

EDITORIAL COMMENTS

REALLY SAFEGUARDED? A DEBATE ON REGULATORY ASPECTS OF CONSUMER PROTECTION¹

“Minister: By the end of next year we shall be waving goodbye to the good old British sausage and we’ll be forced to accept some foreign muck like salami or bratwurst or something in its place.

Sir Bernard: They can’t stop us eating the British sausage, can they?

Minister: They can stop us calling it the sausage though. Apparently it’s going to be called the emulsified, high-fat offal tube.”²

The above dialogue on ‘EuroSausage’ standardization exemplifies only one segment of a more general process of recent decades as regulation of trade in goods and services has undergone a significant transformation. The gradual opening of national markets and their integration into global markets, and later the strengthening of governmental roles against liberalization efforts, not to mention technological development including the emergence of new forms of sales, have brought both benefits and disadvantages to businesses and consumers. At the same time, the concept of consumer has also changed, consumer needs have become more diverse, and the range of vulnerable consumers and those in need of special protection more differentiated. This process is strongly influenced by the economic, social, historical and political context, such as the financial and economic crisis of 2008, the challenges raised by climate change or the current epidemiological situation.

In this context, the ways how to ensure effective consumer protection has been subjected to intense academic debates. The present issue of the *Public Goods & Governance* journal examines the challenges of consumer protection in various policy areas focusing on the role and instruments of regulatory actors at different levels of governance. We use the term ‘consumer’ in a broad sense in this volume covering a wide range of users of goods and services including users of public goods and public services.

The first paper (by *Haekal Al Asyari S.H.* and *Yaries Mahardika Putro S.H.*) discusses the challenges of online marketplace primarily from the point of view of product safety concerns and presents the wide variety of tools available in the United States to overcome these challenges. The next contribution (by *Zsolt Hajnal*) also focuses on products sold online and safety aspects associated with them by analysing the operation of the European market surveillance system including the novelties

¹ by *Tamás M. Horváth*, Leader of the MTA-DE Public Service Research Group, Professor of Law and Political Sciences at the University of Debrecen and *Ildikó Bartha*, Senior Research Fellow of the MTA-DE Public Service Research Group, Associate Professor of Law and Political Sciences at the University of Debrecen

² Dialogue from the British television series „Yes Minister” (episode 22nd), first broadcasted on 17 December 1984.

introduced by a new regulation of the European Union. Remaining with the European context, the third article (by *Dániel Szilágyi*) examines the concept of vulnerable consumer compared to ‘average consumer’ as was developed by the case-law of the Court of Justice of the European Union, with a special focus on financial services. Vulnerability is an important aspect of the analysis provided by the fourth paper (by *Ildikó Bartha*) too, discussing changes in EU consumer protection rules and Member States’ motivation to follow these provisions in the field of services of general interest. After the ‘European block’, a country-specific study (by *Bernadett Veszprémi*) examines how consumer protection is ensured in e-Administration, in particular in public administration proceedings in Hungary. The sixth article (by *Ágnes Bujdos*) closing this volume focuses on the right to water as a fundamental right declared by General Comment No. 15 of the UN Economic and Social Council and analyses the rate of agricultural water supply as determined by the Water Management Act of Hungary in light of the requirements laid down by this international instrument.

The consumer protection aspects of regulation in different goods and services sectors raise a number of additional questions that have not been discussed in this journal issue. The academic website (blog) of the MTA-DE Public Service Research Group publicgoods.eu offers an opportunity to continue the debate, even after the publication of the present volume (see subpage publicgoods.eu/consumer-protection specifically dedicated to this topic). The blog aims to provide a public forum for analysing and discussing recent changes in government functions and regulatory challenges in different policy areas in the wider Europe and its global environment.

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