High prices – actions taken by the Office for Competition and Consumer Protection

* **Tomasz Chróstny, President of the Office for Competition and Consumer Protection, made the decision to appoint a team that will investigate the rise in the prices of food and hygiene products.**
* **The employees of the Office for Competition and Consumer Protection and the Trade Inspection Authority will monitor prices on the Internet and in physical stores.**

**[Warsaw, 20 March 2020]** “*The COVID-19 outbreak is a difficult time for all of us. Unfortunately, social unrest caused by false information is also conducive to unfair practices pursued by businesses. As a result, they mislead consumers by informing them that their products provide protection against the disease or inflate prices by multiple times the original value. We are receiving signals about the gross inflation of prices of certain food products and hygiene articles. I have made the decision to appoint a special team within the Office that will monitor prices. If such practices are confirmed, we will take further actions to restrict this type of negative behaviour,*” said Tomasz Chróstny, President of the Office for Competition and Consumer Protection.

The team monitoring prices in online shops will be composed of employees of the Office of Competition and Consumer Protection, whereas the Trade Inspection Authority employees were assigned to monitor prices in physical stores, including retail chains.

The Office also does not preclude the possibility of interventions against the unfair use of contractual advantage in the agricultural and food sector with respect to small and medium-sized businesses whose product supply agreements may not be honoured.

“*We are taking effective action to counteract the misleading of consumers and their exploitation by unfair businesses. By cooperating with Allegro, which showed a responsible approach, we were able to eliminate over 50 thousand offers of products that were supposedly intended to help protect against COVID-19. We are also receiving complaints regarding the sale of basic products at margins that violate the principles of social coexistence. Many individuals are attempting to exploit the current situation from a business perspective – however they cannot be permitted to profit on the fear of citizens*, added Tomasz Chróstny.

The Office of Competition and Consumer Protection does not preclude legal amendments to the special purpose act being drafted, which grants authority to penalise situations where fear of disease is exploited to inflate the prices of products and to enforce those penalties. However, we assume the possibility that additional mechanisms providing for sanctions against businesses abusing the freedonm to set prices may be established.

Consumer! Please remember that you always have the right to free legal aid and the right of access to safe products. If you have witnessed a breach of law, make use of free legal advice. Call the consumer hotline at 801 440 220 or 22 290 89 16. You can also send an e-mail to porady@dlakonsumentow.pl.

Consumers who have noticed an alarming increase in the prices of food and hygiene products are asked to report this fact by sending an e-mail to monitoring@uokik.gov.pl or call at 801 440 220 or 22 290 89 16.