

Annual Report on Consumer Policy Developments

SWEDEN

2002

General Information

The Consumer Policy Division has, after the Swedish general elections in September 2002, a new Minister of Consumer Policy, Mrs. Ann-Christin Nykvist (who is also Minister for Agriculture, Food and Fishery). Due to this fact the consumer policy division is now working at the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries.

Financial Advice

In May 2002, a committee handed over a report to the government concerning consumer protection in connection with the provision of financial advice (2002:41). The assignment partly included surveying the current rules applicable regarding the liability and obligations of financial advisors, and also proposing legislation or other appropriate measures that may be necessary. The purpose of the proposal should be to strengthen consumer protection in this field. The operations of banks and other financial service providers have changed. Today, these enterprises provide various kinds of financial services, for example savings products. Over the last twenty years the proportion of adult Swedes who own financial instruments has increased from 20 per cent to almost 80 per cent. To an increasing extent, officers at financial service providers have started to act advisors and sellers of financial services.

The consumer is offered a very large range of investment alternatives with varying risk profiles. This development has led to an increased need for knowledge and information on the part of the consumer. From the consumer perspective, the financial advice given by the financial service providers therefore appears to be a very important operation.

The Price Information Act

In June 2002, a committee presented a proposal for the replacement of the existing Price Information Act into a new legislation. The intention about this proposal is to widen the scope of the existing Price Information Act. The new Price Information Act will have a general character. A price comparison will be required for all products.

Report from the Swedish Government to the Swedish Parliament; Evaluation on the environmental task within the consumer policy

The report consists of two main parts. The first part consists of an account of the effects of some specific environmental measures taken within the consumer policy area. In the second part of the report, the Swedish government presents new intermediate goals within the environmental consumer policy. The intermediate goals are such as

- making it more simple and worth its price to act in a way that is positive for the environment,

- there shall be many concrete examples on positive environmental effects on a altered behaviour and
- environmental labeling and ethical labeling shall be widely spread.

After the world-top-meeting in Johannesburg during 2002, the conception of sustainable development with its three dimensions has been approved. In order to intensify the Swedish work with this issue, an investigator should look into this matter and focus the work on clarifying the conception of sustainable development and measures for how sustainable consumption shall be achieved.

The Council of Consumer Policy within the Swedish government

The Council of Consumer Policy was established in August 2002. The main task for this council is to increase the co-operation and co-ordination between the authorities working with issues concerning Swedish consumers. Even before the council was created, different authorities were co-operating. However, there was a need for even more co-operation, for example on issues concerning markets that recently have been opened up to free competition, on the work towards establishing an situation where consumers are offered safe products and on the work to secure a well-functioning competition.

Nordic Council of Ministers

During 2003 Sweden will preside over intergovernmental Nordic co-operation. There is far-reaching, close cooperation between the Nordic countries, ranging across all areas of society. A joint Nordic e-commerce strategy is being developed in the intersectoral group between the consumers and business sectors. The aim of the e-commerce strategy is to boost consumer confidence in e-commerce, primarily regarding security. Sweden will initiate projects on information and aims to complete work on a joint Nordic e-commerce strategy during its Presidency.

It is important to listen to the voice of Nordic consumers. It is also important that this voice get heard in the consumer policy area. To elucidate this co-operation and to give consumer organizations an increased influence in the Nordic consumer policy, a seminar called Voice of the Nordic Consumers, will be held in April.

The Nordic Ministerial Meeting for Consumers Ministers will be held in the archipelago of Stockholm, in August 2003.