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Committee on Industry, Research and Energy

2008/2006(INI)

7.5.2008

OPINION

of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy

for the Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection

Towards a European Charter on the Rights of Energy Consumers
(2008/2006(INI))

Draftsman: András Gyürk

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SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Industry, Research and Energy calls on the Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions in its motion for a resolution:

1. Stresses the fact that energy supply is a key element for the successful participation of citizens in social and economic life;
2. Recalls that, although the rights of consumers are already protected by the Community legislation in force, they are often not respected; emphasises that the reinforcement of consumer protection measures can best be achieved by more effective implementation of the legislation;
3. Points out that adoption of the package of proposals concerning the electricity and natural gas markets which Parliament is currently debating would further reinforce the legal framework for the protection of energy consumers;
4. Considers that the future protection of energy consumers must continue to be based on joint action by the European Union and Member States. Individual consumer protection practices in the energy market might have different effects in different Member States. Consistent application of the principle of subsidiarity is therefore vital;
5. Supports the Commission's plans not to propose the charter as a new legal act but as a means of assisting citizens to obtain information about their rights in a better and simpler way; points out in this context that discussions aimed at disseminating information in the framework of the charter concerning potential but not yet adopted legal acts have an adverse effect on the clarity and applicability of the rights and, therefore, stand in the way of the desired objectives;
6. Recalls that the European energy market continues to be characterised by a large number of monopolies. This restricts freedom of choice and the possibility of changing supplier quickly and free of charge, increases the lack of information and, as a result, heightens the vulnerability of consumers. It is important to ensure that efforts to create a single, competitive energy market and to protect, in particular, vulnerable customers are therefore made;
7. Points out that, in accordance with the principles of social inclusion, equal opportunities for all and fair access to information in the digital era, it is essential that every citizen of the Union has access to affordable energy;
8. Calls on Member States and national regulatory authorities to make serious progress with a transparent price indication and a transparent energy invoice, making correct price comparisons possible;
9. Whereas consumers – especially domestic customers and small and medium-sized enterprises – have limited tools and opportunities for having their interests represented effectively;

10. Considers that guaranteeing supply to people with lower incomes is necessary in the light of increasing energy prices and is also necessary for people living in remote areas, because of small and uncompetitive energy markets; considers it important that Member States take steps as soon as possible to define exactly these groups of consumers and to promote and support measures, for example social tariffs, ensuring continuity of access for them to services for electricity and natural gas; calls on Member States to invest as a priority in comprehensive energy efficiency measures for low income households, thereby addressing in a strategic manner both the problem of fuel poverty and the 20% by 2020 energy efficiency target adopted at the 2007 Spring European Council;
11. Points out that the Member States need to go further in tackling energy poverty, since adequate energy provision constitutes one of the key elements in the successful participation of citizens in social and economic life;
12. Emphasises that, in the light of increasing energy prices, Member States should establish national definitions of energy poverty and develop measures to eradicate energy poverty, taking account of increasing energy prices, levels of household income and energy efficiency;
13. Expresses its conviction that national regulators should play a central role in consumer protection; believes, for this reason, that proposals aimed at reinforcing the powers and independence of regulators, including the right to impose sanctions on suppliers who do not comply with Community law relating to this issue, should be supported;
14. Stresses that the Member States must devote more attention to the problem of energy poverty and that an appraisal should be made of the extent to which the individual national social security or tax systems take account of the risks associated with energy poverty;
15. Points out that consumers are key players in a competitive market; expresses its belief that facilitating access to information is one of the most important tools in the field of consumer protection, with special regard to the comparability of prices and the conditions for changing supplier; considers that the transparency and predictability of published prices and tariffs must be further improved by means of the use of comprehensible and easily accessible calculation methods; stresses that in order to increase individual contributions to achieving the EU's energy strategy goals regarding CO₂ emissions, consumers should be informed about the fuel mix that makes up the energy they consume;
16. Stresses therefore the need to implement in practice Article 3(6) of Directive 2003/54/EC, according to which Member States shall ensure that consumers receive reliable information about the energy mix of the electricity supplier and the environmental impact resulting from the electricity produced by the supplier's energy
17. Calls on the Member States to promote smart meters, which provide consumers with a clear view on their actual energy consumption and therefore contribute to better energy efficiency; Recalls the requirements of Article 13 of the Directive 2006/32/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 April 2006 on energy end-use efficiency

and energy services¹ on the provision of smart meters; calls urgently on the Commission and Member States to implement and enforce the Directive's requirements on metering and billing, in the interests of consumer information and energy;

18. Emphasises the need of to develop standard invoices that can be used by all suppliers, in order to increase the transparency and comparability of information, and the need to mention consumer rights on the websites of electricity and gas companies and of independent national regulators;
19. Emphasises the need for the Commission to develop quality criteria in cooperation with national regulatory authorities to be applied to consumer-related services, included call-centres;
20. Emphasises the need to require suppliers to inform consumers about the promulgation of the proposed Charter.

¹ OJ L 114, 27.4.2006, p. 64.

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

Date adopted	6.5.2008
Result of final vote	+: 50 -: 0 0: 0
Members present for the final vote	Šarūnas Birutis, Jan Březina, Philippe Busquin, Jerzy Buzek, Jorgo Chatzimarkakis, Giles Chichester, Dragoș Florin David, Pilar del Castillo Vera, Den Dover, Lena Ek, Nicole Fontaine, Norbert Glante, András Gyürk, Fiona Hall, David Hammerstein, Rebecca Harms, Erna Hennicot-Schoepges, Mary Honeyball, Ján Hudacký, Romana Jordan Cizelj, Werner Langen, Anne Laperrouze, Eugenijus Maldeikis, Eluned Morgan, Angelika Niebler, Atanas Papanizov, Aldo Patriciello, Francisca Pleguezuelos Aguilar, Anni Podimata, Miloslav Ransdorf, Vladimír Remek, Herbert Reul, Teresa Riera Madurell, Mechtild Rothe, Paul Rübig, Andres Tarand, Catherine Trautmann, Nikolaos Vakalis, Adina-Ioana Vălean, Alejo Vidal-Quadras
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Daniel Caspary, Dorette Corbey, Manuel António dos Santos, Göran Färm, Juan Fraile Cantón, Gunnar Hökmark, Vittorio Prodi, Bernhard Rapkay, Silvia-Adriana Ţicău
Substitute(s) under Rule 178(2) present for the final vote	Daniel Stroj