

Belgium European Consumers' Organization (BEUC)

Consumers on the European stage

BEUC was created on 6 March 1962 by the consumer organisations of Belgium, Luxembourg, France, the Netherlands, Italy and Germany. After working together for a number of years, these organisations decided to create a European association, based in Brussels, right at the heart of Community policy.

BEUC was a pioneer, one of the first lobbying organisations to set up base in the European capital in a bid to influence the decision-making process. Many others followed, and the number of lobbyists rose exponentially to the present-day figure of over 15,000. Most of these lobbying organisations are there to protect commercial, industrial and farming interests.

While these groups are entitled to put forward their points of view, the intense pressure brought to bear on decision-makers highlights the need for BEUC to have a strong presence on the Brussels scene. To do this, we receive funding from our members in addition to a grant from the European Union. This enables BEUC to continue the task we have been pursuing for the past 46 years, of promoting basic consumers rights. These are the rights to:

- Safety
- Information
- Choice
- Representation
- Redress
- Education
- Satisfaction of basic needs
- A clean environment

BEUC's strength: our members

Just like the EU itself, BEUC's membership has grown, and in 2009 our members include 42 well respected, independent national consumer organisations from some thirty European countries (EU, EEA and applicant countries). BEUC acts as a sort of "embassy" for these organisations in Brussels and our main task is to represent our members and defend the interests of all Europe's

consumers. BEUC is acknowledged as a trustworthy representative by both decision-makers and opponents alike, thanks in particular to the collective skills, knowledge and expertise of our member organisations. Indeed it is they who decide on BEUC's policy objectives, priorities and options at our twice-yearly General Assemblies. BEUC is fortunate to benefit directly from their experience and day-to-day contacts with consumers at grass root level. What is more, anyone dealing with BEUC can be sure that the position we present has received the unanimous backing of the most representative national consumer organisations. Through BEUC, these organisations are able to speak out with one voice.

BEUC investigates all European Union decisions, programmes and developments liable to affect consumers. BEUC promotes the development of a Single Market that truly works in the interests of consumers. BEUC takes the view that the relationship between consumers and suppliers of goods and services should be based on fairness and should strive to create the right conditions for consumers to make independent decisions. BEUC's work is also based on respect for human dignity, and we endeavour to pay special heed to the needs of the most vulnerable consumers, such as children, the elderly and the disadvantaged. Lastly, BEUC focuses on social and environmental aspects and on responsible (or "ethical") consumption.

On the side of the institutions

In addition to lobbying activities, BEUC also formally represents consumers within the decision-making process. BEUC has a seat on the European Consumer Consultative Group (ECCG) and experts from our member organisations participate in various European Commission advisory groups.

In the European Parliament, BEUC has established good relations with MEPs, notably via the Health and Consumer Intergroup, for which BEUC provides the secretariat jointly with the European Public Health Alliance (EPHA). The aim of the Intergroup is to bring together MEPs, experts from industry, and consumer and public health organisations, to discuss issues on the European Parliament agenda.

Outside Europe, BEUC maintains close contacts with our "big sister", the international consumer organisation, Consumers International (CI). BEUC also plays an active role in the TransAtlantic Consumer Dialogue (TACD), which is designed to promote contacts and exchanges

with our colleagues in the US. Our aim, in close collaboration with Consumers International, is to reinforce consumerism and to get the voice of European consumers heard at world level.

Domains:

Consumer safety

Vision:

Making the European consumers' voice heard

Mission:

The organization aims to defend and promote the interests of European consumers - citizens as purchasers or users of goods and services - in the EU policy process. Drawing on collective knowledge and experience, the BEUC team and our members together develop policy positions that form the basis of their campaigning.

BEUC contributes expertise on issues that have direct economic or legal consequences for consumers or that impact consumers' health, safety and environment, and seeks to maximise the benefits of the Single European Market and minimise potential risks for the consumer, focusing increasingly on matters of quality and on social and ethical issues.

Objectives:

To campaign on all issues at EU level that may affect consumers, in particular integration of consumer policy into all EU policies, food safety and unfair commercial practices.

Scope and areas of interest:

Health & Environment issues

Safety issues (revision of European policies and Directives and sustainable development; road safety and integrated product policy –IPP)

Structure of the organisation

Type of members: National Consumers' organisations

Main projects in the field in the last 3 years:

Awareness raising campaigns

Relevant linkages with "Actions for a Safer Europe" priorities:

CONSUMER POLICY STRATEGY 2007-2013

This is a position paper from BEUC the European Consumers Organisation setting out some proposals, recommendations and comments on the Commission's proposed

Consumer Policy strategy 2007-2013.

The Commission has already begun to develop proposals for this strategy, in parallel with inter-institutional discussions on the financial perspective 2007-2013. It is timely therefore to make this submission now but we stress that we expect to have many more points to make when we have more information on what is proposed, and as the proposed strategy is developed and discussed in Commission, Council and Parliament.

In general, European consumer policy has to be recognized to be an important factor for both the Lisbon strategy and the European strategy for sustainable development. Increasing consumers' willingness to actively engage for sustainability with their purchasing decisions will allow European business to be both economically successful and socially and ecologically responsible.

Also, there are a number of specific issues that we would expect would have a prominent place in the proposed strategy. Without implying an order of priority, these include:

1. Review of the consumer acquis.
2. Enforcement of consumer law at national level and cross-border.
3. Development of a research capacity for consumer oriented research.
4. Regular Reporting Mechanism on Consumption and Consumer Protection in the EU Market
5. A new impetus to improve the integration of consumer policy into other policies, including the establishment of clear benchmarks against which any progress in this direction can be measured
6. Improving consumer input in specific sectors, such as transport, financial services, energy, international trade/WTO etc
7. A major effort to improve and "universalise" redress mechanisms for consumers throughout the single market and more widely.

8. Strengthening (not multiplying) independent consumer organisations, especially but not exclusively in the new member states.
9. Services of General Interest, and including ongoing research and monitoring of the impact of liberalization followed by corrective action where needed.
10. Services Consumer rights need to be strengthened across the entire service sector, including contractual rights, redress and issues of safety and liability.
11. Nutrition, or more generally a campaign to promote healthier choices or to promote an environment that facilitates or encourages healthy choices.

