society and at reducing alcohol-related road accidents.

One in ten Europeans binge drink

One in ten Europeans usually drink 5 or more drinks in one session, (the widely-used definition of "binge drinking") and 44% of drinkers report doing so more than once per month. Binge drinking is particularly high among the youngest respondents. Nineteen percent of people aged 15-24 admit to regular binge drinking.

There are considerable national variations, with 34% of Irish respondents saying they usually binge drink, and about one in four from Finland, the UK and Denmark. However, only 2% of

Harmful alcohol consumption is estimated to kill 195,000 people a year in the EU and is responsible for one in four deaths among young men aged 15-29 years.

In October 2006, the European Commission launched a strategy to support Member States in reducing alcohol related harm.

For more information :

http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/alcohol/alcohol_com_en.htm



respondents in Italy and Greece usually binge drink.

Protective measures

The vast majority of Europeans would welcome measures to protect vulnerable groups in society and to reduce deaths from road accidents. 73% would agree to the introduction of a lower blood alcohol level for young and novice drivers, and 80% of respondents agree with random alcohol testing by police.

87% of EU citizens approve banning the sale and serving of alcohol to young people under the age of 18 in all EU Member States. A further 77% agree with putting warnings on alcohol bottles and advertisements and 76% approve of banning alcohol advertising targeting young people.

Further information:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/health/ph_publication/eurobarometers_en.htm



In brief



EU emergency veterinary team to be established

On 27 February, the Commission adopted a Decision to establish an emergency veterinary team to provide support to European experts if needed to respond rapidly to animal disease outbreaks in the EU and third countries. The team will be made up of animal health experts who are available at short notice to assist with major outbreaks of certain diseases, such as avian influenza, bluetongue and foot-and-mouth disease. When necessary, members of the team will be sent to the affected country to provide technical assistance and to work with local authorities in bringing the disease situation under control. The team will also collaborate closely with experts from international organisations, such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and International Office of Epizootics (OIE).

Further information:

http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/index_en.htm

Collective redress for consumers

Consumers will not enjoy the benefits of the Single Market unless there are strong and effective systems in place to resolve problems with goods and services when things go wrong. This is why the Commission has pledged to consider action on collective redress mechanisms for consumers for infringements of consumer protection rules and breaches of the EC anti-trust rules.

The Commission intends to take an in-depth look at the issues involved. It has launched two studies and has set up a dialogue with stakeholders. It will also take part in a major conference organised by the Portuguese Presidency in November 2007 and publish a White Paper on antitrust damages, including the possibility of collective redress for competition law infringements, by the end of this year.

Further information:

http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/overview/cons_policy/index_en.htm

Kuneva launches new Consumer Strategy

On 13 March, the Commissioner for Consumer Protection, Meglena Kuneva set out more than 20 legislative and non-legislative initiatives to boost the retail side of the Single Market by 2013.

The new Consumer Strategy 2007-2013 aims to boost confidence in the Single Market so that consumers can shop freely across borders - while travelling or online - to get the best price, the best quality and the best product suited to their needs.



Commissioner Meglena Kuneva at a press conference on the launch of the new Consumer Strategy

Consumer spending represents 58% of EU Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Statistics show that businesses and consumers are still not using the potential offered by the internal market, particularly the new possibilities in e-shopping, because the 27 national markets remain governed by local conditions.

The five pillars of the Strategy

1. Modern cross-border shopping rights

There will be an overhaul and streamlining of the current consumer legislative framework, centred on the review of 8 core Consumer Directives. These cover, among other things, consumer guarantees, delivery, timeshare and package travel.

2. Strong systems for redress and enforcement

The Commission will take action to; reinforce monitoring of Alternative Disputes Resolution (ADR) schemes; consider action on collective redress mechanisms for consumers for infringements of consumer protection rules and breaches of the EC anti-trust rules; and implement the new Consumer Protection Co-operation (CPC) Regulation to tackle cross-border scams and breaches of consumer protection rules.

3. Safe Markets

Priority areas for action include; reinforcing the EU's market surveillance and Rapid Alert System ('RAPEX') for notification of dangerous products; strengthening co-operation with US and Chinese authorities; and collecting data on product and service related accidents and injuries as well as chemical risks.

4. Making consumer outcomes the focus of EU policies

This will involve, inter alia; integrating consumer interests into the policy-making process in key policy areas; introducing a White Paper on Mortgage Credit; and ensuring high standards in Services of general interest (i.e. water, telecommunications, electricity, etc).

5. Information

Priority actions will include; co-financing and co-ordinating the work of the European Consumer Centres Network (ECC-Net), which advises citizens on their rights as consumers and provides easy access to redress in cross border cases; information campaigns in new Member States; the development of post-graduate education courses in consumer issues; the publication of the annual school diary; and the development of adult education modules.

Consumers: EU clamps down on cross-border fraudsters

Traders breaking the law on a cross-border basis are now facing an EU wide crackdown, following the launch of a powerful new enforcement network on 27 February.

The network has been set up to target cross-border scams such as phoney lotteries and bogus holiday clubs. It also aims to clamp down on systematic abuses of EU consumer protection rules, from a company's refusal to give refunds on airline delays to pressure selling of timeshare holidays to sending misleading holiday brochures to consumers in other EU countries.

The Enforcement Cooperation Regulation sets up an EU wide network between enforcement bodies to tackle crooks who rip off victims in one country but operate in another. It also establishes minimum standards for national enforcement authorities.

This includes the ability to conduct on-site inspections, impose fines and to order companies to cease illegal practices. These powers could result, for instance, in freezing the assets of scamsters and preventing them causing more harm to consumers and honest traders.

What next?

The Consumer Protection Cooperation (CPC) regulation was adopted on 27 October 2004, and came fully into force in January 2007. Mrs Kuneva and representatives of the national enforcement authorities formally launched the operation of the network with its new powers in February 2007. This was the first of regular co-operation meetings between EU enforcement agencies in Brussels.

In brief



Commission supplies foot-and-mouth vaccine to Turkey

A consignment of 1,500,000 doses of tri-valent vaccine against foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) was supplied to Turkey by the European Commission on 9 March, as a contribution towards the spring vaccination campaign against this disease in Turkish Thrace and adjacent areas.

Foot-and-mouth disease is still endemic in large parts of Turkey, and already two outbreaks have been reported in 2007 in areas close to the border with Greece and Bulgaria. Where complete culling of infected herds is not carried out, vaccination is the only disease control measure which can protect animals against infection from the foot-and-mouth disease virus. It is also essential in minimising the spread of the virus.

Further information:

http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/diseases/controlmeasures/fmd_en.htm

EU requires cigarette lighters to be child-resistant

A Commission Decision requiring all cigarette lighters sold in the EU to be safe for children came into force on 14 March.

The Decision requires governments to ensure that lighters placed on the EU market are child-resistant and forbids placing "novelty lighters" (lighters resembling objects attractive to children) on the market. Luxury lighters are not covered by this ban but must still comply with the general safety requirements for these products.

Why this Decision?

It is estimated that between 1,500 and 1,900 injuries and 34 to 40 deaths per year in the EU are due to fire-related accidents caused by children playing with lighters. Child-resistance mecha-



nisms have been developed to prevent such accidents, and their use in countries including the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand has resulted in a 60% reduction in the number of such accidents.

What is a "child-resistant lighter"?

A European standard (EN 13869:2002) establishes child-resistance specifications for lighters. These include a

mechanism on the lighter that aims to make it more difficult for children to ignite the flame.

What is covered?

The child-resistance requirement of the Decision applies to roughly 98% of all lighters sold in the EU each year, including all disposable, plastic lighters and low-cost metal lighters. In addition, the Decision bans the placing on the market of "novelty lighters" which resemble appealing objects for children, such as toys, mobile phones, food, cars, etc.

Further information:

http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/cons_safe/prod_safe/gpsd/lighters/index_en.htm

EU consumers willing to pay for better animal welfare

EU consumers are willing to make an extra effort to buy animal welfare friendly products, even if this means changing where they shop or paying more for goods, according to a *Eurobarometer survey on attitudes to animal welfare*, published on 22 March.

The report shows, however, that citizens feel they lack the necessary information to distinguish between products on animal welfare grounds.

In the first EU survey on animal welfare to cover all 27 Member States, as well as Turkey and Croatia, 62% of respondents said that they would change their shopping habits in order to access more animal welfare friendly goods. A large majority of respondents backed the idea of labelling or logos to indicate the animal welfare standards met in producing the foods they buy. The survey demonstrates general support for financially rewarding EU farmers who use better animal welfare practices.

A priority for citizens

The Eurobarometer shows that animal welfare is an issue which EU citizens rank highly, giving it 8 out of 10 on average in terms of importance. Most perceive that animal welfare has improved in their country over the last decade, although 77% still believe there is more to be done. Greeks (96%), Cypriots (91%) and Portuguese (90%), in particular, would like more attention to be given to the wellbeing of animals in their country.

The Eurobarometer also shows that citizens are in favour of further incentives to promote animal welfare in the EU. Over 70% of respondents supported the idea of financial rewards for producers who apply high animal welfare standards. There was also strong consensus (89%) that imports should be produced under the same animal welfare conditions as those originating in the EU.

Perceived benefits of animal welfare

In addition to the traditional ethical concerns that generate support for animal welfare, the wellbeing of animals during the production of food now appears to be strongly associated with the healthiness and quality of products. Over half of those surveyed perceived food produced in keeping with high animal welfare standards to be healthier than other food, while 48% said they thought it to be of better quality.

More information needed

This Eurobarometer indicates that people would even go so far as to change their shopping patterns to support animal welfare friendly goods. Nevertheless, over half of those surveyed felt that they had neither enough knowledge about the farming conditions in their country nor the information to differentiate good animal welfare products from others. When asked how animal welfare products should be distinguished in retail outlets, 39% were in favour of written information on the labels, 35% supported the idea of logos and 26% backed the use of a grading/star system on packaging.

The Community Action Plan on the Protection and Welfare of Animals 2006-2010 foresees the establishment of standardised indicators for animal welfare and possibly an EU animal welfare label.

More information about the Eurobarometer survey is published at : http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/welfare/survey/index_en.htm

Further information on Animal Welfare : http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/welfare/index_en.htm



Health Commissioner Markos Kyprianou demonstrates the standard size of a cage for laying hens at a seminar on animal welfare held in Brussels on 22 March

In brief



Evaluation of *Health-EU* - The Public Health Portal of the European Union

Health-EU was launched last year to provide citizens, patients, health professionals and stakeholders with simple, clear and scientifically sound information on European and national activities in public health. It is designed as a multilingual gateway to 47 health-related topics organised into six thematic areas and covering all health issues affecting individuals and their environment.

The Health and Consumer Protection Directorate-General is now evaluating the Portal among its users, including through an online survey. The survey can be accessed in 22 official languages until **30 April 2007** at :

http://ec.europa.eu/health-eu/news/logos/promotion_en.htm.



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