Consumer policy: priorities 1996-1998

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The priorities of European consumer policy can be more successfully attained by the EU than by Member States alone, the Consumer Protection Committeeconcluded today in a report it adopted on consumer priorities for the next three years. The report by Mr Phillip WHITEHEAD on a Commission communication on priorities for consumer policy for the years 1996 to 1998 is stressing that subsidiarity must not be abused to prevent action in the interests of Europe's consumers. Produced under the consultation procedure, the report is calling on the Commission in future to pay greater attention to whether Member States transposed European directives promptly into their national legislation. "This is the only way of guaranteeing that consumers enjoy a minimum of protection and can also insist on such protection throughout the Union," it states. Urging the Commission to bring forward a detailed action plan as soon as possible, the report criticized the communication on the grounds that it lacked a timetable and concrete proposals to take consumer policy forward. The report is also calling for new European legislation on food labelling to provide the consumer with "complete information", including health risks. It noted, in this connection, that the number of people with allergies was increasing and that very few consumers understood the system of E codes. Turning to Europe's relations with developing countries, the report wants greater control on dangerous European products marketed in developing countries. The aim is, gradually, to impose the same safety, health and environmental standards as applies to products marketed in the European Union: double standards should be ended and fair trade promoted.