Consumers: general framework for Community activities 1999-2003

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An increase in budget proposed by the Commission for a new Community framework for consumer activities has been requested by the Committee. The committee adopted a report by Phillip WHITEHEAD (PES, UK) amending a Commission proposal for an EP and Council Decision establishing a general framework for Community activities in favour of consumers. In the wake of a recent ruling by the Court of Justice, which questioned the legality of certain categories of expenditure, this framework is intended to provide a legal base for Community spending on consumer protection in accordance with Article 129a of the Maastricht Treaty. The committee report calls for an increase from ECU 114 million to ECU 130 million in the funding proposed for the framework, which covers the five years 1999 to 2003. Recommending the increase, Mr Whitehead warned that the budget proposed by the Commission would lead to a severe downgrading of consumer protection. "The rapporteur is extremely concerned that the budget being proposed will not give the pride of place to consumer protection and consumer health assured by Commission President Santer in the wake of the BSE crisis". In amending the proposal, the committee wants the framework to help promote the consumer interest internationally and to give more opportunity to consumer protection bodies. The legal interests of consumers must be protected, including their right to redress and access to justice. The impact of the Euro on products and services also needs attention and measures should be taken to make consumers aware of the possible benefits of the internal market and of sustainable and environmentally sound patterns of consumption. Measures must be taken to deal with potentially hazardous services as well as products. Funding should be available for high-quality independent scientific advice, globally recognized risk assessment and effective control and inspection. Measures should also be adopted to encourage consumer access to the information society.