Basic information

2004/2157(INI) INI - Own-initiative procedure	Procedure completed
The promotion and protection of consumers' interests in the new Member States **Subject** 4.60 Consumers' protection in general	

Key players

European Parliament

Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
IMCO Internal Market and Consumer Protection	KRISTENSEN Henrik Dam (PSE)	27/09/2004

Key events

Date	Event	Reference	Summary
28/10/2004	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
22/11/2005	Vote in committee		Summary
30/11/2005	Committee report tabled for plenary	A6-0378/2005	
13/12/2005	Debate in Parliament		
15/12/2005	Decision by Parliament	T6-0526/2005	Summary
15/12/2005	Results of vote in Parliament		
15/12/2005	End of procedure in Parliament		

Technical information

Procedure reference	2004/2157(INI)
Procedure type	INI - Own-initiative procedure
Procedure subtype	Initiative
Legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 55
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	IMCO/6/23426

Documentation gateway

European Parliament

Document type	Committee	Reference	Date	Summary
Amendments tabled in committee		PE364.756	21/10/2005	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A6-0378/2005	30/11/2005	
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T6-0526/2005	15/12/2005	Summary

The promotion and protection of consumers' interests in the new Member States

2004/2157(INI) - 15/12/2005 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Henrik Dam **KRISTENSEN** (PES, DK) on the promotion and protection of consumers' interests in the new Member States. The resolution was adopted by 512 votes in favour to 22 against with 10 abstentions. (Please see the summary of 22/11/2005.) Parliament stated that the internal market would not function properly if consumers are less well protected in some Member States than they are in others. A high common level of consumer protection across the Member States will promote cross-border transactions and will ensure that consumers take advantage of the internal market.

Legislative framework: Whilst the new Member States have a good record in terms of transposition of the acquis communautaire, Community legislation must also be effectively applied in practice and enforced. Parliament called for the strengthening of market surveillance structures in the new Member States so that products and services circulating on their Strengthening consumer protection for children and other vulnerable groups should be a particular focus. Parliament also called on the Commission to help improve the performance of, and coordination between, supervisory bodies in both the old and the new Member States, including cross-border mutual cooperation between them.

Consumer culture: The creation of a "consumer culture" based on a higher level of consumer awareness is essential for better enforcement and application of the existing legal framework. Parliament underlined the vital role that consumer organisations, consumer protection authorities and business organisations play in strengthening this consumer culture, and called on the Commission to draw up a specific strategy to encourage the development of a consumer culture in the new Member States.

Consumer organisations: The Commission is asked to assess the possibility of defining parameters at Community level for what is meant by a "representative consumer association or organisation", to ensure that consumers in the EU are properly and independently represented. The old Member States must continue their commitment to support consumer organisations, and new Member States are asked to ensure that consumer organisations, which are representative, are adequately financed, whilst still having their independence. The requirements fixed by the Commission for obtaining grant support are strict and difficult to meet for consumer organisations in the new Member States and the Commission is asked to examine whether these requirements could not be made more flexible, including whether the work of volunteers could be regarded as being part of the financial contribution. Parliament emphasised that strong and independent consumer organisations provide the basis for an effective consumer policy, and felt that individual consumer organisations must be strengthened financially, and objective and publicly available assessments of the quality of their performance must be produced.

Business organisations: Parliament encouraged business organisations in the new Member States to work closely with consumer organisations and to establish voluntary standards of ethical business practices with transparent and effective enforcement procedures, consumer and business educational programmes and fair and effective Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) processes. The new Member States should encourage and support these initiatives.

Consumer protection authorities: The lack of a well-functioning administration in the field of consumer protection, as seen in some of the new Member States, is a serious obstacle to securing a high level of consumer protection. Member States' consumer protection authorities, business organisations and consumer organisations should work in close cooperation to promote consumer protection, since the smooth running of the market is in the interests of all parties concerned.

Consumer information: Parliament made various suggestions about providing information to consumers. Consumer awareness should be given a higher priority in school curricula throughout Europe, and start-up funds be made available to those centres that provide consumers with cross-border information between old and new Member States, particularly in border regions. New Member States must strengthen the provision of information to consumers and businesses regarding their rights and the existing legal framework on consumer policy, in particular by putting in place user-friendly web portals as well as awareness-raising campaigns, surveys, conferences, and information points using national and regional networks.

Dispute resolution: Parliament called on the Commission and the new Member States to extend the European Consumer Centres Network (ECC-Net) by involving independent consumer organisations in order to provide consumers with information on available ADR schemes, as well as legal advice and practical help in pursuing complaints by these means. Parliament suggested that the Commission undertake a comprehensive study on the existence and functioning of ADR organisations to identify the need for other initiatives and support at EU level, which could supplement ECC-Net and which could also be better targeted at the specific situation of the new Member States.