

COMMENTS OF MONIQUE GOYENS, DIRECTOR
GENERAL, BEUC
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TRANSATLANTIC CONSUMER DIALOGUE
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TACD brings together the main independent consumer organisations from the EU and the US. All together we are 80. For us transatlantic cooperation is very important. We believe that good cooperation has the potential to create a vibrant market, but also increase consumer and environmental protection, and raise regulatory standards. We can learn from best practices and from mistakes, and we can together ensure that governments on both sides of the Atlantic listen to us.

These 10 years of dialogue have been very productive ones. We at BEUC feel we have learned a lot from our colleagues in the US. Our knowledge on Intellectual Property and Digital issues has benefitted enormously from our contacts with you, and we have been able to ensure that in on product safety, food labeling, transfats, and marketing to children we could have a common front towards the US and EU governments.

We have had achievements on GMOs, chicken, product safety, and increasingly in relation to marketing to children and generating understanding about issues that consumers face on-line such as privacy and social networks, but there is plenty more to do for the next 10 years.

To have our meeting here in Brussels, early June, is very good timing given the fact that the Obama administration is very seriously considering how the TEC, Trans Atlantic Economic Council, can be reorganised to be more effective, but also to have more resonance with the public at large.

We have just had the elections for the European Parliament here, and will soon also have a new European Commission. On this side of the Atlantic a serious re-evaluation of the Trans Atlantic relationship is also taking place. Already the European Commission has indicated that it will ensure that there is more focus to the dialogue and better/earlier consultation of consumer organisations. In this context we also appreciate the fact that we have now had meetings with the COTRA working group (Working Group on Transatlantic Relations and the Art.133 Committee) organized on the initiative of the French and Czech Presidencies.

We are encouraged with the indications that Commissioner Verheugen and Mr. Michael Froman (deputy national security adviser for international economic affairs), have agreed they would like more influential roles in the Trans Atlantic Economic Council for both the TACD and the Transatlantic Legislators' Dialogue (TLD). We appreciate the fact that Mr. Verheugen and Mr. Froman met with our US colleagues in April.

The outgoing European Parliament had some interesting suggestions on how the dialogue could be improved. At their meeting in April 2009 the Transatlantic Legislators' Dialogue called for greater collaboration between legislators in the US House of Representatives and the European Parliament on issues of common concern and

legislation that affects each side of the Atlantic. They also expressed the intention to have increased communication between their biannual meetings, and the formation of working groups to address specific topics in greater detail.

In the context of the TEC they have called for more transparent processes. The TACD and the Transatlantic Business Dialogue (TABD) wholly support the TLD/ Transatlantic Legislators' Dialogue call that the schedules of TEC meetings, agendas, roadmaps and progress reports should be agreed upon between the core stakeholders as early as possible and then made public. Such measures are crucial to developing a clear and transparent process for setting the agenda of the TEC, extending the TEC to new sectors, and establishing a long-term roadmap of activities.

We also hope that the TACD's call that the connections between the various EU-US sectoral dialogues and the TEC be clarified will be taken on board. There should be transparency concerning the work of the other dialogues, whether they are formal or informal, and about how they involve stakeholders. Dialogues that do not now involve stakeholders should take measures to do so.

Finally, I must say I am pleased that the TLD seems to support our conclusions that were communicated to the last TEC meeting in Washington in December 2008. The financial crisis requires a strong and coordinated policy response by the US and the EU. Global financial regulation and supervision must be strengthened, including better crisis prevention and management.

We will now urge the newly elected MEPs to make sure these promises are followed through.

Now let me just briefly describe the various issues that we have been focusing on the past year, and some of which will again be discussed this week

- Information Society

Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology has been a topic which has also featured on the TEC agenda. Consumer organisations have been involved in the two transatlantic symposiums organised on this issue. Going forward it is essential that more attention is paid to establishing safeguards to ensure better protection of consumers in the use of RFID. We would also encourage both business and government to explore how RFID technology could be used in the retail domain to provide consumers with more information, notably on essentials such as ingredients, allergens, nutrition, chemical content, social and environmental production conditions, energy consumption and efficiency, third-party testing results and food origins. We see encouraging developments within the European Commission that recently published a recommendation on the implementation of privacy and data protection principles in RFID applications where many of our suggestions have been taken on board. We would welcome the same type of reaction in the context of the EU-US discussions.

A more recent topic that TACD has been concentrating on is social networking, calling on the EU and the US government in cooperation with social network providers to step up measures to protect users' privacy. We are going to be discussing our resolution on this during the course of this week. In this context it is also important to mention that TACD has issued a resolution calling on the EU and the US government to ensure that

their existing policies and regulation on data collection and unfair commercial practices are improved with specific regard to online marketing to children.

- **Nanotechnology**

Consumer organisations acknowledge the need to be open to the responsible development and applications of new technologies. We are, however, concerned about the lack of clear definitions and about the difficulty in getting clear information about potential applications, their specific benefits for consumers and the associated risks. There is a need to agree on common definitions in order to develop regulatory requirements. We call for the consistent use of the precautionary principle and the use of a very strict and effective pre-market assessment and authorisation process to address health, safety and environmental impacts. We ask that both industry and government engage with stakeholders and for adequate legislative responses on both a European and international basis. This should not be used as a marketing exercise but as a two-way process where listening to consumers' concerns and addressing wider social issues is at least as important as providing adequate and understandable information. Finally, we ask that economic interests linked to the large investments in the field of nanotechnologies do not take precedence over consumer safety and broader societal issues and ask the European Commission and the US administration to work closer with consumers and industry to address the potential impacts of nanotechnologies on human health and the environment. I am very pleased that we are organising a conference on nanotech this week, and am looking forward to the discussions.

- **Poultry**

We never asked this to become a priority for discussions in the TEC. We do feel very strongly that the EU farm to fork approach on food safety is more effective than end of chain/pipe measures such as the antimicrobial treatment of chicken; i.e. dipping it in chlorine.

The EU strategy for control throughout the production chain has resulted in lower salmonella prevalence in European poultry meat than in US poultry meat.

European policy based on the principle "prevention is better than cure" has helped the poultry industry to enhance its product's safety and quality, and contributed to maintain consumer confidence. The same cannot be said for the US where, despite the use of AMT as standard practice, high contamination rates have not decreased.

If appropriate hygiene measures are applied through-out the food chain the use of AMT is unnecessary.

When discussions of ending the EU ban were taking place within the EU member states as well as in the European Parliament last year, the research conducted by Consumer Union in the US was an enormous help to us in the very "evidence-based" driven policy environment in Brussels.

We are able to ensure an overwhelming majority of member states as well as MEPs blocked the Commission proposal in Council and the European Parliament.

- **Product safety**

The Commission states in its annual RAPEX (Rapid Alert System for non-food consumer products) report of 2008 that the United States and Europe are facing similar challenges and that a strong transatlantic relationship therefore is of key importance in order to keep consumers on both sides of the Atlantic safe. Consumer representatives strongly welcome the dialogue and increased data exchange between the US and EU legislators and the trialogue between Europe, China and the United States. Further progress is needed in order to ensure that dangerous products are taken off the market before they reach consumers.

We would like to encourage the TEC to keep product safety as a highly important issue on coming agendas. We predict that this will be an even more important issue as nanotechnology most likely will be playing a significant role in our future societies.