

COMMENTS OF JOOST MARTENS, DIRECTOR
GENERAL, CONSUMERS INTERNATIONAL
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I'd like to start by thanking Mr Bell and Mr Murray for their remarks.

It's a pleasure to join you today to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Trans Atlantic Consumer Dialogue.

Consumers International has hosted the TACD secretariat since its inception in 1998, and over this period, TACD's value as a forum for deepening relations between European and American consumer organisations has shone through. TACD has been pivotal in strengthening cooperation in areas of common interest, building and sharing capacity in new and important consumer policy areas and providing a strong and unified consumer voice in transatlantic relations.

I want to focus my remarks on three areas:

1. Firstly, the significance of transatlantic cooperation for consumers around the world
2. Secondly, examples of areas where the EU and US, in cooperation with consumer organisations can demonstrate strong leadership on issues of global importance
3. And lastly, some words on the importance of transparency and inclusiveness in transatlantic cooperation

1. The significance of EU-US cooperation for consumers around the world

As the global voice for consumers, CI recognises the importance of transatlantic economic and trade cooperation, not just because of its impact on American and European consumers, but because of the profound influence such cooperation has on global decision-making affecting consumers around the world. All consumers are bound together by a set of common interests. These are enshrined in the 8 consumer rights adopted by the United Nations Assembly in 1985.

The transatlantic marketplace is one of the largest and most significant bilateral trading relationships in the world. Open trade has delivered many benefits for consumers, but as we have all learnt from the recent financial crisis, without strong and properly implemented regulation to guide and shape the marketplace, consumer trust can be quickly lost.

We are at a pivotal moment in EU-US relations, a moment of political change and at a time where significant economic challenges make strong and concerted action imperative. The world is waiting, hoping for and expecting a revitalised transatlantic partnership. One that is ready to demonstrate much-needed leadership on global challenges. Over the past years, we have heard much talk of "better regulation" as a synonym for removing regulatory barriers to trade. We believe that now is the time to work towards genuine better regulation, where the goal is to aim for higher not lower

standards and where consumer and environmental protection are given their rightful status as key priorities.

2. Cooperation on global challenges

Fight against climate change

There is global recognition that unsustainable patterns of production and consumption are having grave environmental and social impacts worldwide. The international consensus is resoundingly clear: climate change is real, it is caused predominantly by human activities, and it will have far-reaching consequences for ecosystems and human lives unless we act swiftly to reduce carbon emissions.

Climate change is a consumer issue in more ways than one. Whilst on the one hand consumers contribute significantly to climate change by engaging in unsustainable consumption patterns (most extensively in developed countries), other consumers, many with low consumption behaviours, are already suffering the impact, predominantly, but not exclusively in the developing world. The impact of climate change on food supply chains, water service provision and utilities for example, is being felt, and in devastating proportions for many consumers in developing countries.

With their cars, appliances, and large houses, citizens in the US and the EU are among the planet's biggest energy consumers. They are also increasingly concerned about climate change and keen to adopt 'greener' consumption behaviour. However, government policies aimed at consumers have been mostly of the 'softer' kind, focusing on information and awareness raising; these have not been very effective in changing consumption patterns. The adoption in July 2008 of a Sustainable Consumption and Production Action Plan in the EU, including activities focusing on the retail sector, and current efforts in the US to address energy efficiency are welcome steps. However much more remains to be done to enable collective action and make 'green' and socially responsible choices the easy and default options.

The EU and US need to be at the forefront of developing ambitious climate change policies focused on consumption as well as production. To succeed, governments will need to work with businesses and consumers alike to achieve the dramatic reductions in carbon emissions that are necessary. TACD has now established a working group on climate change and sustainability and stands ready to play a role in future EU-US dialogue in this area.

Improving Access to knowledge

TACD has long highlighted the need for the US and EU to promote more balance in their intellectual property laws, both at home and abroad, in order to ensure that access to knowledge—through legal journals, textbooks and medical journals for example—and access to medicine—AIDS drugs in particular—is placed on a par with the economic interests of rightsholders in making a profit from their inventions, creations and innovations, their movies, computer programs, handbags and bluejeans. Intellectual property rights are a consumer issue, not just an issue for business.

However, unfortunately, the on-going expansion of the scope and enforcement of intellectual property rights at the behest of rights holders—many of whom are in the

EU and US-- is having serious impacts on consumers by inhibiting the sharing and development of culture, by denying consumers the freedom to use goods in the way they reasonably expect to be able to, and by making learning materials and advancements in science and medicine unaffordable or simply unavailable to many consumers, particularly poor consumers in developing countries

In addition, the positions taken by the EU and US in international fora such as the World Intellectual Property Organisation have often impeded important initiatives designed to improve access to knowledge. For example, the EU and US have not been supportive of the proposed *WIPO Treaty for Blind, Visually Impaired and other Reading Disabled Persons*, despite the obvious benefits that it would have for disadvantaged consumers around the world.

We believe that the EU and US should reassess their approach to intellectual property policies in order to ensure that they work to the mutual advantage of producers and users of knowledge, in a manner conducive to social and economic welfare, and to a balance of rights and obligations.

We hope that future EU-US discussions on intellectual property and enforcement will be more inclusive and TACD looks forward to playing a bigger part in future dialogue in this area.

Tackling the global obesity pandemic

We live in a world of many contrasts and extremes, and one is that while a significant portion of the world's citizens go hungry, another significant portion suffer from obesity. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 2.3 billion people, almost one third of the global population, will be overweight by 2015, with serious resulting impacts on their health. While there are many causes of this problem, one of the greatest concerns is aggressive marketing of "junk food"—high calorie, low nutritional value foods like sodas, cookies, candy and potato chips—to children.

We believe that urgent action and leadership is needed by the EU and US governments to prioritize the improvement of the health status of consumers, particularly children, in accord with the WHO's Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health. The EU and U.S. have both identified childhood obesity and diet related disease as key issues especially given their impact on health care costs. However, EU and U.S. action to reduce diet related disease has often relied on voluntary industry initiatives.

Consumers in the U.S. and many parts of the EU want government to take stronger steps.

The EU and U.S. should act more aggressively to stem the tide of childhood obesity and the incidence of diet related disease by:

- Restricting the marketing of foods of low nutritional value to children.
- Requiring adequate nutrition labelling of processed foods
- Setting specific targets that manufacturers should achieve to lower the salt, fat, and sugar content of processed foods.

3. Importance of transparency and inclusiveness in transatlantic cooperation

Transatlantic business has always enjoyed strong influence in shaping EU-US economic and trade relations in the pursuit of a barrier free market.

While the concerns of business are legitimate, they do not represent the whole picture. Cooperation needs to reflect the priorities of the wider stakeholder community, including consumers, and a process needs to be put in place to ensure that these views are listened to and acted upon.

The presence of TACD in the advisory group to the Transatlantic Economic Council is an important signal and we have welcomed the opportunity to participate in this process. However, we now need to make sure that this participation becomes truly meaningful and that the priorities that we present are given serious attention by decision makers on both sides of the Atlantic.

At this important juncture in transatlantic relations, we expect to see some changes in approach, including how the advisory committee is consulted and involved in the development of the agenda, how meetings are prepared and in the provision of working documents including a detailed work programme outlining the various areas of cooperation, contact details of responsible persons and timelines for the completion of activities. We welcome recent signals of improvement in these areas.

To sum up:

- Strong consumer involvement in EU-US cooperation is fundamental to setting strong global precedents on consumer protection
- The EU and US governments in cooperation with consumer organisations can show true leadership on key areas of global significance
- In entering this new era of EU-US relations, an inclusive, transparent and open approach will help to ensure a truly inclusive dialogue that is relevant to consumers, citizens and industry alike.

Thank you.