

Question for written answer E-001209/2013
to the Commission
Rule 117
Edit Bauer (PPE)

Subject: Consumer protection and discrimination

Instances of the quality of products with the same brand name (e.g. meat products, washing powder, washing-up liquids, nappies) varying across the Member States have recently caused outrage in Slovakia and other new Member States. Many people from western Slovakia, for example, cross the border to Austria to go shopping not only because the prices of products are lower but also because the quality of products of the same brand and with the same packaging is much better than if they were purchased in Slovakia. The same is true of some services, for example when mobile phone companies or banks offer better services at lower rates in the old Member States than in the new ones.

There are often considerable discrepancies in quality between products with the same name and the same brand name purchased in some Member States. This practice clearly discriminates against consumers in some Member States – primarily those which joined the EU after 2004 – who can only acquire lower-quality products at what are often higher prices. Moreover, consumers in these countries earn on average far less than their counterparts in the more developed Member States of Western Europe, a factor which widens the gap and has a negative impact on social cohesion.

Is the Commission working to develop a clear and uniform consumer protection system which would protect consumers equally in all Member States?

Is the Commission not drawing up a comparative study which would focus on these unacceptable differences and on the discrimination between groups of consumers?