Consumers: general framework for Community activities 1999-2003

1998/0028(COD) - 16/09/2005 - Follow-up document

This Commission Communication gives an overview of Directive 283/1999, which sets up a general framework of activities to promote consumer interests and to ensure a high level of consumer protection. The Report gives an overview of the Directive's implementation covering the years 2002/03. The total commitment appropriations (including EFTA contribution) for 2002 amounted to about EUR 22.5 million and to EUR 23 million for 2003. In 2002 more than 95% of the appropriations were utilised and in 2003 more than 99%.

As far as the Protection of Consumer Health and Safety is concerned, expenditure in the field of scientific advice concerns indemnities for the Scientific Committees and preparatory scientific studies. In 2002/03 a total number of 540 meetings took place, resulting in the adoption of 381 reports and scientific opinions, at a cost of about EUR 1.7 million. The kind of work carried out included on-the-spot checks of national control systems in the food, veterinary and phytosanitary sectors by the Food and Veterinary Office (FVO). Other actions funded under this Directive include, amongst others, validating test methods to detect BSE and the preparatory work for a Community Reference Laboratory on analytical methods for the authorisation of feed additives. Other activities funded under the terms of the Directive include a database of unfair contractual terms, a survey of fees for cross border payments in retail banking across the EU and a survey of mortgage credit suppliers to assess the uptake and effectiveness of the Voluntary Code of Conduct on Pre-contractual Information for Home Loans.

Under the Education and Information heading, the Report notes that the health and consumer policy web site was revised in 2002/03 with visits to the site peaking at 2 774 321 in October 2003. The Consumer Voice Newsletter was sent out to over 10 000 subscribers. Total expenditure for technical support including web site, e-mail service and newsletter added up to around EUR 1 million, with an additional EUR 72 500 spent on print publications. Other forms of expenditure included an evaluation of EU food labelling legislation, the European Young Consumer Competition, the development of on-line interactive education tools, supporting 15 European Consumer Centres Networks and funding workshops for consumer association experts. Grants for operating costs were awarded to the European Association for the Co-ordination of Consumer Representatives in Standardisation (ANEC) and to the European Consumers' Organisation (BEUC). In terms of financing for specific projects, the Report notes that in 2002/03, a total of 44 specific projects were co-financed, with national consumer organisations and NGO's being the main beneficiaries. The number of applications, approved projects and the total amount committed has stabilised. Noteworthy is the fact that the average size of projects has decreased though the administrative cost has increased – this being largely thanks to the need for external evaluators.

To conclude, the Report states that expenditure in 2002/03 was more policy driven that in previous years (1999-2001). The Commission attributes this new direction to the clear objective and more coherent approach of the Consumer Policy Strategy 2002- 2006. Actions to build a knowledge-base for policy making has increased in importance and efforts to improve the efficiency of the European Consumer Centres and Extra-Judicial networks has led to the merging of the two into a single structure. This allows them to focus their activities more on cross-border consumer problems. In addition the specific projects appear to be more effective as a means to support national consumer organisations. Lastly, new instruments to support consumer associations such as capacity building actions will, in future, be given a greater attention.

Total amounts of commitments are for 2002 EUR 20.984.847 and for 2003 EUR 22.943.787.

- Commission actions: 2002 -16.240.612/ 2003 - 17.883.792
- European organisations: 2002 - 1.995.394/ 2003 - 2.265.290
- Specific Projects: 2002 - 2.748.841/ 2003 - 2.794.705