

EU consumer policy strategy 2007-2013

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PURPOSE: to propose an EU Consumer Policy strategy 2007-2013.

BACKGROUND: the place of EU consumer policy will be at the heart of the next phase of the internal market, as set out in the Commission's communication to the 2007 Spring European Council on the Single Market Review (COM(2007)0060). The 493 million EU consumers are central to the three main challenges facing the EU: growth, jobs and the need to re-connect with our citizens. The internal market has the potential to be the largest retail market in the world. Today, it remains largely fragmented along national lines, forming 27 mini-markets instead. The advent of the e-commerce revolution, which has still not reached critical mass, has transformed the potential for integration of retail markets in the EU to give a major stimulus to competitiveness and expand the opportunities for EU citizens.

This is an ambitious agenda for a relatively young EU policy. In the period 2007-2013, consumer policy is uniquely well placed to help the EU rise to the challenges of growth and jobs and re-connecting with its citizens. The EU will know if it has succeeded if by 2013 it can credibly demonstrate to all EU citizens that they can shop from anywhere in the EU, from corner-shop to website, confident they are equally effectively protected, whether from dangerous products or rogue traders; and to be able to demonstrate to all retailers, but especially SMEs, that they can sell anywhere on the basis of a single, simple set of rules.

In April 2005 the Commission adopted a joint strategy for health and consumer policy from 2007-2013 ([COD/2005/0042B](#)). In order to respond to a demand from stakeholders, the Council and European Parliament, this strategy develops the strategy for consumer policy further. An analysis of the main outcomes of the Consumer Policy Strategy 2002-2006 together with an Impact Assessment are set out in staff working papers.

CONTENT : the consumer policy strategy (2007-2013) seeks to establish equal levels of security and protection throughout the European Union (EU), as well as a more integrated internal market, through the following objectives:

- **empower EU consumers:** putting consumers in the driving seat benefits citizens but also boosts competition significantly. Empowered consumers need real choices, accurate information, market transparency and the confidence that comes from effective protection and solid rights;
- **enhance EU consumers' welfare in terms of price, choice, quality, diversity, affordability and safety:** consumer welfare is at the heart of well-functioning markets.
- **protect consumers effectively from the serious risks and threats that they cannot tackle as individuals:** a high level of protection against these threats is essential to consumer confidence.

In achieving these three objectives the Commission will be guided by the relevant articles of the Treaty which are also reflected in the operational objectives of the new consumer financial programme 2007-2013 which sets out the legal framework for EU consumer policy expenditure in the period covered by the strategy:

- to ensure a high level of consumer protection through a simple legal framework, improved evidence, better consultation and better representation of consumers' interests;
- to ensure the effective application of the rules notably through enforcement cooperation, information, education and redress.

These objectives reflect a high degree of continuity with previous EU consumer policy goals. 2007-2013 will however see a change in gear from the past and different priorities for action:

- better monitoring of consumer markets and national consumer policies;
- better consumer protection regulation;
- enhancing product safety through the development of market monitoring tools;
- putting consumers at the heart of other EU policies;
- better informed and educated consumers, for example through strengthening the role of the European Consumer Centres.

Before March 2011 the Commission will produce a mid-term report and before December 2015 an ex-post evaluation report.