Consumer policy: action plan 1999-2001

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Without debate, the European Parliament adopted the resolution by Phillip Whitehead (PSE,UK) on the communication from the Commission on a Consumer Policy Action Plan 1999-2001. The report welcomes the proposed action plan for the next three years and calls on the Commission to report regularly to the Parliament on its implementation. The Parliament calls on the EU institutions to implement the Treaty obligation for a high level of consumer protection as a necessary condition of future, new or amended directives and requests the Commission to develop a systematic methodology of appraisal to meet this requirement. The Commission is called on, in particular, to: - engage in serious negotiations with the US amied at establishing a common GMO-free and organic food line; - put up the strongest possible defence of the interests of European Union consumers in any pending or future disputes in the WTO; - outline a clear strategy for future negotiations within the WTO in order to guarantee the effectiveness of EU consumer policy vis-à-vis WTO rules; - propose a global, horizontal approach to the protection of minors from potentially dangerous content (excessive violence, pornography) and to include this in its action plan; - take greater pains to ensure that the directives are transposed into national law by the Member States; - ensure that the applicant states fully adopt and enforce EU consumer protection legislation. The Parliament welcomes the Commission's intention to improve consumer representation at all levels from its present unsatisfactory composition and asks the Commission to put inplace measures to improve the systematic integration of consumer representatives into a transparent and open decision-making process, in particular in the areas of telecommunications, the information society, food, financial services and transport. The report calls for effective integration of the Commission's own Consumer Committee along with national consumer organisations and regulatory agencies in enforcing EU legislation. In order to ensure a high level of health and safety for EU consumers, the Parliament calls on the Commission to: - continue to take the utmost heed of the serious consequences of the BSE crisis for food safety and consumer health; - complete its review of existing legislation on labelling; - establish a Product Safety Network as part of the review of the General Product Safety Directive (92/59/EEC); - take action concerning the safety of child-care articles; - take action in removing phthalates from PVC toys intended for babies and young children; - integrate consumer concerns in CAP reform; - develop a multi-disciplinary approach to tackling antibiotic-resistance (animal feedingstuffs); - ensure that countries with the laxest standards do not determine the outcome of the WTO negotiations; - submit a fundamental revision of the directive on the freedom of access to information on the environment, thereby ensuring improved access to information on damage to the environment and its effects on consumers. With regard to full respect for the economic interests of EU consumers, the Parliament deplores the excessive conversioncharges that banks are enforcing on consumers and calls on the Commission to undertake regular monitoring of the situation and to take action where necessary. It calls on the Commission to encourage specific indication of high quality standards, particularly in the craft industry sector (brand marks, labels and certificates, etc.). The report proposes that consideration be given to the idea of a standard model bill which could briefly indicate the bodies responsible for solving cross-border disputes as well as certain aspects of payment. Finally, it calls on the Commission to lay down mandatory regulations on the laibility of service providers which would apply only to certain services (installation and building services, medical services and information technology services).