



Event	Intergroup meeting on the Health and Consumer Programme 2007-2013
Author	Intergroup Secretariat
Date and place	22 June 2005, room ASP 1E3, European Parliament, Brussels
Organised by	BEUC and EPHA
Notes	For the list of participants, speeches and background documents, go to: http://www.hecointergroup.org

The Chairperson of this meeting, Ms Pilar Ayuso Gonzalez, opened the session by introducing the newly constituted Health and Consumer Intergroup and its elements: more than 100 members, terms of reference, bureau, two co-chairs, external Secretariat and website.

Ms Ayuso put to vote the approval of the members of the Bureau and the two Co-Chairs. The MEPs present approved them by unanimity.

Mr Fahy transmitted the support of Health and Consumer Protection Commissioner Markos Kyprianou, who considers this joint Health and Consumer Intergroup as an extremely valuable opportunity to dialogue with the European Parliament. In the same line, the joint Programme demonstrates the potential synergies between health and consumer issues.

Presentation by Nick Fahy and David Mair, DG SANCO:

The programme foresees some common health and consumer objectives: the protection of citizens; informed and educated consumers; the integration of health and consumer policy into all EU policies. It also contains separate consumer and health policy objectives and action strands.

The consumer objectives are to ensure an equally high level of protection for all EU consumers and to increase the capacity of consumer to defend their own interests. There are four action strands: better understanding of consumers and markets; better consumer protection regulation; better enforcement, monitoring and redress; better informed and educated consumers.

Secretariat of the intergroup

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Health and Consumer Intergroup

The health objectives are to protect citizens against health threats, to promote health, to reduce diseases, to help national health systems and to improve health information. There are three action strands: deliver effective responses to threats; prevent diseases; improve patient mobility and synergies between national health systems.

With regard to the programme's technical structure, it aims to achieve maximum flexibility by taking the "best of both worlds" by combining the two existing programmes. The total budget is 1,2 billion euros, a significant increase compared to the previous programmes.

Following the Commission presentation, both EPHA and BEUC had the opportunity to comment on the new Programme.

Ms Tamsin Rose (EPHA), speaking from a health organisation, welcomed the Programme for its expanded remit and significantly greater resources, but reminded the Commission that it was about delivering health improvements. Regarding the budget, Ms Rose compared the 13 euro cents per person per year of the previous Health Programme with the 800 euro per cow per year of the Common Agricultural Policy. In this respect, she welcomed the increased budget for health that this new Programme allocates. However, Ms Rose expressed doubts about this joint Programme, as there are times when the interests of individual consumers and the public wellbeing are in conflict, and referred to the broad health inequalities that existed in the EU. Ms Rose commented the content of the Programme and reminded the lack of reference to gender health and the need to have a closer integration between the issues raised in the explanatory text and the legal text of the Programme.

Ms Willemien Bax (BEUC), from the consumer protection perspective, thanked MEPs for their support in creating this Intergroup. Regarding the Health and Consumer Programme, she welcomed the ambitious Programme, and stated it would give more visibility to and mainstream both areas. However she pointed out that although the funding had increased, the budget still only amounts to less than 10 eurocents per consumer per year. Regarding the content of the Programme, Ms Bax underlined the importance of strengthening consumer organisations in new Member States and expressed the need for special funding for the particular needs of these organisations. With regard to the European consumer institute foreseen by the European Commission, she recognised the need for more research on what drives consumers and the internal market, but was concerned by the fact that such consumer institutes at national level compete with national consumer organisations. Finally, she reminded the Commission that benchmarking and measuring of consumer protection was very important.

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Ms Ayuso opened the floor to questions from Members of the Parliament:

Mr Andreas Schwab (EPP-ED, D) asked why the Commission had issued a joint Health and Consumer Programme when previously we had two separate programmes. He also expressed the need to find reasonable solutions for funding of consumer and health policy, but not talk about cents.

Mr John Bowis (EPP-ED, UK) mentioned the need to put the funding in perspective and warned that the new EU agencies should be effective. He insisted that one must not confuse consumers and patients, underlining that there are common interests but also separate ones. He also highlighted the need to include men's health when dealing with gender issues, which are not addressed properly by this new Programme, and he asked if there was any intention of including health impact assessments required in the preparation of all legislation.

Mr Giovanni Berlinguer (PES, IT) mentioned health inequalities, and said that despite the increase in the level of health of the European population, health inequalities are even broader in the EU.

Mr David Hammerstein Mintz (Greens, ES) spoke about environment and health, and mentioned issues such as indoor air quality and children's health, for which there are no standards at EU level. He also said that if the EU wanted to regain citizens' trust, having high objectives for health and consumer rights can be a tool to achieve this, and underlined that health and consumer rights do go together.

Ms Linda McAvan (PES, UK), who should be the socialist shadow rapporteur for the Health and Consumer Programme for the ENVI Committee, referred to common issues for health and consumers, such as food and nutrition, and expressed her concerns about the Commission asking for more money and not ensuring that this money would be allocated to the right objectives. She also insisted on the need to focus more on inequalities across the EU, especially in the new member states.

Mr Nick Fahy stated that a Commission proposal is never perfect and hoped that the European Parliament would improve it during the discussion process. He also recognised the need to take all these issues into account in other EU policies. He underlined that an integrated programme does not mean that health and consumer policy are the same issues: there are common areas where there is overlap, but also two separate health and consumer areas. He also pointed out that a combined impact assessment for health and consumer protection would provide for more leverage as both these policies are not given enough importance. Regarding the budget, he agreed that it was insufficient, but that it reflects the situation in the member states. He clarified that the recently created European Centre for Disease Control has its own budget, outside the Programme.

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Mr David Mair considered having a joint health and consumer protection programme as a positive move. He also underlined there would a role for NGOs to play in all strands of the consumer policy objectives.

Ms Tamsin Rose thanked the valuable comments of the MEPs present, and answering to some of the questions raised by MEPs, she stressed the idea that it is about the impact that this Programme has and not about the money that it is allocated to it. Given that the internal market is the EU's most powerful mechanism to affect individual health, if this mechanism actually contributed towards health, then we would really be able to say that Europe is good for your health.

Ms Ayuso closed the meeting by announcing that the next meeting would be held on 6 July 2005 from 16h30 to 17h30 in room SDM-S3 in the European Parliament in Strasbourg and would cover the 7th Research Framework Programme.

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