

The Consumerism and Consumer Protection Policies in the European Community

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Abstract. *In the modern economy, the efficiency of the markets generally guarantees an effective superiority of the consumers, that unjustly consider them to be affected by large-scale diffusing of the consumption process, but which in reality are not more than the free choice expression of the consumers, practically of their own autonomy. Starting from these aspects, the authors have aimed, after a short presentation of the consumer protection policies and the origins and evolution of the consumption phenomenon within the EU, to identify and analyze the critical elements with impacts over these policies, but also the first steps made by the institutions and legislation of the states that make the European Community. Our attention has been mainly focused on the future strategies programmed by the EC, highlighting the support and harmony encouragement necessity between the national legislations of the EU member states, in order to answer first of all to the more pressing demand, on behalf of the citizens, to have laws as simple and clear as possible, and therefore to be protected. Therefore, consumer protection becomes, from an objective mediated through individual interventions of the Community Institutions (inspired by the harmonization wish of the national legislation afferent to the EU member states regarding economical and commercial relations) one of the main intervention policies of the Community Organisms.*

Keywords: consumer protection policy; community organisms; consumerism; the consumer.

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1. Introduction

“Consumerism” is a term invented to define a specific analysis category that studies the phenomenon that came up with mass production development and consumption expansion. As long as for a great part of the population the consumption was anchored just for surviving, taking into consideration the restrained income disposed of, the analysis of the activity regarding the consumption had a minor priority, also reduced being the attention accorded to the quality of the products and services. The consumption has many forms and interpretation, one of these referring to the appearance of new status need, rights and common interest carriers. By these characteristics, the consumer’s face as a social subject has gained a raised importance, even to evoking the way from the consumer’s face in relation with the economical revolution. This evokes furthermore citizenship rights (keep in mind the relation with the public services, school, care services and medical assistance, public administration), and can make a subject or in the contrary, a market object, if trained consciously it can aspire to the role of market referee, especially if it is involved in associations and democratic movements, it can orientate the economical, social and civil development or he can resign to a directed subject role.

The active conscious aware consumer role can be important, especially from a sustainable and solid development point of view. We are talking about a phenomenon that until a few years ago was very little known, but which in present involves the companies that aim to presenting themselves as being modern and consider the client as being the primary resource, and that accept or better said search for the confrontation with the exigent client.

2. The origin and evolution of the consumerism phenomenon. What it is, where, how and for what is it born?

The consumerism phenomenon is born in the USA, at the beginning of the 20th century, where in the year 1906 the first mass protests were so powerful that they constrained the federal government to approve a very important set of rules, which imposed a control, not very restrictive though, to the industry at that time. The first organized experience regarding consumerism lead to the foundation of the magazine called “Research Bulletin”, that published the results of the tests regarding large consume products.

Later, in the year 1928, the Consumer Union was founded, an active and present association of the USA and Canada. This association, by an own magazine, informs its subscribers about the news regarding goods and services on the market, offering the consumers the possibility to know more profoundly

the product they wish to acquire. The American consumerism had a great sustainer: J. F. Kennedy, who proclaimed the five fundamental rights of the consumer: the right to health, safety, economical defense, legal defense and representation. In Europe, barely in the 50s, the English government was involved on this front; the English government and then the Dutch one considered necessary to give the consumers the opportunity to feel their own voice, creating a protection organism, called the Consumer Advisor Council. In England, such as in the USA, a magazine is started to be published, the Shopper's Guide, which supplies to the consumers critical information regarding various products, comparing them among themselves by rigorous tests, verified and for the first time a consumer-favorable service is offered, to obtain rewards if cheated. In the same period of time, following the example of Denmark and England, more countries started recognize the social importance of this problem: France, Switzerland, Belgium, Germany and Netherland but without Italy, and found together administrative control organisms in favor of the consumers, which formed the sub-layer for further development of a more complex legislation.

The advanced capitalist societies have lead in parallel to form monopolist and oligopolistic structures, discovering new figures, diverse from the traditional social categories, and carriers of new interests and rights: the consumers.

As Fabris recalled at the end of the 50s, a large scale diffusing of the conviction that a new balance was reached, a new society model towards whom all the countries aimed, the *mass society* model, characterized by a grow in standardization, making a homogenous market, but mostly towards a cultural and value unit. The protagonist of this new social order, defined not randomly a consumption society, is the consumer – the main subject in medium and long-term predictions, in the context of relatively slow but predictable changes. This analysis was, instead, based on a “linear” vision of the changes and the cause/effect relation, underestimating the complexity of the existing system and the turbulences this on-growing complexity would have brought in the social development of future periods of time.

The development of technologies that has lead to the increase of the access of a subject multitude allowed an increased liberalization and a diversification of the information sources. As Vanni Cadeluppi states: “*the tomorrow consumer will be more lay, because he will be more unpredictable and unfaithful regarding his decisions on brands and products' privacy*”.

In the same time, the consumption has gained a raised social relevance as a mean of individual branding, according to a reasoning that says that the products tend to reflect a new values system. In the last years, the relation between the consumer and the company has changed, by a conscious raise of

the consumer role importance compared to the company; the new consumer is more exigent, selective and mature. The raise of its autonomy to the ones that sell goods and services is in the same time the cause and effect of a major sensibility to the quality, to the faithfulness to the strongly-dimensioned brand, and a greater sensibility to the price, that is no longer seen as an independent variable, but as an element over which the pressure of the consumer can have influences. But there, where the reorganization of the market has lead to reduction of the efficacy to choose consumers, the need to give birth to an organization was sensed, that could give a re-balance of the relation between the producers and consumers, leading to the creation of that social phenomenon defined as “consumerism”. By consumerism, we understand that assembly of ideologies regarding social activism, pressure groups (consumer associations) and in general that trend that tries to raise the rights and the consumer’s power in relation to the entities.

3. Consumerism as a social movement

Protecting the consumer is not an invention of our times, as Mayer underlined, the consumer protection legislation – for example against altered food and scale fraud appear even since the Old Testament and the Hammurabi Code. In the 15th and 16th centuries, in Austria, altered milk sellers were constrained to drink the product themselves, while in France, the ones that bought rotten eggs were authorized to throw them at the seller.

But when talking about consumerism, we refer to a well-circumscribed phenomenon, “a social movement that seeks to raise the rights and powers of the one that buys in relation to the one that sells”, says Philip Kother.

Short history of consumerism

Within the activities of the EC, a special attention for the consumer’s protection was developed at the beginning of the 70s, when Chiefs of States and Governments from the 9 member states of the EU have gathered in Paris in October 1972, in order to establish practical decisions, inviting the representatives of the Community Institutions to define an action program capable of consolidating action coordinates in favor of consumer protection. Within this context, some fundamental objectives are remembered, according to article no. 2 of the Rome Treaty, set by the EC, were “to improve constantly the life and work conditions of the citizens” that were part of the community, and the assumed engagement was to “promote harmonious development of the economical activity, by a continuous, balanced and stable expansion to improve faster and faster the living conditions”.

It is important and proper to signal that articles no. 85 and 82 of the Treaty, even if referring to competition, could be extended for consumer protection, as far as offering the EC the power to dispose of laws that could establish the limits of “production and markets” or “development of the technologies that operated in spite of the consumers”. Therefore, after these confrontations begun, the competent institutions could be given the initiation of consumer protection policies, as a new and essential dimension that over the years would influence (and further on till today) the assembly of the sector policies that contribute to economical and social development of the EU and that expresses its particularities to other community policies. As a consequence of the decisions made within the Paris reunion, first measures were taken to develop a consumer policy at a community level: creating a environment and consumer protection service, creating a Consultation Committee of the Consumers near the Commission composed of organizations that represented the consumers and experts designated by the Committee and a preliminary program of the EC for a protection and informing consumers policy.

The prior plan for the longest period, 2007-2013, that will be analyzed more profoundly along the work, is based on an ambitious existent program substitution program, for the consumer policy sector, by an unique action plan in what regards health and protection of the consumers, wanting to work based on a common synergy that will give better results.

The greater part of the European policies, and the one destined to the consumers, is the subject of permanent upgrades, being in the center of certain consultations on all levels, from the competent institutions to civil societies, passing to the directly involved associations. Until now, the EU has legislated, with specific references for consumer protection: food product labeling; misleading advertisement; safety of the cosmetics, toys and general safety of products; door-to-door sales; trans- country sales; long-distance sales; multi-properties; electronic sales; abusive clauses of long-distance sales and financial sales contracts; voyage contracts; product guarantees; protection of personal data etc.

Almost all the interventions that create jurisprudence regarding consumer protection are included in the Community Directive, in which the perspective of an approach of a national law obliges the member states to reach the aimed objective, but leaving at their choice a certain application flexibility of the dispositions. In the same time, the consumer-citizens must be in the center of a sensitizing campaign that may allow them to become economically responsible subjects, aware especially in what regards the rights and obligations in collecting opportunities that the unique market proposes; knowing the

community directives actually means knowing the minimum protection level a state must guarantee.

In what regards the new states that have entered the EU between 2004 and 2007, a conformation of these community rules is tried, even if in certain cases it has not gone up to direct upgrades, because structures and control organisms were missing to be able to protect the consumer. A special attention is wished to be granted on behalf of the EU along with the adoption of the directives regarding consumer protection in this countries.

3.1. Consumerism culture in France

France's policy regarding the consumers has, as a main objective, their permission to be responsible economical players, sufficiently informed and capable to act, and install relatively trustworthy and transparent in the market relations. In what regards the protection of the economical interests of the consumers, the regulations about the consumption phenomenon has, as a purpose, supplying the possibility to the consumers to make aware choices, as a consequence of an objective informing, and to protect them in the case that imbalances can be verified in relation to the entities. These two objectives contribute to determine a healthy competition on the market, in benefit of the consumers.

In the last 20 years, the upgrade and adequacy of the legislative area and regulation has been signaled, in order to protect the fundamental rights of the consumers. An active support has been given by the independent association to allow it to play an active partner role with the public powers and professionals.

In France, the objectives of the consumption policies have been fixed by the Ministry of the respective sector, along with other governmental departments. The governmental actions were made about:

- excessive indebt degree;
- new technologies, especially in electronic commerce and cellular phones;
- general safety of the products.

The public/administration structures

The "Conseil National de la Consommation" was established, in order to allow confrontation and consultation between representatives of the consumers' interests and representatives of the companies, public services and public authority interests, all the situations being focused on problems about consumption.

This organism is presided by the competent Ministry, and supplies consultancy regarding the legislative and normative problems that could have

an impact over consumption; it is made of an equal number of representatives both on behalf of the consumers and companies; it is consulted for almost any interest consumption subject and votes the decisions made by the workgroups of the Council and for the legislative projects or consumption regulations. It is the only national structure, the other ones operating nationally or in specific sectors.

L'Institut National de la Consommation – INC is the organization in which the consumer representatives address to prepare the discussions in the Council, aided by the technical consultancy of this institute.

Established in the year 1966 as a public entity with an administrative characteristic, after the 1990 reform it became a public entity with an economical and commercial characteristic, making own compared evidences and publishing an own magazine addressed to the consumers.

The General Direction of Competition, Consumption and Fraud Repelling (DGCCRF) is an administrative structure responsible of upgrading the consumers' political program upgrade. This organism is a direction of the Ministry of Economy, Finances and Industry, tasked with the market control and upgrade of the consumption policy; it also is tasked with national cooperation, having relations with a number of the world countries.

The consumers association

In France, there is a large number of consumer associations that all operate within the protection area, other exclusively in specific domains. In the year 1988, the French law allowed the right to summon in court only the known associations; in order to obtain recognition, these must have had as a status “protecting the interests of the consumer” and be truly representative, that is to have operated at least a year, pursue the consumer protection objective in a public and effective way and have at least 10,000 members; in present, only 20 such associations are recognized, the most important being “Union Federale des Consommateurs”, established in the year 1951 by public authorities contribution.

Mediation, reconciliation and arbitration

Still in France, various public structures were created, to solve out of court the disputes that involved the consumers. The mediator on behalf of the republic (Mediateur de la Republique), institution established in 1973, helps the citizens that are in conflict with the administrations or the companies that supply public services. Since December 1994, in France have become active special commissions on consumption disputes (Commission de reglement des litiges de consommation - CRLC), that are still in experimental phase and to which the consumers can accede free of charge and easy.

Another governmental structure, existing since 1990, is Commission de Surendettement, near Banque de France, established for the ones that cannot pay own debts and need a friendly way. It is necessary to recall of Boites Postales 5000, introduced in the year 1977, with offices present in around 70 departments, operating under the authority and competence of the “Direction departementale de la concurrence de la consommation et de la repression des fraudes”. In the great part of the cases, initial mediation has a favorable result, being accompanied by reward payback regarding made damage, in favor of the consumers that have made the complaint. Along with the public entities, private companies have created own mediation and conciliation structures.

3.2. Consumer protection policy in Germany

In Germany, the consumer protection policy is considered an integrated part of the general economic policy decisions. In fact, the federal government defines, by the annual economical report, the political orientations that are to be applied for this domain.

The report regarding salvation of the German Market (Bericht zur Zukunftssicherung des Standortes Deutschland) expects suppression of the regulations contrary to the market laws.

After the unification, the actions were concentrated on making consumer organizations of new Lander, and then on general informing on its rights and the offered possibilities the market economy gives to the consumers.

In Germany, more activities are taking place for consumption monitoring by:

- The statistic Wiesbaden bureau – a German federal cartel bureau, which is responsible in what regards competition. Since January 1998, there is a new governmental organism for telecom and postal problems; regarding the food products offer there are some surveillance organisms (Lebensmittelueberwachungsaeamter); for disloyal competition, there are the consumer organizations especially.
- The international cooperation is very developed – for consumption goods it is proper to mention the information exchanges regarding harming products, for food products the bases of cooperation installed in the Food Code (Codex Alimentarius) being set. This cooperation exists even in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, some organizations raising the contracts on an European and world level, and which participates by workgroups to upgrading the PECO projects (Central and Western Europe countries) and the 3rd world countries.

The Federal Ministry of Economy has made an “Eurotelephone” in order to allow the consumers to inform themselves free of charge about the intern market and demand information about community regulations over personal problems.

Certain organizations estimate that the EU remains, for the greater majority of the Germans an unknown figure, rather negative, and for that reason the initiatives of the Commission in favor of the consumers are not known, and the consumer does not perceive as such the effects of the community regulations made for him. This means that, according to the article no. 153 of the Rome Treaty, Germany does not consider as necessary that for any specific action that the EC may/should propose to sustain and, if necessary, to complete the policy of the member states in favor of the consumers, opposing to the take over by the Committee of actions in domains that are not mentioned in article no. 153 of the Treaty.

3.3. Consumerism policy in Spain

Spain is no different to other European member countries, taking into account its wish to improve:

- legislation, aimed to create authentic consumer rights;
- juridical protection;
- product and services quality;
- education;
- consumer representation;
- competence condition and consumer choice possibility.

In the last years, strategic activity plans were elaborated, regarding the protection policy of the consumers, which were approved in the Sector Conference of the Consumers, making the base in realizing a homologous policy within the national territory. The main responsible administrative structure for this program is the Health and Consumption Ministry. The mid term action program is presented for approval in the Sector Conference of the Consumers, to which participate the Minister of Health and Consumption and the independent community advisers, the Consume Cooperation Commission made of the General Direction of Consumption of the independent Communities and the National Consumption Institute tasked with its appliance.

The Spanish legislation authorizes the consumers to participate, by their own representatives, to more than over 50 consultation organisms, dependent of public organisms. Besides the Consumption Institute (INC), they participate to all the work meetings where aspects that can affect or interest the consumers or subscribers are examined.

Within the INC association registry, a total number of 313 organizations are recorded, of which 11 of the national sphere, which are part of the Consumer and Subscribers' Council (CCU), and must be consulted along with

making general dispositions for the consumers, that make the Real Decreto no. 825/90, modified by the decree no. 221/1995. The CCU is made exclusively of the representatives of the 11 national organisms; Decree no 825.90 establishes that the Ministry of Health and Consumption must supply to the CCU the human resources and materials necessary for its functioning; besides that it establishes that the headquarters of the council will be the one of the INC, and its secretary will be nominated from its workers.

According to the opinion of the Consumers' Observatory, Spain with the INC and France with its DGCCRF, or England with its Office of Fair Trading dispose of a well-defined structure that guarantees constant attention to the consumption of all products and services.

The INC has bi-lateral cooperation with all Latin America, with several Central Europe Countries, the EU countries and sporadically with the North American, Eastern Europe and Asian countries. Within the material interchanges, the most frequent is technical assistance of the workgroups that demand information regarding the arbitrage in what regards consumption, education, market control etc. In what regards protecting health and consumer safety in Spain, applying article no. 51 of the Constitution and Law no. 26/1984 are pursued as such, and through concrete action in what regards safety, especially for:

- the possibility to dispose at any moment of an adequate normative for consumer protection;
- the control of the market as a protection mean and promoting instrument of the quality (surveying and prevention of the product risks, food contamination, control of the critical production and commercialization points);
- self-control advertising, within the companies;
- contribution of the consumers to realizing a health and safety protection legislation;
- tight collaboration between the competent authorities in what regards consumption, by cooperation mechanisms established internationally;
- studies regarding safety and quality of goods and services.

As a consequence of the participation of the consumer organizations, article no. 22 of the Law no. 26/1984 stipulates the participation of the consumer organizations to elaborate the legislation regarding products and services; this participation is made by the CCU.

Spain considers as being necessary to upgrade at a community level all that regards the trans-country advertising and access to justice questions, especially in what regards:

- making international penalties;

- consolidating the initiative capacity on behalf of the consumer associations within the consumption policy of the EC;
- aggressive sale techniques;
- trans-country payments;
- transparency within the banking sector and bank credits.

3.4. The consumerism phenomenon in Belgium

The public/administrative structures and the semi-public organisms

In Belgium, there is a consultation specialized organism: Conseil de la Consommation/Raad Voor Het Verbruik; this council is made of 36 members, half of them being the representatives of the consumers, nominated by the associations they recognize, and the other half being represented by various groups that interest the companies, regarding aspects such as production, distribution, manufacture sector, professionals and agriculture.

The consumer associations are recognized by the Ministry of Economy, which gives the right to the consumers to participate at the discussions. If an association is part of the Consumers Council, it is considered representative and has the right to summon in court as being a recognized association. The task of the council is to supply consultancy to the Belgian government, the impact of the council over the consumerism policies being limited. The large number of divergent interests makes, usually, reaching a unanimous opinion impossible.

According to the Real Decree, that has led to the establishment of the organism on February 20, 1964, it is necessary to collect information regarding the consumer problems, to stimulate research and coordination of the initiatives regarding informing. Unfortunately, the limited resources have not allowed to absolve this task, the greatest part of this being solved by the CRIOC/OIVO.

“Il Centre de Recherches et d’Information des Organisations des Consommateurs/OfldeZoek en Infonnatiecentrum Voor de Verbruikersorganisaties” was founded in 1975 by the desire of the association to obtain support in preparing the reunions of the council. This center is financed almost entirely with the subventions of the Ministry of Economy, being lead by the association of consumers, its task being to supply technical assistance, disposing of three services: documentation, information and education. The CRIOC/OIVO library is the largest in Belgium, also from a book number point of view but also when talking about publications. This organism has its own weekly magazine in which syntheses are published, of the articles of 30 current journals and 16 weekly published of all Europe.

Private associations

In Belgium, there is only one consumer association: La Association des Consommateurs/Verbruikersunie; evermore, the list with the recognized associations includes 17 more names, that is why it is easy to obtain recognition; it is necessary in fact for the associations to be represented in the consumer council. Also, the syndicates and consumption cooperatives are recognized as associations as it happens in other countries, and the family associations and the feminist ones can represent consumers' interests.

La Association des Consommateurs/Verbruikersunie, founded in 1957, has as main purpose pursuing the interests of the consumers. Verbruikersunie collaborates with similar organisms inn Europe, and the results of the tests compared are published in the Test Aankoop/Test Achats reviews; this is a private association and almost exclusively sponsored by income obtained from selling own publications.

Until 1992, this association was based on the copyright law in order to protect the information supplied by comparison tests, in the same year succeeding in convincing the legislative to introduce, in the law against unfaithful competition, privation to inform and consumer protection, the article no. 23, that includes an explicit interdiction regarding public use of the tests made by private associations.

Dispute solving

Verbruikersunie distributes contract-type modules, whose content was negotiated with the suppliers, these modules approved by the Testaankoop/Test Achats being available to acquire long-term consumption goods, as rental contracts for houses, land, furniture etc. Within the same context, Arbitrary Commissions were established, that decide on privation of these problems.

The consumer associations have the right to summon in court the unfaithful commercial practices, but the associations must be recognized, for that being sufficient to be a member in the Consumers Council.

The unfaithful commercial practices concept is interpreted in a more complex way: this refers to the misleading advertisement, incorrect clauses from contracts with consumers and selling methods that authorize tactics based on powerful pressures. Contract violation does not allow the associations to interpret legal actions, because it is not considered as being an unfaithful commercial practice.

3.5. Consumerism culture in Italy

Consumerism culture in Italy started to be diffused late compared to the rest of Europe, as a consequence of poorer legislation in what regards it. In the 50s, in Italy reigned the most total arbitration in what regards consumerism, the observation and evaluation of this situation making the reason that led to the official establishment, on November 25th 1955, of the first Italian Consumer Association (l'Unione Nazionale Consumatori). The Consumers' League is the second Italian experience that is born in 1971. This one starts operating in the presence of a powerful raise of prices, and in parallel in the presence of a greater demand of raise in quality, life condition, environment protection, national solidarity; but the real consumer protection in Italy started working due to the normative of the EC, that, starting with the year 1975, wanted to reorder organically the initiatives in what regarded consumer protection. The communitarian intervention made with the passing of time became more urgent, even if the legislative was busy only with the substantial right to defense of the consumer, leaving to every state the discipline regarding entities and proposed organisms to protect the consumers, competences and prerogatives. The Italian law of July 30th, 1998, no. 281, "Disciplina dei diritti dei consumatori e degli utenti", recognized in the whole Europe for promoting the interests of the consumer and insuring own protection means, making the national referring normative that, besides the fact that establishes the consumer's right, supplies an institutional recognition of the Consumer's Association.

4. Consumer protection policy of the consumers in the EU for the 2007-2013 period

The EC has disposed of a precise strategy for the consumer policy in the EU, extending it in design for a period that starts with 2007 until 2013; dressed as a slogan, the objectives aimed to be reached and consolidated within this period of time refer to: a greater power for the consumers, more welfare for these, along with a more effective protection. Before analyzing these orientation directions of the communitarian policies, it is necessary to highlight which are the objectives the EC has stated:

- first of all, insuring an increased attention over the powers and rights of the consumers, so that they significantly motivate competition;
- second of all, promoting welfare of the consumers in what regards prices, quality, choice, diversity and safety – this aspect certainly being a direct evidence of the existence of correctly functioning markets;

- the third objective regarding consumer protection refers to the fact that these can be subjects exposed to risks and threats, which they cannot face as lone individuals. This objective is a strategic one because, if reached, determines a greater trust of consumer-citizens to the European institutions.

These three macro-objectives, in order to be achieved, need an internal market of the member states, that would be more integrated and effective, especially in what regards piece by piece sale, as long as it is the internal European market that has the necessary potential to become the greatest market of this commerce type, seeing that in present there are 27 mini-markets, all animated according to national coordinates. Therefore, it is necessary to insure a raised consumer protection degree, especially by an improvement of information, consulting and consumer representation.

Another deem aspect to investigate is the trans-border detail commerce, that has received significant increasing signals in the last years: in 2006, 26% of the consumers have made at least an acquisition beyond the borders of the country, in the last 12 months, compared to 12% in 2003. The electronic commerce becomes one of the most popular selling channels in 2006, 27% of the consumers making an acquisition by electronic commerce, but this percentage is raised with only 6% if taking into consideration only trans-border acquisitions. 50% of the subscribers to household internet have acquired by electronic commerce, and only 12% did it across the border. 57% of the detail commerce of the EU sells by electronic commerce, and 49% of these are willing to look across the border in at least an EU country; nevertheless, 29% have already made that. Figures regarding financial services are even more eloquent: 26% of the consumers have acquired a financial service on long-distance, from a seller or supplier in their own country, and only 1.1% over border. These figures demonstrate the necessity to intervene in increasing the trust for the detail commerce consumers on the internal market (*Cf. Strategia per la politica dei consumatori dell'UE 2007-2013, Maggiori*).

It is necessary to recall that not only the European institutions have objectives and hopes, but also the consumers target towards certain force-points such as: an increase of workplaces, a new and more vivacious relation with the EU institutions, these being more than justified aspirations as long as only the Europeans' consumption represents 58% of the EU's GDP, capable to determine a significant economical change, motivating innovation and efficiency.

In conclusion, the obstacles for a real internal own market are numerous, but they can also be of a normative nature, that is why they are not limited only to the lack of trust on behalf of the consumers about who we recalled at the

beginning of the paper. The most important obstacle has started to be eliminated by the directive regarding unfaithful commercial practices, by the Regulation regarding consumer protection cooperation and by the European Network of Consumer Centers. No doubt, the introduction of the Euro currency has simplified also the possibility to compare the prices from different countries, but relevant obstacles remain, especially in the consumer contracts domain.

Conclusions

The result that the EU has proposed to reach by the year 2013 consists in the possibility to guarantee to the citizens of the Member States equal rights and protection, not caring if acquiring from a shop or an online web store. The objective is rather ambitious, but no doubt the consumer is wanted to be in the center of attention; the recent Lisbon Treaty will lead, within economical balances, to a raise in actions to protect the consumers, but this characteristic itself, in the case of European policies variation, may act as a brake in a fully development and common shared of this one.

Certainly, in the future, after speeding this policy in the last years, an important role must be played by the associations that are focused in consumer protection, consolidating the network between the member states, being necessary to continue working by a more optimum coordination; but it would not be wrong to make, in the same time, efforts for an economical growth.

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