Consumer policy: priorities 1996-1998

1995/2285(COS) - 20/02/1997 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

Parliament adopted the report by Mr Phillip WHITEHEAD (PSE, UK) on the communication from the Commission on priorities for consumer policy (1996-1998). Parliament urged the Commission to bring forward a detailed Action Plan setting out proposals upon which it intended to act and a timetable for their completion. It stressed that the subsidiarity principle should not provide an excuse for not strengthening consumer protection. Parliament hoped firstly for the completion of activities started during the previous period, calling on the Commission to monitor the transposition of directives into national law by the Member States and to submit a new proposal for a directive on service liability. With regard to new priorities the Commission was called on to focus on action in the following areas: 1. Facilitating access by consumers to justice. Parliament called for legislative actions to secure the mutual recognition of conditions for receiving legal aid, to enable consumer organisations to bring class actions and to establish the right to sue for infringements of Community law. 2. Representing consumers' financial interests. The Commission was called on a) to come forward with legislation that rendered mandatory the 1988 recommendation on payment systems, regulated the sales of financial services at a distance and established a single mathematical formula for calculating annual percentage rate across the Union; b) to follow up the Green Paper on mortgage credit; c) to consider the possibility of harmonizing legal procedures for the recovery of late payments. 3. Converting consumer information into consumer power. Parliament called on the Commission a) to develop the network of cross-border information centres providing free advice to consumers; b) to take measures to improve the systematic integration of consumer representatives into decision-making structures; c) to propose a product safety network to coordinate action in this field. 4. Promoting a sustainable food policy. Parliament called on the Commission to support the establishment of an independent food safety agency at European level. It also pointed out that it was essential to implement as soon as possible the new European legislation on labelling of foodstuffs. Consumers should be guaranteed full information including the clear indication of possible health risks. With regard to European products which are considered unsafe and are marketed in developing countries, the report advocated a strengthening of controls so that gradually these products become subject to the same health, safety and environmental standards as apply to those sold on the territory of the European Union. Double standards should be eliminated and fair-trade relations should be promoted.